

*Scripture, Skepticism and the Character of God:
The Theology of Henry Mansel*

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A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Wycliffe College and the Theology Department of the Toronto School of Theology. In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Theology awarded by Wycliffe College and the University of Toronto.

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Scripture, Skepticism and the Character of God: The Theology of Henry

Mansel. ThD, Wycliffe College, 2015. Dane Neufeld.

Abstract

Henry Mansel's Bampton Lectures *The Limits of Religious Thought* have primarily been remembered both for their defense of orthodox Christianity and their unintended incorporation into the Agnostic philosophy of Herbert Spencer. But Mansel's theology belongs more securely in the tradition of Anglican theology that combines a skepticism toward speculative theology and an intense devotion to the centrality of Scripture in the Church's common life. Critics argued that Mansel's skepticism and theory of regulative truth separated the reality of God from the language and narrative of Scripture. However, it can be argued that Mansel's skepticism provides a context in which the entire canon of Scripture can speak truthfully and coherently about the character of God's action in the world. Mansel's theological skepticism provides a method for examining theological and philosophical frameworks that seek to encompass or improve the language of Scripture in order to ensure that the Scriptures themselves form the context through which the Church apprehends God and interprets reality.

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Introduction

The following dissertation focuses on Henry Mansel's theological and philosophical skepticism and his general theological context as a lens into the broader question of the limits of theological knowledge in relation to the character of Christian belief and corresponding forms of unbelief. Mansel's 1858 Bampton Lectures, *The Limits of Religious Thought*, became famous for their defense of orthodox Christianity through the use of a skeptical theological method. Drawing on the thought of Joseph Butler and relying heavily upon William Hamilton, his mentor in the Scottish school of Common Sense, Mansel used a skeptical epistemology to argue against traditional rationalist arguments opposing the Christian faith and against more recent idealistic innovations within theology and philosophy. Mansel's central conviction is that the human mind cannot conceive of God as Absolute or Infinite, but it can only grasp God within the relative and limited constraints of the human mind; the revelation of God is not a revelation of His eternal essence but of His active character apprehended within the created world.

I argue that Mansel's skeptical philosophy is derived from his basic axiom that people "learn to pray before they learn to reason."¹ His skepticism is used to examine the foundations and logic of varying forms of human thought that seek to reconfigure, augment or obscure what Mansel understands to be the scriptural account of God's relation to His people. The person of Christ and the language of Scripture are regulatively

¹ Henry Mansel, *The Limits of Religious Thought Examined in Eight Lectures* (London: John Murray, 1867), 74.

true, in that they do not present God in His essence but as He chooses to be known within His creation: God cannot be thought of under any terms that transcend the structure of human knowledge, and he forms his appeal to us in a manner that is appropriate to our humanity. For Mansel, the whole canon of Scripture, read through the figure of Jesus Christ, reveals a truthful account of God's character and the created world. This truthful account necessarily includes the strange, difficult and at times, contradictory portions of Scripture. The Scriptures, Mansel argued, formed an "incomplete system" which described God's character in contrasting and at times, seemingly contradictory anthropomorphic language.² But it is within this form of human language that God is revealed and efforts to complete the system, or to construct an ideal portrait of God's being, often distort the Scriptural images under which God has chosen to represent and reveal himself. While the language of Scripture can create speculative difficulties, Mansel urged that the portrait of God Scripture renders must be accepted in faith, or not at all.

Mansel's contemporary and later critics suggested that his account of epistemological skepticism and revelation ultimately render God unknowable and distant. One anonymous writer in the *Eclectic Review* questioned "but what if the hero himself also has perished, and if his mangled and lifeless body be found under the heaps of his slain enemies?"³ The perception among many fellow Churchmen was that Mansel's skepticism, in an effort to protect a certain form of theological orthodoxy, actually sacrificed the immediate knowledge of God: the real God remained hidden behind the regulative God. Likewise, critics suggested that Mansel's theology authorized the

² Mansel, *Limits of Religious Thought*, 6.

³ Anon. "The Philosophy of the Conditioned" in *Eclectic Review*, 1861 (438).

immoral and violent acts of God, especially in the Old Testament, with little attempt to mitigate the collision between modern moral sentiments and the scriptural account of God's character. This criticism was most famously captured by Mill's memorable words: "I will call no being good, who is not what I mean when I apply that epithet to my fellow creatures."⁴ At a time when the moral character of God revealed in the Bible was becoming increasingly difficult for Victorian intellectuals to accept, Mansel's affirmation of the whole range of Scripture struck an emphatic and dissonant note.

But I argue, in contrast to these criticisms that Mansel's skepticism and theory of regulative truth do not alienate God from the created world, but rather they allow the Scriptures to speak truthfully of God: God can in fact be found and encountered in every line and word of Scripture. The strength of Mansel's skepticism is that the revelation of God in Scripture does not require a metaphysical or ontological framework in order to make sense or perform its task: there is no broader or deeper framework to describe the reality of God than the language of the Bible itself. For this reason Mansel resisted philosophical, theological and moral presuppositions that sought to streamline portions of Scripture in order to fit it into a larger vision. Thus, while critics saw in the Bampton lecturer's theology a haphazard Scripturalism, for Mansel, the Scriptures came alive with the presence of God when the whole array of Biblical texts were allowed to reveal God in a dizzying but ultimately unified witness. The main argument of this dissertation is that Mansel's skepticism places the continually evolving life of Church within the narrative and language of Scripture. This language is on one hand solid and concrete in its ability to reveal and refer to God. But on the other hand, Mansel's account of the limitations of

⁴ J. S. Mill, *An Examination of Sir William Hamilton's Philosophy*, 103.

the human mind grants the Spirit-inspired language of Scripture a depth that is capable of expanding around and describing a constantly changing world.

The Life and Career of Henry Mansel

Henry Mansel was born in 1820 in the village of Cosgrove. He studied at St. John's, Oxford, where he read logic and mathematics. In 1844 he was ordained a deacon and the following year, a priest, but he would spend the next twenty-four years at Oxford in various teaching posts.⁵ In 1855 he was elected to the Readership in Moral and Metaphysical Philosophy in Magdalen College, a position that allowed him to get married the same year to Charlotte Augusta.⁶ Several years later he was named the Waynflete Professor of Metaphysics at Magdalen, a position he would hold until his appointment as the Regius Professor of Ecclesiastical History in 1866. This appointment was a surprise to many, given Mansel's background philosophy and logic, and it was one he accepted with some hesitation. In the end he accepted the post to secure "sound teaching at the University of Oxford" and to afford himself more opportunity to pursue his writing.⁷ However, only two years later, in 1868, Mansel was appointed the dean of St. Paul's Cathedral. In this appointment he undertook the commuting of the estates of the cathedral, a task that was nearly complete upon his sudden death in 1871.⁸

Mansel was known as a High Tory and a descendant of the Oxford Movement. He corresponded frequently with E.B. Pusey and was a close friend of H. P. Liddon, both

⁵ John Burgon, *The Lives of Twelve Good Men* (London: Murray, 1888), 173.

⁶ John Burgon, *The Lives of Twelve Good Men*, 182.

⁷ B. A. Know, "Filling the Oxford Chair of Ecclesiastical History, 1866: the Nomination of H. L. Mansel," *Journal of Religious History* 5 (June 1968): 62–70, 68. In a letter (December 3, 1866) by Lord Carnarvon to Lord Derby concerning the appointment, Carnarvon writes that Mansel earlier declined an appointment to a living that would have afforded him 1, 700 pounds a year, a significant increase. However, Mansel declined "because he considered that his Oxford life and habits had not sufficiently qualified him for the parochial work of a country clergyman," 69.

⁸ John Burgon, *The Lives of Twelve Good Men*, 230.

important Tractarian leaders. However, his many books and articles bear little explicit reference to the Tractarian authors. In this way he was perhaps more typical of the second generation of the Oxford Movement, which was concerned about the divisive character of the movement and its weighted appeal to antiquity.⁹ Mansel's biographer, Dean Burgon, expressed the concern that the Oxford Movement, despite its conservatism, neglected the classic Anglican focus upon the Scriptures: "It is a memorable fact that throughout this period (1830 to 1850) holy scripture itself experienced marked neglect."¹⁰ Mansel was well read in Patristics and Anglican divinity, but it was his focus upon the defense of Scripture that inspired his writings. Despite his obvious devotion to the Church of England, he wrote very little that might be called ecclesiology, but his theology, as I will argue, can be understood as an articulation of the space in which the Church reads, responds and lives within the Scriptures. He certainly inherited the Tractarian concern that the Church of England was becoming increasingly marginalized in public life; his satirical poem *The Phrontisterion*, which describes the increasingly secular attitudes of Oxford's intellectual life, is a testament to this anxiety.¹¹ But he was energized to recover certain traditions in antiquity, as he was motivated to preserve the place of the Bible in the Church of England's common life and worship. This is the theme that will occupy the following chapters.

⁹ Peter Nockles distinguishes 18th century and 19th century High Churchmen from the Tractarians according to their broader outlook, incorporation of the Reformation heritage in the Church of England, and their more general appeal to the Church Fathers. Mansel shared Newman's hostility toward 19th century liberalism in the Church and the nation of England, but he did not share, at least explicitly, Newman's hostility to the Reformation, and certainly Mansel's views of Scripture have something in common with that of Luther and Calvin. Peter Nockles, *The Oxford Movement: Europe and the Wider World 1830-1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

¹⁰ John Burgon, *The Lives of Twelve Good Men*, 223.

¹¹ Henry Mansel, "The Phrontisterion, or Oxford in the 19th Century," in *Letters, Lectures and Reviews, Including the Phrontisterion, or, Oxford in the 19th Century* (London: John Murray, 1873), 403.

The career of Mansel's ideas, subsequent to his Bampton Lectures in 1858, marks a puzzling sequence in modern intellectual history. His lectures went through five editions and were enormously popular for well over a decade. Mansel's debate with F.D. Maurice was celebrated as the greatest religious controversy of the 19th century,¹² and he drew fire and recognition from some of most prominent intellectual figures of his day, such as J. S. Mill, Herbert Spencer and John Henry Newman. The philosophical idealism that took hold of Oxford after Mansel's death, represented by figures like F. H. Bradley and T. H. Green, grounded its constructions on the repudiation of Mansel's ideas.¹³ Yet aside from some initial applause and intensely negative reactions, the positive influence of Mansel's ideas on the Anglican theology of his own generation or that of later generations is difficult to trace. Despite Mansel's fierce loyalty to the Church of England and her articles of faith, some of his most adamant opponents were fellow clergymen who saw in his lectures a dangerous and threatening theological method. In many ways Mansel cut across the grain of his theological climate by offering what seemed to be a narrow Scriptural view of reality. His theology lacked the comprehensive ambition that characterized the aspirations of the later *Lux Mundi* writers who sought to provide a theological vision that could incorporate modern developments in science and philosophy. For this reason, Mansel's contemporaries were not pleased to recognize themselves in his writings, and this, in part, accounts for his marginalization in the history of Anglican theology. But I will argue throughout this dissertation that Mansel's

¹² Michael Wolff highlights the fact that the Henry Mansel/ Frederick Denison Maurice debate was reviewed in 1859 by fourteen of the twenty-five most prominent literature periodicals of the era. Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (London: John Murray, 1859) received twenty-two reviews. Wolff's representative list does not necessarily favor theological reviews. Michael Wolff, "Victorian Reviewers and Cultural Responsibility," in *1859: Entering an Age of Crisis*, ed. Philip Appleman, William Madden and Michael Wolff (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1959), 273.

¹³ R. G. Collingwood, "The Metaphysics of F.H. Bradley," in *An Essay on Philosophical Method* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 236.

seeming lack of ambition is a fundamental oversight. Mansel's hope was not to articulate a defensive or regressive theological vision, but rather his aim was to allow the Scripture's "to absorb the universe"¹⁴, to use George Lindbeck's phrase. The limitations of human thought were simply a method of ensuring that the Church apprehended itself and its God within the narrative of the Bible.

Contemporary Scholarship on Mansel

The Victorian era was characterized by massive intellectual and theological disturbances that provoked considerable confusion within the Church. Mansel's career and the controversy that surrounded him offer a unique lens into this confusion over the status of the Church's Scriptures and the intelligibility of its central claims. Charles Taylor has written that in this period "belief and unbelief exist in contrast and tension with each other" in a manner that was largely unprecedented in England.¹⁵ As the traditional metaphysical frameworks in which Christian claims had been rooted began to disintegrate, theologians were pressed with the task of articulating new spaces within which Christian teaching could flourish. Even more, theological writers were searching for frameworks within which to describe the relationship between God and His people. In 19th century England this meant making alliances with the continental philosophy of Immanuel Kant and his successors, while attempting to make sense of the empirical bent within English philosophy and, to some extent, within Anglican theology. Kant seemed

¹⁴ George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1984) 117. I do not wish to simply cast Mansel as a proto Postliberal in Lindbeck's manner, however the similarities are obvious, despite largely dissimilar methods of philosophical and theological reasoning. The following statement by Lindbeck, though, could have been pulled from the Bampton Lectures: "The primary focus is not on God's being in itself, for that is not what the text is about, but on how life is to be lived and reality construed in the light of God's character as an agent as this is depicted in the stories of Israel and of Jesus." *The Nature of Doctrine*, 121.

¹⁵ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 408.

to offer a rational structure for the mediation of theological knowledge, even if this form of mediation carried threatening demands.¹⁶

Thus Mansel has been largely read in the 20th and 21st centuries as a Kantian religious philosopher. While it is true that Mansel engaged Kant's philosophy, there were limits to which he could appropriate Kant's views. This was most apparent in his theology of Scripture, the aspect of Mansel's thought that has surprisingly not been engaged by the vast majority of scholars who have written about him in recent years. From the publication of the Bampton Lectures until recently, it has been customary among Mansel's readers and critics to overlook or ignore any integral connection between his philosophical skepticism and his theological and Scriptural orthodoxy. This is merely to say that the majority of writers to have taken up Mansel's ideas have separated these aspects, and in most cases dismissed the latter as an outdated or even desperate attempt by the Victorian philosopher to hold onto his religion in the grips of a disintegrating agnosticism. On account of this assumption, two general approaches to Mansel's philosophy can be traced.

The first approach is characterized by a scholar like Bernard Lightman who views Mansel as a creative and interesting thinker, who nevertheless failed to come to terms with the shifting intellectual patterns of German Idealistic philosophy. Lightman's book, *The Origins of Agnosticism*, has convincingly shown how Mansel's ideas on the unknowability of the Absolute and the Infinite, derived in part from Kant, were adopted

¹⁶ I will discuss the relationship of Kant and English theology more fully in chapter 1. Mansel was very aware that while there was a religious and theological aspect to Kant's philosophy, it also rendered portions of the Bible incomprehensible and even irrational. See Kant's, *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, 178.

and altered by the early English Agnostics, most notably Herbert Spencer.¹⁷ What made this transferal of Mansel's ideas into an alien context possible, Lightman argues, was Mansel's failure to come to terms with Kant's resolution of faith and reason: "Mansel's selective use of Kant, and his additions, warped Kant's delicate epistemological viewpoints so that, in Mansel's hands, reason was divorced entirely from faith. Only through such a process could Kant's brand of agnosticism be transformed into the basis for what was to become Huxley's agnostic position."¹⁸ Mansel's explicit rejection of Kant's practical reason meant that he was left standing awkwardly with the two incommensurate commitments of epistemological skepticism and orthodox religious faith, which in effect, symbolized the general fate of Victorian theology. Lightman's approach finds correspondence in other works on Mansel¹⁹ with its portrayal of him as a thinker who failed to synthesize the increasingly disparate aspects of 19th century scientific and philosophical thought.

A second way of approaching Mansel's thought has been to characterize him as a proleptic thinker who was entirely ahead of his times, which accounts for the apparent failure of his ideas to take hold within his contemporary context. While the approach is obviously more sympathetic toward Mansel as a whole, it typically retains the stark separation of his philosophical skepticism and his views of Christian Scripture. Christopher Herbert's book *Victorian Relativity* provides a particularly startling instance of this interpretation. Herbert explores some of the fascinating tendencies in Victorian

¹⁷ Bernard Lightman, *The Origins of Agnosticism: Victorian Unbelief and the Limits of Knowledge*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987)

¹⁸ Lightman, *The Origins of Agnosticism*, 66

¹⁹ Timothy Fitzgerald's article "Mansel's agnosticism" (*Religious Studies* 26, no. 4: 525-541) takes a similar approach by measuring Mansel's philosophy by the standard of Kant. In a slightly different tone, Hamish Swanston's book *Ideas of Order: Anglicans and the Renewal of Theological Method in the Middle Years of the Nineteenth Century*, (Assen: Gorcum, 1974) describes Mansel's philosophy as an inventive but ultimately flawed attempt to renew theology through philosophical synthesis.

thought which seem to anticipate Einstein's theory of relativity and postmodern modern notions of difference and the relative or constructed character of knowledge. In particular, Mansel's idea, following William Hamilton, that all knowledge is conditioned by relations, a contingency of the mind which makes the Absolute inconceivable, Herbert writes, "is an unmistakably revolutionary act"²⁰ within the discipline of philosophy. Yet Herbert maintains that Mansel shrinks back from the revolutionary character of his thinking into a conservative orthodoxy that "is very much a system of rigid practical control appealing to an expressly authoritarian and absolutist ideology."²¹ Presumably, Herbert is referring here to Mansel's theory of the regulative truth of Scripture. Mansel's theory might be characterized otherwise than 'authoritarian' or 'absolutist' but presently it is sufficient to simply note the incongruence Herbert perceives between his radical philosophical skepticism and his high view of Scripture: the latter simply does not keep pace with the former. This is characteristic of the second approach I have described which applauds Mansel for his unusually modern (or even postmodern) philosophical views, though these views have been torn out of the context of his understanding of Scripture.²²

While figures like Lightman and Herbert have provided important insights into the character of Mansel's thought and even more, his perplexing place in intellectual history, it is fair to say that neither scholar has made an effort to understand the

²⁰ Christopher Herbert, *Victorian Relativity: Radical Thought and Scientific Discovery*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001) 36.

²¹ Herbert, *Victorian Relativity*, 40

²² Edwyn Bevan's chapter on Mansel in *Symbolism and Belief* (Boston, MA : Beacon Press, 1957) takes a parallel approach though with respect to the symbolic and anthropomorphic character of religious language. While he is more sympathetic to Mansel's scripturalism than Herbert, he too concludes that this aspect of Mansel's thought is no longer plausible or even necessary. Kenneth Freeman takes a more radical approach to Mansel *The Role of Reason in Religion: a Study of Henry Mansel*, (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1969) where he argues that Mansel's philosophy can be appropriated into a death of God theology, which argues for the wholly immanent and finite presence of God in history.

relationship between his skepticism and Scripturalism. Granted, this was not their intention. But it will be the purpose of this dissertation to stress this very relationship and to argue that his skepticism can only be understood as an extension of his orthodox commitments to Scripture. The common accusations that Mansel separates faith and reason, that he truncates the human search for knowledge—as true as these may be—in the end, merely underline the general crisis of theological thinking in 19th century England. By his own admission, Mansel was not trying to build a new synthetic system; rather, his philosophy was critical and sought to chastise human reason in order to make space for Christian faith, founded on the entire Scriptures and the creeds. In his own words: “A writer who is content with the humbler task of confuting objections will be satisfied to find his ‘positive side’, not in his own confutations, but in that Catholic faith which exists independently of the objections and of the answers to them.”²³ It is true that in order to do this he engaged Kant and the philosophy of his day, but given his general aims, I believe it is more important to assess his thought in the tradition of the eighteenth century Anglican apologist Joseph Butler, who Mansel admired greatly and quoted abundantly. In this sense, it is possible to argue that for Mansel Christian orthodoxy—Scripture and the Creeds—was not an isolated set of beliefs asserted in a skeptical void, but in the Butlerian sense, the “scheme of salvation” was literally written into the created world. Mansel pursues this conviction through the examination of human consciousness and the corresponding character of divine revelation in Scripture which accommodates itself to the contours and strictures of the human mind. In order to demonstrate the manner in which Scripture adjusts and responds to human reality, Mansel made use of

²³ Henry Mansel, *A Second Letter to Goldwin Smith*, 26

typological, allegorical and figural methods of reading. In this respect he truly was ahead of his time, though not perhaps quite in the way that Herbert imagined.²⁴

To read Mansel in light of Butler, is in essence, to read him theologically, the context where he naturally belongs. And yet ironically, this is the context in which he has seldom been read, except, perhaps during his own life. The fact that Mansel has been primarily remembered as the unlikely progenitor of English agnosticism is unfortunate given his own devotion to the Church of England and the integrity of the Christian faith. For this reason, I believe the time is ripe for a reconsideration of his work, especially as the pressures of unbelief that he warned of in his own era have only deepened and expanded their influence in our current context. Mansel believed that certain metaphysical and philosophical schemes, when pushed beyond the limits of human conception and capacity, risked subjecting the Scriptures to a deforming criterion unable to render the Bible as a unified whole. The consequence of violating these limits, for Mansel, is that the portrait of God's presence in the world witnessed to in Scripture becomes increasingly difficult to apprehend. Contrary to the conception that his skepticism described a remote and unknowable God, the limits of religious thought, for Mansel, were designed to make the God of Scripture available and present in a world that was growing impatient of the difficulties and complexities of the scriptural account. Of

²⁴ The recent interest in typology and figuration in exegesis has a long history. Henri De Lubac's *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture*, (Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 1998) remains a touchstone on the topic of the return to medieval and patristic practices in reading Scripture, over and against modern historical critical methods. The following is a list of more recent, notable contributions: Matthew Levering, *Participatory Biblical Exegesis: A Theology of Biblical Interpretation.*, (Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008); Richard Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989; Telford Work, *Living and Active: Scripture in the Economy of Salvation.*, (Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans, 2002); *Go Figure!: Figuration in Biblical Interpretation*, Edited by Stanley Walters, (Eugene, Or: Pickwick Publications, 2008); Christopher Seitz, *Figured Out: Typology and Providence in Christian Scripture.*, (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001); Ephraim Radner, *Time and the Word*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, Forthcoming). The Brazos Commentary series is perhaps the most sustained and collaborative recent effort to approach Scripture through the lens of typology and the history of interpretation throughout Church history

course, for Mansel the stakes concerned not only the status of the Bible but also the character of God as he is revealed and described in its witness.

Summary

In what follows, I explore the influence of Kant and German Idealism in England and I argue that Mansel, far from being a Kantian, actually linked the new philosophy of the continent with the Deist tradition in the 18th century England. In many ways, the deeper antecedents of Mansel's theology can be found in the 18th century debates between figures like George Berkeley, John Toland, Peter Browne and Joseph Butler. In particular, I contrast the figures of Coleridge and Joseph Butler to illuminate the various uses of theological skepticism in relation to the reading of Scripture. Mansel was indebted primarily to Butler, as his contemporaries all understood, and it in this light that I describe and defend his theory of the regulative truth of Scripture. Butler's analogy of religion and the correspondences between the scheme of salvation and the natural world formed a framework for Mansel, who pursued this analogy within the context of the human mind and personality. Although Mansel is best known for his skeptical approach to theological knowledge, the fourth chapter focuses upon his more explicitly theological writings, sermons and letters in order to understand how his theory of regulative truth functioned in a scriptural and theological context.

The final chapters engage Mansel's reception in the late 19th century and the 20th century. Here I argue that while Mansel's ideas were rejected by idealist theologians and philosophers in England, his reception can function as a lens into the place of Scripture in the modern Church of England. In effect, the inability of Anglican theologians to come to terms with Mansel's central concern for the integrity of the entire

Scriptures has contributed to the perplexity and conflict within modern Anglicanism with respect to the scriptural witness and the God it reveals. This reception history begins with T. H. Green and the *Lux Mundi* theologians and closes with a discussion of Don Cupitt, Mansel's best known 20th century interpreter.

Rowan Williams has argued that a certain form of theological skepticism has been one of the primary virtues of Anglican theology.²⁵ If this is indeed the case— I would argue that it is—than an exploration of Mansel's thought is highly valuable in clarifying the nature of this claim and its relation to the reading and interpretation of the Scriptures.

Chapter One: Kant and Anglican Theology in the 19th Century

²⁵ Rowan Williams, "General Introductions" in *Love's Redeeming Work: The Anglican Quest for Holiness*, Compiled by Geoffrey Rowell, Kenneth Stevenson and Rowan Williams, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), xxv. I will discuss Williams' own understanding of theological skepticism in the third chapter.

1.1 Introduction

As mentioned in the Introduction, Mansel has primarily been remembered as an interpreter of Kant who failed to follow through on the furthest implications of Kant's philosophy. But I would argue that Mansel should be primarily regarded as a critic of Kant—a critic who understood him, appropriated aspects of his thought but ultimately discerned that Kant's philosophy presented insurmountable difficulties for traditional Christian belief. If Mansel's central goal was to create a space in which the Scriptures could reliably and powerfully reveal God in a rapidly changing intellectual and cultural landscape, the theological implications of Kant's philosophy became one of the greatest threats to this goal in 19th Century England. Though Kant himself was critical of English Deism, Mansel regarded his philosophy as an extension of 18th century Deistic attempts to shape and mold the contents of Christian belief by the standards of human reasoning.²⁶ In fact, Mansel identified John Locke as the English originator of this particular transgression of the limits of religious knowledge, and in so doing he grouped philosophers as diverse as Locke and Kant into the rationalist tradition in English thought.

The purpose of this chapter is to outline Mansel's criticism of Kant and to then explore the greater influence and reception of Kant's philosophy on religious and theological thinking in 19th Century England. I give special attention to the figures of S. T. Coleridge and Thomas Carlyle, who both seized upon Kant's philosophy as an

²⁶ Kant claimed that inferring the existence of God from the patterns and laws of observed nature was an exercise in speculative reason: "If, again, I infer from the form of the universe, from the way in which all things are connected and act and react upon each other, the existence of a cause entirely distinct from the universe—this would again be a judgment of purely speculative reason; because the object in this case—the cause—can never be an object of possible experience. In both these cases the principle of causality, which is valid only in the field of experience—useless and even meaningless beyond this region, would be diverted from its proper destination." Immanuel Kant and J. M. D. Meiklejohn, *Critique of Pure Reason* (New York: Colonial Press, 1899), 356.

opportunity to move beyond the entrenched philosophical and theological heritage of the 18th Century theological controversies. Coleridge attempted to appropriate Kant's distinction between Reason and Understanding into a renewed and orthodox theological synthesis. Though as I will argue in this chapter and the next, this endeavor placed considerable pressure on Coleridge's theology and reading of Scripture. Carlyle, on the other hand, also made use of Kant's distinction but moved in a more overtly agnostic position in which the particular Scriptural and doctrinal claims of the Christian faith began to wither. Mansel understood and reacted against the difficulties in both of these trajectories and for that reason an account of Kant's influence on English writers and their reading of Scripture is essential for understanding Mansel's own thought. In pursuing this topic I will also engage a few representative scholars in order to show that Kant, even in the 20th and 21st century, has continued to function as a benchmark for assessing the religious thought of the 19th century. While this is a testament to the profound influence of Kant's philosophy in England, I also hope to show that the writings of Mansel, among other theological writers of the period, are better assessed by more explicitly theological standards.

1.2 Rationalism and Scripture in the 19th Century

1.2.1 Mansel and Rationalism

Henry Mansel was concerned for the integrity and coherence of the entire Scriptures. This concern emerged from tensions and criticisms of the Bible that had deep roots in England. David Friedrich Strauss's *Das Leben Jesu* and his investigation of the contradictions within Scripture and the mythical character of biblical miracles did not represent a novel thesis but was the product of long-standing streams of thought that

received popular expression in 18th century England by Deist writers.²⁷ John Toland's *Christianity Not Mysterious* embodies the classic rationalist statement that anything within Scripture that is not easily comprehended by reason cannot be required of Christian belief.²⁸ To be sure, this was an extension, or perhaps distortion, of Locke's claim that "God, out of the infiniteness of his mercy... gave him [man] reason, and with it a law, that could not be otherwise than what reason should dictate, unless we should think, that a reasonable creature, should have an unreasonable law."²⁹ In Mansel's view, this already dangerous position of Locke's was amplified by Toland and others and used to run roughshod over the Scriptures by separating reasonable and unreasonable portions within the text. Thus, while books like *Das Leben Jesu* were shaped in a particular Kantian form of philosophical idealism, Mansel's claim that the philosophy of Kant and Hegel represented a renovated or renewed form of deism is true insofar as it placed tremendous pressure on the coherence and integrity of Scripture.³⁰ Thus, while Mansel acknowledged that his arguments for the regulative truth of Scripture carried a skeptical

²⁷ John Toland, *Christianity Not Mysterious: A Treatise Shewing, That There Is Nothing in the Gospel Contrary to Reason, Nor Above It: And That No Christian Doctrine Can Be Properly Call'd a Mystery* (London, 1696; reprint, New York: Garland, 1978).

²⁸ John Toland, *Christianity Not Mysterious*, 2. Of course, this argument was not original to Toland. Spinoza made very similar arguments concerning the character of Scripture and its miraculous content. Benedict De Spinoza, "Theological Political Treatise," in *The Chief Works of Benedict De Spinoza*, vol. 1, trans. R. H. M. Elwes (New York: Dover Publications, 1951), 86. See also David Friedrich, Strauss, Peter Crafts Hodgson, and George Eliot, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, (Ramsey, NJ: Sigler Press, 1994)

²⁹ John Locke, *Reasonableness of Christianity with A Discourse on Miracles and part of A Third Letter Concerning Toleration*, ed. I. T. Ramsay (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1958), 77.

³⁰ In his essay on English freethinking Mansel writes, "The English Deism of the last century, like the English gentlemen of the same period, has made the grand tour of Europe, and come home with the fruits of its travels." "Freethinking—Its History and Tendency," in *Letters, Lectures, and Reviews, Including the Phrontisterion*, ed. H. W. Chandler (London: John Murray, 1873), 334. This is a conclusion that is affirmed by W. R. Ward: "By the end of the Napoleonic wars the cultural relations of theology in England and Germany were the reverse of what they had been three quarters of a century before. Then radical English criticism in the field of the philosophy of religion had given a lead to German theologians, a lead enhanced by an English reputation justified to the extent that deist literature could actually appear in print." "Faith and Fallacy: English and German Perspectives in the Nineteenth Century," in *Victorian Faith in Crisis: Essays on Continuity and Change in Nineteenth-Century Religious Belief*, ed. Richard J. Helmstadter and Bernard V. Lightman (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan, 1990), 53.

strain, he tried to distinguish this skepticism from both Locke and Kant and their respective followers.

In an essay on “freethinking,” Mansel chronicles the slippage of the mysterious aspects of Christian doctrine, from Locke’s initial indifference down to the deist’s outright hostility toward any notion of an incomprehensible reality.³¹ Locke, Mansel argues, treated the attributes of God as if they were similar in kind to the attributes of a stone, and as a result he forfeited the analogical relation—circumscribed by an inherent imperfection—between language about God and language about created reality.³² The inevitable result was that distinctive Christian doctrines that did not conform to human notions of reality would become increasingly irrelevant or even absurd. So while Mansel, in some sense, was a descendant of the English empirical tradition, his empiricism, if it can be called that, was theologically altered in order to avoid what he saw as the natural outcome of Lockean philosophy.³³

Likewise, for Mansel, German idealism—the philosophy of Kant, Schelling and Hegel—was little more than an extension of this form of reasoning.³⁴ Kant’s distinction between the phenomenal and noumenal realm was one that Mansel made use of, but he rejected Kant’s mediating faculty of practical reason. Kant argued that, while we cannot perceive the noumenal—the real or the spiritual aspect of reality—it was necessary for moral living that our practical reason posit the existence of God, freedom and immortality.³⁵ These postulates are not known as transcendent realities but as regulative

³¹ Henry Mansel, “Freethinking.”

³² Henry Mansel, “Freethinking,” 313.

³³ How exactly Mansel did this I discuss more fully in the second chapter.

³⁴ I discuss Mansel’s reading of Hegel in particular in the fifth chapter on British Idealism and *Lux Mundi*.

³⁵ “Pure reason, then, contains, not indeed in its speculative, but in its practical, or, more strictly, its moral use, principles of the possibility of experience, of such actions, namely, as, in accordance with ethical precepts, might be met with in the history of man. For since reason commands that such actions should take

ideas that are necessary for the moral life. At least this was how Mansel read Kant, and his criticism of Kant relates precisely to my initial statement:

Let us hear then the philosopher's (Kant's) *rational* explanation, upon this assumption, of the duty of Prayer. It is a mere superstitious delusion, he tells us, to consider prayer as service addressed to God, and as a means of obtaining his favor. The true purpose of the act is not to alter or affect in anyway God's relation towards us; but only to quicken our own moral sentiments.³⁶

Mansel's worry with Kant is that his rational description or account of God cannot permit basic scriptural notions such as petitioning prayer, because this form of prayer does not cohere within Kant's constructed framework of knowledge, a framework that extends its boundaries to God's character.

While Mansel followed Kant in his limiting of speculative knowledge, Mansel felt as though Kant left the door open for Schelling and Hegel to construct a purely rational theology:

Kant neither absolutely accepted the unconditioned as a product of Reason, nor absolutely rejected it; but assigned to it a kind of shadowy existence on the confines of light and darkness, speculatively unknown and unknowable, regulatively present and in operation.³⁷

Because Kant left this speculative door open, his followers constructed rational accounts of God based on principles such as the Infinite and the Absolute. And though Mansel was

place, it must be possible for them to take place; and hence a particular kind of systematic unity—the moral—must be possible. We have found, it is true, that the systematic unity of nature could not be established according to speculative principles of reason, because, while reason possesses a causal power in relation to freedom, it has none in relation to the whole sphere of nature; and, while moral principles of reason can produce free actions, they cannot produce natural laws. It is, then, in its practical, but especially in its moral use, that the principles of pure reason possess objective reality." Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 453.

³⁶ Henry Mansel, *Limits of Religious Thought*, 12.

³⁷ Henry Mansel, "The Philosophy of Kant," in *Letter, Lectures and Reviews, Including the Phrontisterion, or, Oxford in the 19th Century* (London: J. Murray, 1873), 175. Mansel's interpretation of Kant in this case was directly derived from Hamilton: "Kant had annihilated the older metaphysic, but the germ of a more visionary doctrine of the absolute, than any of those refuted, was contained in the bosom of his own philosophy. He had slain the body, but had not exorcised the spectre of the absolute." William Hamilton, "The Philosophy of the Unconditioned," in *Discussions on Philosophy and Literature, Education and University Reform* (New York: Harper, 1861), 25.

severely critical of what he regarded as the pantheism of Hegel, he at least applauded Hegel for carrying the implications of such a philosophy to its logical conclusion: “That which is conceived as absolute and infinite must be conceived as containing within itself the sum, not only of all actual, but of all possible, modes of being.”³⁸ Hegel’s dialectic was in Mansel’s eyes the most thorough and consistent attempt to pursue this mode of reasoning.³⁹

Mansel’s criticism of Kant in particular was based upon the Scottish philosopher Sir William Hamilton. Hamilton argued in *The Philosophy of the Unconditioned* that “consciousness is only possible under the antithesis of a subject and object of thought, known only in correlation and mutually limiting each other.”⁴⁰ In this respect, Hamilton argued that all knowledge of the world exists within conditions of distinction, and for this reason nothing can be known of the world beyond sense aside from what is revealed:

Consciousness is to the philosopher what the bible is to the theologian. Both are professedly revelations of divine truth; both exclusively supply the constitutive principles of knowledge, and the regulative principles of its construction...Each may be disproved, but disproved only by itself.⁴¹

To argue beyond the realm of consciousness is to argue toward “zero,” against the very conditions of thinking at all. Likewise, Mansel took from Hamilton the notion that the Scriptures contain their own logic and must be understood from within the character of

³⁸ Henry Mansel, *Limits of Religious Thought*, 32.

³⁹ In the fourth chapter I more fully detail Mansel’s views of Hegel in relation to English idealism and figures like T. H. Green and F. H. Bradley.

⁴⁰ William Hamilton, “Philosophy of Perception,” in *Discussions on Philosophy and Literature, Education and University Reform* (New York: Harper, 1861), 21. Hamilton read Kant through the eyes of Jacobi, the Christian disciple of Kant, who reached similar conclusions about the revelatory quality of knowledge. Jacobi was in turn influenced by Reid and what is known as the position of “natural realism.”⁴⁰ Manfred Kuehn, *Scottish Common Sense in Germany, 1768–1800: a Contribution to the History of Critical Philosophy* (Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1987), 8.

⁴¹ William Hamilton, “Philosophy of Perception,” 90.

their own narrative. In this way, Kant’s philosophy was dangerous because it threatened to subject the Scriptures to the constraints of practical reason.

This is a sketch of Mansel’s criticisms of “rationalism”—whether German idealism or English empiricism. In both systems the tendency is to describe and characterize God according to humanly constructed accounts of God’s character and our ability to perceive his character. Staying with the theme of prayer, Mansel writes,

They may not, forsooth, think of the unchangeable God as if He were their fellow man, influenced by human motives, and moved by human supplications. They want a truer, a juster idea of the Deity as He is, than that under which He has been pleased to reveal Himself; and they call on their reason to furnish it.⁴²

It is the conflict between what people think God ought to be like and how he actually appears in Scripture that leads into Mansel’s skeptical epistemology. In other words, his skepticism is an attempt to examine the modes of thinking that various philosophical positions employ that inhibit them from affirming basic and intelligible scriptural realities.

1.2.2 Kant in England

However, unlike Mansel, other English theologians did not see in Kant an extension of English deism but an opportunity to move beyond shallow empiricism of men like Toland and his orthodox opponents and the restrictions they placed on the capacity of reason.⁴³ S. T. Coleridge and Thomas Carlyle are perhaps the most profound examples of people who wholeheartedly moved away from Locke’s limitation of reason

⁴² Henry Mansel, *Limits of Religious Thought*, 12.

⁴³ In the next chapter I will discuss more specifically the English theology heritage many 19th century Anglican writers were reacting against. While William Paley became the symbol of the poverty of 18th century English theology—Mansel too was critical of Paley—there was another tradition in English theology which stemmed from writers like Peter Browne, George Berkeley and Joseph Butler.

to the sensible world in favor of Kant's epistemology, which seemed to promise reasonable access to spiritual realities.

The delayed influence of German thought, and the philosophy of Kant in particular, in 19th century England is related to a number of complex historical factors, not least the national isolationism that the French Revolution provoked on English soil.⁴⁴ English intellectuals were leery of German philosophical writings, not only for their seemingly dangerous political implications but also because they employed a language and form of reasoning that seemed abstract, obscure and remote from the common-sense tendencies within the English philosophical and theological tradition.⁴⁵ Yet it was the metaphysical character of Kant's writings that at the same time made his philosophy appealing to English writers who were weary of the empirical restrictions operating within English theology and philosophy.⁴⁶

A. O. Dyson, for example, has argued that the decline of deism in England, and what seemed like an orthodox consensus, concealed the enduring weaknesses in the

⁴⁴ For example, in 1800 the *Anti Jacobin Review* had made it a priority to attack the foreign incursions of German philosophy into England's intellectual life as the threat of continental political unrest created fear and unease in England. Giuseppe Micheli, "The Early Reception of Kant's Thought in England," in *Kant and His Influence*, ed. G. MacDonald Ross and Tony McWalter (Bristol: Thoemmes Antiquarian Books, 1990), 286.

⁴⁵ Giuseppe Micheli quotes an early interpreter of Kant, Benjamin Snowdon, who writes that German idealism that resembles "A mass of obscurity and confusion, which instead of assisting the mind in the acquisition of true science, tends to sink it in doubt and skepticism." Giuseppe Micheli, "The Early Reception of Kant's Thought in England," 216.

⁴⁶ Kant's critique of "Physico-Theology" was particularly compelling for English theologians like Coleridge who felt that the design arguments of natural theology distracted Christian writers from the spiritual and moral foundations of the Christian faith. Kant writes in the first critique: "Physico-Theology is therefore incapable of presenting a determinate conception of a supreme cause of the world, and is therefore insufficient as a principle of theology—a theology which is itself to be the basis of religion." *The Critique of Pure Reason*, 352. Kant famously turned to morality as the foundation of belief in God: "the moral laws not merely presuppose the existence of a Supreme Being, but also, as themselves absolutely necessary in a different relation, demand or postulate it—although only from a practical point of view." *The Critique of Pure Reason*, 355.

orthodox conception of reason and faith.⁴⁷ This would come to a crisis, for orthodox and deist alike, in the criticisms of David Hume, represented in Demea and Cleanthes. So long as the criteria for a rational religion lay in the external evidences either side could muster, one way or the other, the balance tipped in favor of the deists, though neither side could cope with Hume.⁴⁸ Dyson goes on to say,

The orthodox believed that in practice totally satisfying proof could be found. The deists believed that totally satisfying disproof could be found. If the debate is couched in these terms, then the deists were victorious...A very different approach of this kind could not be broached without a far richer concept of reason than that provided by Locke and without the help of the kind of historical sensibility which the 18th century English theology never knew.⁴⁹

What was needed, Dyson claims, was a more searching and profound understanding of reason as rooted in the subject, or religion “that has its roots in man.”⁵⁰ The unproductive oscillations between revealed and natural religion that characterized English thought stalled any progress in this regard and ultimately left English theology more vulnerable to the threats of modern science that arose in the 19th century.⁵¹ England lacked both the intellectual climate and the “creative theological figures”⁵² that could have inspired the necessary innovation. According to Stephen Sykes, theologians weary of the natural law tendency in English divinity were attracted to German philosophies that regarded the

⁴⁷ A. O. Dyson points to the Locke and Leibniz debate of the late 17th century as cementing the varying trajectories in English and German thought. In particular, Locke’s refusal of Leibniz’s notion of innate ideas in favor of the “tabula rasa,” a passive mind that receives sensory data, clarified a separation in styles of thought that would persist until the 19th century. While Kant would criticize Leibniz, and innate ideas in particular, the effect of this separation established a tradition in Germany which elevated the powers of reason and granted them a constructive and formative agency in cognition. Dyson argues, as have others, that the great debates between the orthodox and deists, which climaxed between 1720 and 1740, presented a shallow and misleading resolution. A. O. Dyson, “Theological Legacies of the Enlightenment: England and Germany,” in *England and Germany: Studies in Theological Diplomacy*, ed. S. W. Sykes (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1982), 48.

⁴⁸ A. O. Dyson, “Theological Legacies of the Enlightenment,” 53.

⁴⁹ A. O. Dyson, “Theological Legacies of the Enlightenment,” 53.

⁵⁰ A. O. Dyson, “Theological Legacies of the Enlightenment,” 54.

⁵¹ A. O. Dyson, “Theological Legacies of the Enlightenment,” 60.

⁵² A. O. Dyson, “Theological Legacies of the Enlightenment: England and Germany,” 55.

world and history as “subject to mysterious forces which from time to time mould out of individuals a ‘spiritual whole.’”⁵³

Dyson’s view of the impoverishment of English theology is not entirely uncommon. One thinks of Paul Tillich’s straight-faced remark that the “contribution of the established church in Great Britain to systematic theology is almost nonexistent.”⁵⁴ His reasons are similar to Dyson’s and, for that matter, Ward’s, in that the national Church in England provided a conservative liturgical shelter that did not necessitate vigorous engagement with the issues emerging in the culture; rather, theology and philosophy developed like two parallel paths that never met. Whether true or not, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that this was a common impression in the minds of many in early 19th century England. As a result, figures as diverse as Coleridge, Carlyle, Hamilton and Pusey turned to German idealism with mixed feelings of hope, trepidation and some sense of national humiliation as they struggled to reconfigure and articulate their belief in God and His presence in the world.

1.2.3 Coleridge and Kant

Of all early 19th century theological writers in England, Coleridge is regarded as one of the few who took up this “creative” theological task. Coleridge provides the most spectacular attempt to translate Kant and the later German idealists into an orthodox Christian idiom. Yet many critics have argued that this unusual and prolific attempt at a synthesis proved too difficult for Coleridge to accomplish, and it represents the sort of synthesis that Mansel suspected might be dangerous.

⁵³ Giuseppe Micheli, “The Early Reception of Kant’s Thought in England 1785–1805,” 151.

⁵⁴ Paul Tillich, *The History of Christian Thought: From Its Judaic and Hellenistic Origins to Existentialism*, ed. Carl Braaten (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967), 359.

Rene Wellek is the classic example of this approach, and his book *Immanuel Kant in England*, written in 1931, is still an essential touchstone on the topic. Coleridge's failure to understand Kant, according to Wellek, stems from his indiscriminate endorsement of *The Critique of Pure Reason* without confining himself to the narrow escape from the problems of reason that Kant articulated.⁵⁵ For example, Coleridge makes the distinction between Reason and Understanding central to his own religious thinking, but he immediately extends the sphere of reason beyond the limits the distinction was meant to preserve for Kant.⁵⁶ In *Aids to Reflection*, Coleridge writes, "Reason is then the Spirit of the regenerated man, whereby the Person is capable of a quickening intercommunion with the Divine Spirit."⁵⁷ Wellek sees this dualism in Coleridge as a fideistic attempt to circumvent the oppositions that Kant sets up between form and matter, perception and things. In this regard, Coleridge follows Schelling, Wellek argues, though he ends up in a very different place:

Schelling—like Coleridge—wholeheartedly adopts "intellectual intuition" as the solution of the dilemma, as it means for him the concrete unity of intuition and thought, of action, and insight...Both of them recognize the deficiencies of a Kantian dualism, but they never succeeded in carrying out this synthesis speculatively. Coleridge fled into a deeper and more pernicious dualism, Schelling merely showed Hegel the way to solve it.⁵⁸

Clearly, in Wellek's mind, Coleridge's flight into a "pernicious dualism" secured his position outside of the philosophical mainstream, as he was unable to extend the

⁵⁵ Rene Wellek, *Immanuel Kant in England, 1793–1838* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1931), 80, 68.

⁵⁶ Kant writes in *The Critique of Pure Reason*: "Now I maintain that all attempts of reason to establish a theology by the aid of speculation alone are fruitless, that the principles of reason as applied to nature do not conduct us to any theological truths, and, consequently, that a rational theology can have no existence, unless it is founded upon the laws of morality. For all synthetical principles of the understanding are valid only as immanent in experience; while the cognition of a Supreme Being necessitates their being employed transcendently, and of this the understanding is quite incapable." 356.

⁵⁷ S. T. Coleridge, *Aids to Reflection in the Formation of a Manly Character: on the Several Grounds of Prudence, Morality, and Religion* (London: Taylor and Hessey, 1825), 209.

⁵⁸ Rene Wellek, *Immanuel Kant in England, 1793–1838*, 101.

discussion that Kant inaugurated in any sort of intelligible manner. To this end, Coleridge simply used Kant's distinction between reason and understanding to ensure that the faculty of understanding could not be applied to spiritual concerns; this was the disaster of deism and evidential theology in the 18th century. But rather than abandon Kant at this point, Coleridge was inclined to search the philosopher for some kind of concealed intention that would lead in this direction:

In spite therefore of his own declarations, I could never believe, that it was possible for him to have meant no more by his Noumenon, or Thing in itself, than his mere words express; or that in his own conception he confined the whole plastic power to the forms of the intellect, leaving for the external cause, for the material of our sensations, a matter without form, which doubtless is inconceivable.⁵⁹

While Wellek can admit that Kant may have left such a door open, the direction in which Coleridge proceeds veers further and further from any of the positive aspects of the German philosopher's thinking.⁶⁰

In the end, Wellek portrays Coleridge as a very "struggling spirit" caught up in currents of thought that ultimately overwhelmed him, and the conservatism that would emerge in his later life was little more than a desperate solace, sought out when it became clear that there was nowhere left to hide. This does not stop Wellek from describing Coleridge as the great inspiration for romanticism in England, but his spectacular struggle

⁵⁹ S. T. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1927), 77.

⁶⁰ Wellek's concluding words are telling: "Finally he gave up any attempts at a solution and came to take for granted the dualism of speculation and life, of the head and heart. The monistic aim demanded precisely the solution of these dualisms... At length, he seduced the struggling spirit to acquiesce in immediate knowledge and faith, he lured it to enjoy a mere feeling of mystery and to give up the labor of thinking penetration into problems... he simply did not seem to have the ability to conceive in thinking what he felt he should confess and preach as a person... He fell back into an ontology which is fundamentally the same as the ontology of the great systems of the seventeenth century and from there he fell into a mere philosophy of faith." Rene Wellek, *Immanuel Kant in England, 1793-1838*, 134, 135.

with Kant and the philosophy of the age can only be described as a failure.⁶¹ Thus Coleridge, much like Mansel, has often been remembered as another incurably religious Englishman who could not fully appreciate the genius of Kant's philosophical revolution.

However, more recently, scholars have begun to look more sympathetically on Coleridge's philosophy of religion. Ward's comments seem to be indicative of this shift: "What Coleridge valued in the Germans, in other words, was not the critical achievement, but the possibilities of metaphysical construction he perceived in them."⁶² Coleridge thought that Kant's and Schelling's philosophies represented a novel initiative toward a revival or retrieval of metaphysical thinking, which provided structure for his sense of spiritual communion with a living God. Douglas Hedley argues that for Coleridge, the eclipse of Cudworth and the speculative thinking of the 17th century by empiricism was where it all went wrong. Hedley suggests that it was not the idea that the world witnesses to God that offended Coleridge; on this score, Coleridge and Paley are in profound agreement and to some extent stand against Hume. The issue, Hedley writes, has more to do with the content:

Dr. Paley is not attacked because of his rationalism but because he diverts Christianity away from its centre: the indwelling Logos. Paley's *Natural Theology*, as much as the deists', constitutes "the utter rejection of all present and living communion with universal Spirit." In order to experience this Logos, mankind must turn within.⁶³

It is this "turn within" that marks both Coleridge's affinity with idealism and his departure from its strictures. He writes of speculative and practical reason, in the manner

⁶¹ Readings such as Wellek's continued with scholars like Norman Fruman and his book *Coleridge, The Damaged Archangel*. Fruman probes more deeply into the personal problems Coleridge dealt with, and the conclusion is similar: Coleridge simply cannot be taken seriously as a philosopher, despite his immense abilities and intrigue. Norman Fruman, *Coleridge, the Damaged Archangel* (New York: G. Braziller, 1971).

⁶² W. R. Ward, "Faith and Fallacy," 58.

⁶³ Douglas Hedley, *Coleridge, Philosophy and Religion: Aids to Reflection and the Mirror of the Spirit* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 194.

of Kant, but, Hedley argues, what he really means is “immanent reason” through which humans can contemplate, in a limited fashion, reality, by the very thoughts of God that reason can attain to.⁶⁴

While Mansel, with the help of Hamilton, denied the existence of a higher faculty by which human reason could perceive and know, even partially, spiritual realities beyond the constraints of the visible world, Coleridge turned to Kant to articulate and defend this capacity. Yet Coleridge’s use of the reason-and-understanding distinction does, as Wellek suggests, create a certain kind of dualism, especially with respect to the Scriptures. In the second chapter I argue that the structure of spiritual communion, mediated by the faculty of reason, created difficulties for Coleridge in reading the whole Bible as a coherent witness to God’s character in history.

1.2.4 Carlyle and Kantian Agnosticism

While Coleridge shared Mansel’s concern that Kant’s practical reason might be used to shape and control theological beliefs and scriptural imagery, he nevertheless found the distinction between understanding and reason to be an opportunity for a theory of spiritual illumination facilitated by the elevated faculty of reason. Thomas Carlyle, like Coleridge, also seized upon Kant’s distinction between reason and understanding, but he used the distinction for more overtly agnostic purposes. In this way Carlyle more fully represents Mansel’s concern that Kant’s philosophy created profound difficulties for

⁶⁴ Douglas Hedley, *Coleridge, Philosophy and Religion*, 196. Jeffrey Barbeau is another scholar who has argued that Coleridge’s philosophy was controlled more by orthodox theological convictions than by Kant’s philosophy: “Coleridge creates a polarity between the Divine and self-Will that does not collapse the two, in pantheistic fashion, but instead distinguishes them and demands subordination of the finite to the Absolute. At this point, it is important to recall Schelling’s idea of freedom; although Schelling did acknowledge the difference between self-Will and universal Will, he failed, unlike Coleridge, to subordinate the finite to a personal God.” Jeffrey W. Barbeau, “The Development of Coleridge’s Notion of Human Freedom: The Translation and Re-formation of German Idealism in England,” in *Journal of Religion* 80, no. 4 (2000): 576–594.

Christian belief. For example, in his essay “The State of German Literature,” Carlyle writes,

Reason, the Kantists say, is of a higher nature than Understanding; it works by more subtle methods, on higher objects, and requires a far finer culture for its development, indeed in many men it is never developed at all; but its results are no less certain, nay rather, they are much more so; for Reason discerns Truth itself, the absolutely and primitively True; while Understanding discerns only relations, and cannot decide without it.⁶⁵

While “British Philosophy, since the time of Hume, appears to them [Germans] nothing more than a ‘laborious and unsuccessful striving to build dike after dike in front of our churches,’” Carlyle argues that the philosophy of Kant represented an elevated purpose that bypassed the defensive and narrowed ambitions of English philosophers and theologians.⁶⁶

However, for Carlyle, the higher aims of reason did not function to penetrate deeper into scriptural mysteries, but instead reason seemed to move beyond scriptural particularities. Despite the fact that Wellek argues that Carlyle was yet another Englishman who failed to understand Kant,⁶⁷ Frank Turner has shown that Carlyle had an enormous influence in providing the spiritual energy and rationale for a new generation of English agnostics. Turner describes Carlyle as an agnostic whose “idealist concepts and moral doctrines eased the transition from a religious apprehension of the universe to a scientific and secular one.”⁶⁸ This was done through ascribing powers and forces to nature that were unhindered by traditional and dogmatic definitions, while retaining a

⁶⁵ Thomas Carlyle, “State of German Literature,” in *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays, Collected and Published by Thomas Carlyle*, 2 vols. (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1881), 86.

⁶⁶ Thomas Carlyle, “State of German Literature,” 85. Carlyle is quoting August Wilhelm Schlegel and does not reference the source.

⁶⁷ Rene Wellek, *Immanuel Kant in England*, 193.

⁶⁸ Frank Turner, “Victorian Scientific Naturalism and Thomas Carlyle,” in *Victorian Studies* 18, no. 3 (March 1975): 325–43.

place for the religious within the hearts of the people, astonished and overwhelmed by the mysterious world around them. Carlyle's influence on the Victorian agnostics has been frequently noted, and Turner suggests it was his imprecise notion of force, or natural supernaturalism, that animated and inspired the research of the new class of English scientists. Coupled with this was a personal ethic of industriousness and passionate engagement provoked by a wonderful and awful encounter with the forces of nature.⁶⁹ In *Heroes and Hero Worship*, Carlyle exclaims,

This Universe, ah me!—what could the wild man know of it? what can we yet know? That it is a Force, and thousandfold Complexity of Forces; a Force which is not we. That is all; not we, it is altogether different from us. Force, Force, everywhere Force; we ourselves a mysterious force in the centre of that.⁷⁰

This force is beyond comprehension, unknowable in Spencer's terms, and yet it undergirds all of reality with its powerful and indefinite energy.⁷¹ In a like manner, Herbert Spencer described the progress of this conception of an incomprehensible force: "While this process seems to those who effect, and those who undergo it, an anti-religious one, it is really the reverse. Instead of the specific comprehensible agency before assigned, there is substituted a less specific and less comprehensible agency."⁷²

Carlyle's views of nature may be closer to Goethe's or Schelling's than Kant's, but the overall impression of an unknowable world that is yet received and penetrated by the powers of reason provides a setting for an elevated sense of human agency within a

⁶⁹ Frank Turner, "Victorian Scientific Naturalism and Thomas Carlyle," 146.

⁷⁰ Thomas Carlyle, "Heroes and Hero Worship", in *Thomas Carlyle's Collected Works: Volume XII*, (London Chapman and Hall, 1869), 11.

⁷¹ Herbert Spencer writes in *First Principles*, "The abstraction of these conditions and limits is, by the hypothesis, the abstraction of them only; consequently there must be a residuary consciousness of something which filled up their outlines, and this indefinite something constitutes our consciousness of the Non-relative or Absolute. Impossible though it is to give to this consciousness any qualitative or quantitative expression whatever, it is not the less certain that it remains with us as a positive and indestructible element of thought." Herbert Spencer, *First Principles* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1915), 84.

⁷² Herbert Spencer, *First Principles*, 94.

quasi-religious world that is ultimately more interesting than the law-governed rationalistic universe of English deism. Turner writes, “More than any other popular writer during the first half of the century, Carlyle had conceptually separated religion and spirituality from their contemporary institutional and dogmatic incarnations. Religion for Carlyle was wonder, humility, and work amidst the eternities and silences. The true realm of religion and the spirit was the inner man; all else was unessential externality.”⁷³ While Coleridge’s romanticism led him toward a defense of the national Church, in a somewhat idiosyncratic sense, Carlyle moved toward an anti-dogmatic view of religion that tried to retain and renew religious vitality without inhibiting ecclesial structures. This vision was characterized by a profound and moral sense of the individual situated within a mysterious, immanent world, along with an agnostic posture toward defined metaphysical theological doctrines. Thus Carlyle’s Kantian skepticism, unlike Mansel’s, promised a certain kind of spiritual knowledge through the faculty of reason, but this came at the cost of particular scriptural and doctrinal claims.

1.3 Metaphysics, Scripture and Morality

1.3.1 Mansel and Mill

In Carlyle and Coleridge, scholars have found two figures who represent the early and eager appropriation of German idealism and the struggles and conflicts that this reception initiated. If German idealism represents the search for a new holistic and still Christian view of the world, as the inherited “great chain of being” was passing away, it is not clear that this was actually achieved on English terms. Timothy Gouldstone writes in his book on Anglican idealism, “the tradition of Kant and Hegel provided for those in the Christian tradition who inherited a belief in the unity of the created order and the

⁷³ Frank Turner, “Victorian Scientific Naturalism and Thomas Carlyle,” 141.

destiny of mankind a possible means of reconciling the moral law with the material world.”⁷⁴ And yet the tensions within these means were apparent from the outset, and most demonstrably in someone like Coleridge.⁷⁵ For Gouldstone, German idealism represents an uneasy resting place for the Church of England in the 19th century.⁷⁶

Gouldstone’s suggestion that idealism promised a reconciliation between the moral law and changing conceptions of the material world is echoed by Charles Taylor. Speaking of Matthew Arnold’s turn to culture, Taylor writes, “It is an aspiration towards wholeness, towards a fullness of joy where desire is fused with our sense of the deepest significance.”⁷⁷ As I argue throughout this dissertation, this aspiration was pursued by many Victorian philosophers and writers outside of any intelligible scriptural context, and in turn it created a space in which the Scriptures began to flounder. The assumption that the Scriptures, without serious augmentation and revision, could not meet the moral and spiritual needs of modern people was already pervasive in Mansel’s England, and it is a theme that is often repeated in the more contemporary scholarship on the period.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Timothy Gouldstone, *The Rise and Decline of Anglican Idealism in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 26.

⁷⁵ “Coleridge’s mind reflected the tension between Christianity and pantheism, between philosophical inferences and orthodox Christian theism, and in this it bears a strong resemblance to later idealist philosophers who felt acutely the tension between their idealistic and holistic vision of the cosmos and the particularities that are a necessary part of orthodox Christian revelation.” Timothy Goldstone, *The Rise and Decline of Anglican Idealism in the Nineteenth Century*, 32.

⁷⁶ Even the tough-minded and contrarian leaders of the Oxford Movement for a time saw the promise of philosophical idealism’s ferment in England: Pusey’s *An Historical Enquiry into the Probable Causes of the Rationalistic Character Lately Predominant in the Theology of Germany* (1828) is a testament to this tentative hope. And yet Pusey’s later renunciation of this work and Newman’s own attempt to distance himself from Coleridge speaks to the confusion and perceived danger of Kant’s influence in England. Later in life, Newman would deny that he had ever read Coleridge and, for that matter, Kant. Johannes Artz and others think that this must not be true and have shown in the work of Newman various points at which he references Kant. Yet Newman’s desire to say such a thing shows how the implications of German idealism placed Anglican interpreters in an awkward position. Johannes Artz, “Newman in Contact with Newman’s Thought,” in *Journal of Theological Studies* 31, no. 2 (1980): 517–535, 519.

⁷⁷ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 409.

⁷⁸ Hamish Swanston writes, “It was, perhaps, the recognition, however obscure, by their contemporaries that the theologies of Hampden, Mansel and Maurice, impressive and sensitive beyond the ordinary, were yet insufficiently careful of the human, that prevented any one of them becoming the author of a general

For Victorian intellectuals this conflict was brought to a point of profound clarity in J. S. Mill's response to Mansel's lectures and the philosophy of Hamilton. Shortly after these lectures, both Mansel and Hamilton were subjected to a long critique from Mill.

Alan Ryan writes that Mill had two main critical points:

The first is Mill's claim that the majority of cases of inconceivability can be explained by our experience of inseparable associations between attributes, and the other his claim that most of the things that Hamilton claims to be inconceivable are not difficult, let alone impossible, to conceive.⁷⁹

Mill's concern seems to have been that Hamilton's skepticism was based on false alternatives within the sphere of consciousness, and that the effect was to allow back through faith what had been eliminated through philosophy. It seems Mill regarded Hamilton and Mansel as a 'halfway house' between the relativity of knowledge in Kant and his own empiricism.⁸⁰ In this regard, Ryan argues, Mill was still operating from a basically empiricist position:

Mill thinks it is an empirical conviction, implanted by experience, reflecting the way the world actually is, but telling us nothing about how it has to be. The opposition have no common doctrine; the Kantian members of it think that since "the world" is a phenomenal product of our minds working upon unknown and unknowable data it must obey the laws of our own minds.⁸¹

There is no relation between knowing something and conceiving something entirely. The relative part of our knowledge is what originates in our minds, and the inconceivable or absolute is that which eludes us. This is Mill's caricature of Hamilton, and he wishes that

revival of confidence in theology." Hamish Swanston, *Ideas of Order: Anglicans and the Renewal of Theological Method in the Middle Years of the Nineteenth Century* (Assen: Gorcum, 1974), 211.

⁷⁹ Alan Ryan, Introduction to J. S. Mill, *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill, Volume 9: An Examination of William Hamilton's Philosophy [1865]*, ed. J. M. Robson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), xxix.

⁸⁰ Alan Ryan, Introduction to J. S. Mill, xi.

⁸¹ Alan Ryan, Introduction to J. S. Mill, xxx.

he had simply gone all the way to the Kantian position.⁸² According to Mill, because Hamilton permits an alien aspect to our knowledge, that which is inconceivable, he leaves open the option of revelatory truths that in fact contradict the very structure of human perception and cognizance. This becomes most apparent in the work of Mansel, who argues strongly that human conceptions of goodness have no necessary relation to divine goodness. It is this consequence of Hamilton's thought that provoked Mill's well-known words "I will call no being good, who is not what I mean when I apply that epithet to my fellow creatures."⁸³ In other words, human understanding of morality, in a manner that is different than Kant's, still must in some sense correspond to our understanding of divine morality.

F. D. Maurice and Mark Pattison, among other churchmen, gladly received Mill's critique of Hamilton and Mansel, as they sensed that this skeptical philosophy was a threat to their own theological understandings, which were heavily influenced by the Coleridgean "holistic" tradition.⁸⁴ The resulting impression of this conflict is one in which two different forms of Christian theology, both influenced by Kant, came into collision and were to some degree arbitrated by an agnostic like Mill.

Bernard Lightman has convincingly shown how the philosophy of Hamilton and Mansel exercised a strong influence on Victorian agnosticism and people like Spencer,

⁸² "That philosopher [Kant] did recognise a direct object of our perceptions, different from the thing itself, an intermediate between it and the perceiving mind. And it was open to Kant to do so; because he held what Sir W. Hamilton calls a representative theory of perception. He maintained that the object of our perception, and of our knowledge, is a representation in our own minds." J. S. Mill, *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill, Volume 9: An Examination of William Hamilton's Philosophy [1865]*, ed. J. M. Robson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), 27.

⁸³ J. S. Mill, *An Examination of Sir William Hamilton's Philosophy*, 103.

⁸⁴ Alan Ryan, Introduction to J. S. Mill, xiv.

Stephen and Huxley.⁸⁵ Lightman argues that Mansel's failure in part was due to his unnecessary opposition between faith and reason: "Where Mansel grouped knowing, thinking and reason together in opposition to faith, Kant conceived of thinking and reason as an integral part of the realm of faith."⁸⁶ This statement, as I argue, is not quite true of Mansel. However, the simplistic surmise of the conflict of faith and reason symbolizes the vying trajectories that signify the age, where theologians and philosophers alike were reaching out for a new understanding of knowledge and faith but at once with a mixture of hesitation, urgency and perplexity. This is the picture that often emerges from contemporary scholarship on the topic of the reception of Kant and German idealism in 19th century England: Kant was never really understood, and his most notable interpreters were bound by theological commitments that did not allow them to follow Kant's positive philosophy. However, while the philosophical rigor of Kant has been employed as a criterion for assessing the writings of various theologians and philosophers in the 19th century, it is often the case that certain moral and theological presuppositions undergird this standard. Mansel was one of the few philosophical theologians in 19th century England to perceive that two distinct theological visions of God and reality were beginning to emerge and conflict with each other.

1.3.2 *Kant and Theology*

J. S. Mill was obviously not a Kantian, and yet despite all the concerns for philosophical rigor that surround Kant's reception, Mill's moral concern about the scriptural depiction of God were shared deeply by Kant. For example, Donald Mackinnon's comment on Kant's influence on English theology is telling:

⁸⁵ Bernard Lightman, *The Origins of Agnosticism: Victorian Unbelief and the Limits of Knowledge* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1987).

⁸⁶ Bernard Lightman, *The Origins of Agnosticism*, 60.

It was from Kant that theologians were enabled to see that the universalism of the Enlightenment was no facile optimism, but an expression of the need for the devout to submit their aspirations to judgment at the bar of a common humanity—lest indeed they failed to see the Son of Man in the least of his brethren and, failing, forfeited the very faith by which they claimed to live.⁸⁷

However, it is this very notion of the “common bar of humanity” that seems confused in contemporary scholarship on the issue in question. Welles’s assessment is based upon the ability of Kant’s interpreters to understand the philosopher and to integrate his conclusions in a coherent philosophical manner. Certainly in Mansel’s eyes, while the method of figures like Mill and Kant differed, they shared, in some sense, “the bar of common humanity.” Or in other words, they shared a common moral perspective that concealed a considerable danger for scriptural interpretation.

From a contemporary theological perspective it is now becoming clear that Kant’s philosophy, as a representative of modern trends, is not necessarily hospitable for the articulation of a Christian understanding of the world.⁸⁸ Kant’s own comments on the status of Christian claims are well known:

Reason does not dispute the possibility or the reality of the objects of these ideas [grace, miracles, mysteries]; she simply cannot adopt them into her maxims of thought and action...for dogmatic faith which proclaims itself as a form of knowledge, appears to her dishonest or presumptuous.⁸⁹

Kant’s distinctions between the phenomenal and noumenal, the understanding and reason, lent the possibility of greater depth to the created order and a higher mode of

⁸⁷ Donald Mackinnon, “Kant’s Influence on English Theology,” in *Kant and His Influence*, eds. MacDonald Ross, G., and Tony McWalter (Bristol: Thoemmes Antiquarian Books, 1990), 361.

⁸⁸ Stanley Hauerwas’s essay “How ‘Christian Ethics’ Came to Be” (1997) in *The Hauerwas Reader*, eds. John Berkman, and Michael G. Cartwright John Berkman and Michael G. Cartwright, 37–50 (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001) is an example of a theological critique of Kant’s ethics. John Milbank’s *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, Culture* (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1997) contains a sustained critique of Kant and the destructive effects of epistemology on Christian understandings of the world and God.

⁸⁹ Immanuel Kant, *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, 47.

knowledge that was flattened out by the deists. Yet in a way, concrete scriptural claims about the reality of God's presence in the world become obscure, and, even worse, they become matters of potential indifference because they do not relate to the central experience of the moral life. Kant asks, "Do you really trust yourself to assert the truth of these dogmas in the sight of Him who knows the heart and at the risk of losing all that is valuable and holy to you?"⁹⁰ Such creedal-ecclesiastical theology Kant calls "fetish worship."⁹¹ These particularities will one day disappear as man takes his autonomous place in the world, and "God is all in all."⁹²

This specific notion that theological and scriptural particulars stand in opposition to or even destroy the genuine moral life represents one of the great themes of Mansel's period. Whether in Kant's philosophy of the subject, Spencer's philosophy of the unknown, Arnold's theory of culture or Mill's memorable rebuke of an immoral God, the common unifying claim is that the specificity of Scripture's reference to the life of God is no longer capable of guiding human life in the modern world. Of course, much less is the scriptural narrative able to describe the reality of the changing and progressive historical developments of modernity.

Thus, while Mansel made use of Kant's criticisms of reason, in the end Mansel's theology, in its core themes, was ultimately critical of Kant or any philosophy where "the law of human morality must be regarded as the measure and adequate representative of the moral nature of God."⁹³ Charles Taylor's point about the Victorian era is that while

⁹⁰ Immanuel Kant, *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, 178.

⁹¹ Immanuel Kant, *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, 167.

⁹² Immanuel Kant, *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, 126.

⁹³ Henry Mansel, *The Limits of Religious Thought Examined*, 142. Kant's enlightenment understanding of primitive religion's gradual moral purification and purgation was central for 19th century English intellectuals: "Hence, also, we find in the history of human reason that, before the moral conceptions were sufficiently purified and determined, and before men had attained to a perception of the systematic unity of

the rise of science undoubtedly created problems for religious belief, it was the emergence of a new moral idea that was most dangerous to traditional Christian faith: first, “We have an obligation to make up our own minds on the evidence without bowing to any authority. The second is a kind of heroism of unbelief, the deep spiritual satisfaction of knowing that one has confronted the truth of things, however bleak and unconsoling.”⁹⁴ Francis Newman’s *Phases of Faith* offers a perfect example of this emerging attitude. After struggling with the Scriptures, Newman confesses, “At last it pressed on me, that if I allowed morals to rest on an independent basis, it was dishonest to shut my eyes to any apparent collisions of morality with the Scriptures.”⁹⁵ Mansel was keenly aware of this burgeoning moral awareness, and in response to one of his lectures’ critics, Goldwin Smith, he writes, “You have adopted a historical theory, which virtually divides the thinking part of the world into two classes, the friends and enemies of Progress.”⁹⁶ It is within this moral framework that the theological conception of God and the Scriptures were increasingly entangled.

ends according to these conceptions and from necessary principles, the knowledge of nature, and even a considerable amount of intellectual culture in many other sciences, could produce only rude and vague conceptions of the Deity, sometimes even admitting of an astonishing indifference with regard to this question altogether. But the more enlarged treatment of moral ideas, which was rendered necessary by the extreme pure moral law of our religion, awakened the interest, and thereby quickened the perceptions of reason in relation to this object. In this way, and without the help either of an extended acquaintance with nature, or of a reliable transcendental insight (for these have been wanting in all ages), a conception of the Divine Being was arrived at, which we now hold to be the correct one, not because speculative reason convinces us of its correctness, but because it accords with the moral principles of reason.” Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 458

⁹⁴ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 404.

⁹⁵ Francis Newman, *Phases of Faith: Or Passages from the History of My Creed* (London: Trübner, 1881), 69.

⁹⁶ Henry Mansel, *A Letter to Goldwin Smith Concerning the Postscript to His Lectures on the Study of History* (Oxford: Henry Hamman, High Street, 1861), 48. Mansel goes on in this vein, “the one embodying the good, the other the evil principle in the history of mankind; the one generous, the other selfish; the one representing ‘the moral instincts of Man person onwards, in obedience to his conscience, toward the further knowledge of Religious Truth’; the other ‘the defenders of ecclesiastical interests,’ endeavoring ‘to save their threatened dominion’ by ‘civil sword’ or by ‘intellectual intrigue and the power of sophistry.’ This is but a repetition of the old cry of Priestcraft, —a cry common among the demagogues of a former generation, but which I hardly expected to see revived by the philosophers of the present.”

1.3.3 Contemporary Theological Critiques of Kant

While, as I have argued, it has been common to assess Mansel and 19th century English theologians like Coleridge according to standards of Kant's philosophy, it has become increasingly common among theologians today to criticize the influence of Kant on modern theology. However, it is not always the case that these criticisms focus in upon the general philosophical and moral sentiment that provoked Kant to relegate scriptural realities to secondary considerations. John Milbank, for example, in *The Word Made Strange*, argues that "The metaphysics of Kant, which is totally agnostic as concerns God-in-himself, but in a way dogmatic as concerns his relationship to finite beings, and the metaphysics of Aquinas, which is less agnostic concerning God-in-himself, is also more agnostic concerning the conditions of our relationship to God."⁹⁷ Kant, for Milbank, represents the modern culmination of Dun Scotus' separation of the finite and infinite; in the case of Kant, the infinite can only impinge upon the finite as an "empty formality" devoid of any participatory dynamic between the realms.⁹⁸ Unlike many of the scholars mentioned earlier, Milbank's argument is not that 19th century theology in England was insufficiently Kantian but that it was too much so: the medieval and patristic notion of a participationist ontology had been replaced by a barren and sterile epistemology of religion. Thus Milbank's argument, in the face of modern secularism, is to reassert this classical vision as an ontology in which Christian claims, and all truth claims, can be intelligibly made:

Between one unknown and the other there is here no representational knowledge, no 'metaphysics,' but only a mode of ascent which receives something of the infinite source so long as it goes on receiving it, so constituting, not a once and for all theory (or account of the ontological

⁹⁷ John Milbank, *The Word Made Strange*, 9. Here Milbank refers to Mansel as a typical Kantian theologian of the 19th century.

⁹⁸ John Milbank, *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon* (London: Routledge, 2003), 12.

difference) but an endlessly repeated as always different theoretical claim which is nothing other than all the biographies of every ascent, and the history of human ascent as such.⁹⁹

This account of the dynamics of knowledge represents for Milbank theology's "evacuation" of metaphysics, or rather, it is a way of incorporating all of reality within a theological vision that is all embracing. Thus if theology "wishes to think again God's love, and think creation as the manifestation of that love, then it must entirely evacuate philosophy, which is metaphysics."¹⁰⁰

Milbank offers a powerful alternative to many of the confused and entangled theological visions of the modern era that seek to integrate progressive and developmental schemes into theological or providential terms. It stands in stark contrast to the scholarly readings of the period that argue that theologians faced the dilemma of either keeping up with developments in modern philosophical thought or falling desperately behind. For Milbank, modern secularism and unbelief don't stem from the Church's inability to keep pace with philosophical and scientific developments, but rather they are the result of the Church's fatal assimilation of forms of theological thinking that eclipse the ontological framework in which Christian claims have always flourished. Like Mansel, Milbank has argued that Kant's philosophy can have destructive consequences for Christian belief if it becomes the standard by which Christian doctrines are measured. Still, the question that concerned Mansel was how particular metaphysical or ontological schemes can make sense of the entire scriptural account and its witness to the character and life of God within the world. This question can be asked of Kant or Milbank as it can

⁹⁹ John Milbank, *The Word Made Strange*, 44.

¹⁰⁰ John Milbank, *The Word Made Strange*, 50.

be asked of any theological system and its author. It is the purpose of this dissertation to explore this question under the terms in which Mansel posed it.

1.4 Conclusion

This paradigmatic conflict between the emerging moral sensibilities and the morality or character of Scripture's representation of God made any discussion of the "common bar of humanity" fraught with complications in 19th Century England. While Coleridge, for example, struggled deeply to articulate the Christian faith within the general philosophical terms of his era, he was forced to resist the philosophy of Kant and the idealists in a manner that, despite its confusion, made space for a scriptural understanding of God. Yet, as I argue in the second chapter, Coleridge too carried some ambivalence toward the whole scriptural witness, especially the Old Testament portrayal of God's actions in history. Mansel's goal was to defend the whole Scriptures and the character of God embedded within them, but in doing this he did not disregard the "common bar of humanity." He argued that the Scriptures' presentation of a personal God, with all of its complication, difficulties and contradictions, was in fact a profoundly fitting address within the strictures of human personality in general.

But Mansel's account of human personality was simply one among many, and the idea that it should "fit" with a scriptural account of the world may seem too good to be true. The reality for Mansel, however, was that the Church's understanding of the world or human nature and the character of God is located primarily and sufficiently within the scriptural account. However, if readers bring certain controlling moral and metaphysical assumptions to the text of Scripture, it will be difficult for them to discover the character of this "fittingness" that Mansel described. For this reason Mansel's Bampton Lectures argued that the scope of rational criticism extends only to created realities, and for

apologetic purposes he begins his arguments with a description of human thought and personality. But his skeptical conclusions about the capacity of human reason, as I will argue in the following chapters, emerged from a deeper commitment to the internal coherence of the entire Scriptures, represented in the twentieth article of religion in the prayer book: no portion of Scripture should be interpreted as repugnant to another. While Mansel, in his sermons and theological writings, attempted to build and illustrate this coherence through typological readings of the Bible, his theological skepticism was a simple admission that this coherence may not always been perceivable. Or, in other words, believers may not always understand the purposes and actions of God in the world, but the Scriptures provide a particular and comprehensive account of God's character that is centered and interpreted through the life and death of Jesus Christ.

Mansel was one of the few philosophical theologians in 19th Century England to perceive that Kant's philosophy posed serious dangers to the articulation of the Christian faith. Though it has been argued that Mansel separated faith and reason, the deeper nature of his argument was that faith had a form of reasoning that was particular to Christian Scripture and tradition. I explore this form of reasoning more fully in Chapters three and four.

Chapter Two: Anglican Apologetics and the Limits of Religious Thought

2.1 Introduction

This chapter is intended as a background to the philosophy and theology of Henry Mansel. In particular I explore the themes in the mid-Victorian period available to Mansel concerning skeptical epistemology and the Christian's knowledge of God rooted in the Scriptures. In this regard, the controversy between Peter Browne and George Berkeley provides a lens into the topic of skeptical reasoning in Anglican theology in the 18th century and the emerging fear that skepticism was hollowing out Anglican apologetics. I then look more closely at the thought of Joseph Butler and S. T. Coleridge as two prominent trajectories in English theology, both of which struggle to draw a coherent and resonant analogy between the Scriptures and humanity's experience of the created world.

It is likely that at the time of Mansel's Bampton Lectures, there were still many English clergymen who would have wanted to affirm Aquinas's distilled notion that "contempt in the will causes dissent in the intellect, by which the act of unfaithfulness is completed."¹⁰¹ While Aquinas could divide and integrate subtly diverse concepts like unbelief (unfaithfulness), heresy, blasphemy and apostasy, the Victorian Church was beset by a crisis where the traditional claims of Christian orthodoxy were exposed to the escalating threats of skepticism and revision. What some called unbelief, others called the progress or "phases of faith,"¹⁰² the purification of historic theological notions such as the divinity of Christ or the inspiration of Scripture. The long litany of public controversies in the 19th century—the repeal of the Tests and Corporations Act, The University

¹⁰¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Theologica* (New York: Benziger Bros., 1947), part 1, question 13, article 2.

¹⁰² Francis Newman, *Phases of Faith*.

Reform Act, *Essays and Reviews* and the controversy over the Athanasian Creed¹⁰³—not only challenged the status of the Church in England but also questioned the theological bearings that upheld its core articles of faith. In addition, the high profile “loss of faith” narratives,¹⁰⁴ coupled with the defection of prominent churchmen like Newman and Manning to Rome, pressured Anglican theologians to defend their positions on a number of varying and opposing fronts.

The story of Victorian unbelief has been frequently and well told, so it is not my intention to offer another genealogical account in this chapter.¹⁰⁵ Instead I focus on the nature of the problem confronting Anglican theology in the 19th century and the theological context that Mansel drew from and reacted against. Not only did Anglican theologians have to defend the reasonableness of the Christian faith in some measure, but even more they had to show that the narrative of Scripture could still describe the world they lived in. Most essentially, this narrative included the character of God and his dealings with humanity, which since the time of the 18th century deists had been under criticism in favor of more materialistic or impersonal renderings of the cosmic order. Charles Taylor describes the slide away from the personal, biblical image of God in terms of maturation:

This stance is part of the modern identity of the buffered self, which thus finds a natural affinity for the impersonal order... We have to rise above

¹⁰³ Owen Chadwick, *The Mind of the Oxford Movement* (London: A. & C. Black, 1960); A. O. J. Cockshut, *Anglican Attitudes: A Study of Victorian Religious Controversies* (London: Collins, 1959); John Moorman, *A History of the Church of England*, 3rd ed. (Harrisburg: Morehouse Publishing, 1980).

¹⁰⁴ Samuel Butler, *The Way of All Flesh* (London: Grant Richards, 1903); George Eliot, *Adam Bede* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1859); Humphrey Ward, *Robert Elsmere* (London: T. Nelson, 1907).

¹⁰⁵ For examples, see Owen Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century: The Gifford Lectures in the University of Edinburgh for 1973–4* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975); P. T. Marsh, *The Victorian Church in Decline: Archbishop Tait and the Church of England, 1868–1882* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969); Julie Melnyk, *Victorian Religion: Faith and Life in Britain* (Westport: Praeger, 2008); Charles Taylor, *The Secular Age* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007); and A. N. Wilson, *God’s Funeral* (London: John Murray, 1999).

and beyond our particular, narrow, biased view on things, to a view from everywhere, or for everyman, the analogue of the view from nowhere which natural science strives to occupy.¹⁰⁶

The notions of comprehensiveness and limitation were central for many Anglican theologians in the 18th and 19th centuries. In particular, these ideas were pursued in relation to orthodox Christian claims—the creeds and Scripture—and the degree to which the authorized words of the Church closed off or opened up conceptions of reality and of God’s identity. What drove the quest for a more comprehensive worldview—“a view from everywhere, and for everyman”—was something upon which theologians disagreed. It was not always clear that writers who argued for this more comprehensive view at the cost of orthodox particularities were motivated by a “contempt in the will.” But the stance that varying theologians took toward this motivation in many ways characterized the manner in which they articulated their respective understandings of the limits of human knowledge and the limits or domain of the Scriptures and the creeds. Or, in other words, theological writers generally agreed that it was essential to discuss the limitation and constitution of the mind, but they differed sharply over the degree to which these accounts of human knowledge were allowed to shape or control the contents of revelation.

¹⁰⁶ Charles Taylor, *The Secular Age*, 363. Taylor’s picture is illustrated well by Samuel Butler’s Ernest Pontifex in *The Way of All Flesh*. Pontifex’s biography was not unfamiliar to many Victorians, which explains the novel’s resonance. After a constricted and unhappy upbringing in the home of an Evangelical minister, the young Pontifex is grudgingly ordained, yet his spiritual discontent drives him away from the Evangelical to the Tractarian Movement, and eventually into the Broad Church. But one disillusionment follows another until his maturation is complete and he settles into a role as a social critic, with little semblance of his Christian faith left intact. His final position seems to be an ill-defined agnostic and scientific materialism in which the very lack of metaphysical or theological strictures actually provides a more comprehensive worldview, though in this case it is important to note that comprehensiveness is gained more by the removal of limitations than by the expanding of old ones, which is to say that the highly defined traditional notions of God in some sense pushed God away as opposed to drawing him near.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the context and background of Mansel's skeptical philosophy and theory of regulative truth. I briefly look at the status of philosophical and theological skepticism in 18th century England and the manner in which skeptical arguments were used to both buttress and redefine orthodox Christian claims. The debate between George Berkeley and Peter Browne in particular provides an illuminating lens into the nature of such arguments. Then I examine more closely the theology of Joseph Butler—Mansel's closest spiritual and theological mentor—and his understanding of human ignorance and the knowledge of God's providence. Finally, as a partial contrast to Butler and as a development of philosophical skepticism and its idealistic cure, it is important to discuss S. T. Coleridge and his attempt at a chastened though relatively comprehensive Anglican theological vision.

In looking at Butler and Coleridge, alongside writers who influenced them, I outline two differing though not entirely dissimilar tendencies in English theology that were available to Mansel when he approached the topic of human knowledge and the character of God revealed in the Scriptures. Both Butler and Coleridge were concerned to protect the integrity of Christian revelation, while at the same establishing continuity and coherence between that revelation and human knowledge and experience. The degree to which Coleridge extended this coherence beyond particular scriptural accounts toward a more comprehensive theological vision will be the central question in contrasting the two figures.

2.2 Skepticism in Context

The earliest reactions to Mansel's lectures contained worries and criticisms that his skeptical epistemology, which circumscribed the range and extent of human knowledge of God, risked making the very contents of revelation themselves obscure or,

worse, unknowable. Speaking of Mansel's ostensible victory over his rationalist opponents in the lectures, an anonymous writer in the *Eclectic Review* questioned "but what if the hero himself also has perished, and if his mangled and lifeless body be found under the heaps of his slain enemies?"¹⁰⁷ The lurid image was to some degree insightful, and the work of Bernard Lightman has traced the steps by which Mansel's own ideas were turned against him by figures like Herbert Spencer and Thomas Huxley.¹⁰⁸ The suggestion of these critics is that an attempt to safeguard Christian truth claims by restricting or diminishing the scope of human reason only serves to drive these truth claims beyond the field of recognizable human experience, rendering them unbelievable or, as it turns out, irrelevant.

In fact, this contention raised by Lightman and others directed toward the use of skepticism in the realm of theological knowledge is far from new, and it is important to place the issues in some context.¹⁰⁹ Richard Popkin's work on skepticism has opened a whole field of study that undoubtedly pertains to Mansel's position. Popkin's thesis, simply put, is that the revival of skeptical texts in the Renaissance period provided tools for religious controversialists of the Reformation to undermine opponents' arguments.¹¹⁰ While Protestants attacked the tradition of the Catholic Church and its spurious role in the establishment of truth, Catholics replied by questioning the ability of individuals to interpret the Bible outside of an established and traditional framework. Over the

¹⁰⁷ Anon. "The Philosophy of the Conditioned" in *Eclectic Review*, 1861 (438).

¹⁰⁸ Bernard Lightman, *The Origins of Agnosticism*.

¹⁰⁹ I look more fully at Mansel's skeptical epistemology in the second chapter, but here I explore some possible traditions in which he might be placed.

¹¹⁰ "The Reformers' challenge of the accepted criteria of religious knowledge raised a most fundamental question: How does one justify the basis of one's knowledge? This problem was to unleash a sceptical crisis not only in theology but also, shortly thereafter, in the sciences and in all other areas of human knowledge. Richard Popkin, *The History of Scepticism: From Savonarola to Bayle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 15.

succeeding centuries, Popkin argues, these mutual recriminations stirred a search for new dogmatic systems of knowledge that would close Luther's "Pandora's box."¹¹¹ However, "the gradual failure of these monumental efforts was to see the quest for certainty lead to two other searches, the quest for faith—pure fideism—and the quest for reasonableness—or a 'mitigated scepticism.'"¹¹²

Popkin provided a context in which to place the varying functions of skeptical reasoning in modern theology, and to be sure, Mansel, in some measure, belongs to this stream. Popkin discusses a range of figures whom he describes as "sceptical fideists," Montaigne perhaps being the paradigmatic example. Popkin quotes from Montaigne to illustrate the skeptical fideistic position:

There is nothing in human invention that carries so great a show of likelihood and utility as this; this presents man, naked and empty, confessing his natural weakness, fit to receive some foreign force from above, unfurnished of human and therefore more apt to receive into him the divine knowledge, making nought of his own judgment, to give more room to faith.¹¹³

The extent and manner of this skepticism as it pertains to reality and revelation varies from figure to figure, but I would argue that Mansel's particular form of skepticism stands loosely within this fideistic context that Popkin traces from the Reformation. Furthermore, Popkin's description of the dangers of this position sound very much like an echo of Mansel's critic in the *Eclectic Review*: "The new machine of war appeared to have a peculiar recoil mechanism that had the odd effect of engulfing the target and the gunner in a common catastrophe."¹¹⁴ In other words, Catholic and Protestant polemicists

¹¹¹ Richard Popkin, *The History of Scepticism*, 5.

¹¹² Richard Popkin, *The History of Scepticism*, 15.

¹¹³ Michel de Montaigne, "Apology for Raymond Sebond," in *The Works of Montaigne*, ed. W. Hazlitt (London: John Templeman, 1842), 199–282.

¹¹⁴ Richard Popkin, *The History of Scepticism*, 73.

devoured each other at the cost of their own positions; skepticism, in this sense, which was intended to buttress certain theological positions, actually ended up corroding their foundations.

Iain Hampsher-Monk pursues this insight in the context of Anglican theology in a fascinating article on Edmund Burke's skepticism. Hampsher-Monk argues that Anglican divines had to finesse a middle position between their fundamentally anti-catholic and anti-deistic commitments. For example, he writes, "The success of their position hinged on certain epistemological and hermeneutical issues having to do with the limits of reason in religious matters and the need to maintain the integrity of the sensory and textual evidence on which Christianity or Christian dogma was based."¹¹⁵ The emphasis on sensory and textual evidence is much in the tradition of Locke, who regarded the senses—unlike, perhaps, Montaigne¹¹⁶—as generally reliable for the basic purposes of life. However, Locke's distinction between real and nominal essences places a limit on the depth of human understanding regarding revealed truths.¹¹⁷ This trajectory in English theology—the appeal to common sense, or accessibility to the "vulgar"¹¹⁸—was derived in part from an aversion to "extravagant" and "speculative" Roman Catholic reasoning in

¹¹⁵ Iain Hampsher-Monk, "Burke and the Religious Sources of Conservative Skepticism" in *The Skeptical Tradition Around 1800: Skepticism in Philosophy, Science and Society*, ed. Johan Van Der Zande and Richard Popkin, 235–259 (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1998), 237.

¹¹⁶ This is Mansel's view of Pyrrhonist Skepticism, but while he criticizes the idea that the senses deceive in his essay "Philosophy and Theology," in *Letter, Lectures and Reviews, Including the Phrontisterion, or, Oxford in the 19th Century* (London: John Murray, 1873), his sympathies are clearly closer to this form of skepticism than its dogmatic counterpart: "reason, the highest faculty, is privileged to attain to a knowledge of the real and absolute nature of objects in themselves, and thus to establish a philosophy of realities as the supplement to and corrective of the philosophy of appearances" (344).

¹¹⁷ Locke's emphasis on the essence of Christianity is well-known. In *The Reasonableness of Christianity* especially, Locke's epistemology is borne out by an emphasis on these simplified, textual realities, i.e., the life of Jesus, the moral code, and the evidences of his life. To Hampsher-Monk's point, this method placed the more doctrinal elements of Christianity in an uncertain position. Locke, though not denying their reality, wished to focus on the more concrete, visible aspects of the faith: "This is a religion suited to vulgar capacities, and the state of mankind in this world, destined to labor and travail. The writers and wranglers in religion fill it with niceties, and dress it up with notions, which they make necessary and fundamental parts of it; as if there were no way into the Church, but through the Academy or Lycaeam" (77).

¹¹⁸ John Locke, *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, 77.

their defense of transubstantiation. But, Hampsher-Monk claims, this moderated skepticism had its own recoil effect:

Extravagant claims about the application of rational standards to matters of religious belief rebounded on them, threatening their own position which involved adherence to what their non-conformist critics saw as unreasonable theological tenets. For as Catholic opponents realized, the stress on the evidence of the sense and common reason as criteria of the admissibility of articles of faith, as well as undermining transubstantiation, rendered vulnerable that other crucial touchstone of orthodoxy of rationalist Deism—namely the Trinity...And so, however, incautious Anglicans grew in pursuit of their Catholic adversaries, they had always to retreat to a position which enabled them to combine their attacks on the unreasonableness of transubstantiation with a defence of the Trinity.¹¹⁹

This tension between two rival positions forced Anglican theologians to constantly shift from one ground of authority to another, from reason to Scripture to tradition, and then around again. But as the threat of Catholicism began to wane and the public pressures of the deists increased, fideistic positions that more closely resembled that of Montaigne began to emerge.

Thus, while the empirical bent of Anglican theology was very much formalized and influenced by Locke, there also needed to be a way to limit the encroachment of his mitigated skepticism into the realm of revelation. So, Hampsher-Monk writes, “Anglicans deployed a range of skeptical arguments against the extension of Lockian ‘understanding’ to the realms of religion and morality.”¹²⁰ In this way, the empirical strictures of the human mind were regarded as adequate to receive the necessary content of revelation, but they were not capable of forming or revising these contents according to any larger framework, which is to say that the reception of revelation was to some degree passive. Passivity here need not mean irrational or unreasonable but more

¹¹⁹ Hampsher Monk, “Burke and the Religious Sources of Conservative Skepticism,” 239.

¹²⁰ Hampsher Monk, “Burke and the Religious Sources of Conservative Skepticism,” 255.

indicates a certain posture to tradition and theological authority wherein the articles of the faith are regarded as sufficient for salvation, if not exhaustive explanations of reality.

So the Church of England very much experienced the skeptical crisis that Popkin describes, even though many of these issues would not be fully exposed until the 19th century. However, the empirical or “textual” base of English theology ensured that these topics were not pursued purely in the abstract apart from particular scriptural claims. For writers like Butler and Mansel, revelation was not a bulk of propositions to be merely received on skeptical or epistemological grounds; rather, revelation was in the form of the Scriptures, an articulate and particular witness. And however much they might have used skeptical arguments or appeals to ignorance as a ground for their acceptance, because the Scriptures were writings embedded in the empirical or visible world some accounting of the coherence between the world of the Scriptures and the present was imperative. In this way, Mansel is not quite at home in the skeptical fideist tradition, though his arguments often bear a surface, and at times deeper, resemblance: the inadequacy of reason to judge matters of faith and the reception of doctrines that cannot be accounted for by reason are among the obvious. Yet, as we will see, he inherited from Butler not just a stress upon the ignorance of man but, further, a complex and subtle notion of God’s character and purposes both revealed and concealed in the Scriptures.

2.3 Deism and Anglican Apologetics

Mansel’s comments in his essay on freethinkers clearly demonstrated the continuity that he perceived between the 18th and the 19th centuries: “The English Deism of the last century, like the English gentlemen of the same period, has made the grand

tour of Europe, and come home with the fruits of its travels.”¹²¹ The “grand tour of Europe” refers, of course, to the inroads of German idealistic philosophy in England in the 19th century, which Mansel saw as nothing more than a more sophisticated form of deism. If this is true, it is no small wonder that Mansel’s arguments bear strong affinities with his Anglican predecessors of the 18th century, however altered to suit his circumstances. While Orthodox writers such as Joseph Butler, Peter Browne and George Berkeley employed strategies similar to Mansel’s in their defence of Christian particularities, the differences between these respective authors clearly suggest that the presence of a lurking fear that theological skepticism might undermine the entire theological enterprise was already making itself felt. But despite this fear, it is equally evident that some of the greatest figures in 18th century Anglican theology felt it was necessary to negotiate the limitations of human thought in order to retain the doctrinal core of the Christian faith.

2.3.1 Toland and the Limits of Scripture

As in the Victorian Church, 18th century churchmen disagreed sharply about how the Christian faith should be articulated and defended against rational criticism. This was nowhere more evident than in the debate that took place between Peter Browne and George Berkeley, both writing in some measure against Toland’s already well-known *Christianity Not Mysterious*. The debate took place between 1728 and 1735,¹²² though the

¹²¹ Henry Mansel, “Freethinking—Its History and Tendency,” 334.

¹²² Jean-Paul Pittion and David Berman, “A New Letter by Berkeley to Browne on Divine Analogy,” in *Mind* 78, no. 311 (July 1969), : 375–392, 376.

longtime Irish bishop of Cork, Browne, had expressed the main points of his thought many years earlier in a short letter responding to Toland's major work.¹²³

In *Christianity Not Mysterious* Toland famously made use of Locke's basic epistemology to argue that the statements of Scripture must be understood in a clear and distinct sense, or not understood at all:

No Christian doctrine, no more than any ordinary piece of nature, can be reputed a mystery, because we have not an adequate or complete idea of whatever belongs to it...what is revealed in religion, as it is most useful and necessary, so it must and may be as easily comprehended, and found as consistent with our common notions, as what we know of wood or stone.¹²⁴

As with Locke, Toland argues that all objects of sense have properties that render adequate, though not exhaustive, knowledge for the perceiver, and much in the same manner, Scripture teaches what people need to know about God for practical living.¹²⁵ What Scripture does teach can be clearly known and requires no recourse to a greater depth or mystery. Toland's ostensible purpose in making this claim was to allow the literal words of Scripture to stand plainly without "being wrapped in mystery or garnished with a figure."¹²⁶

The promise of the plain sense, in Toland's mind, was the potential to surpass what he regarded as the deforming effects of party-driven theological controversy. He makes this clear in the introduction and argues that the divines of the Church "prove the authority and perfection before they teach the contents of Scripture. Whereas the first is

¹²³Peter Browne, *A Letter in Answer to a Book Entitled, Christianity Not Mysterious. As also to All those who set up for Reason and Evidence In Opposition to Revelation and Mysteries*, 3rd ed. (London: Robert Clavel), 1703.

¹²⁴ John Toland, *Christianity Not Mysterious*, 79.

¹²⁵ John Toland, *Christianity Not Mysterious*, 86.

¹²⁶ John Toland, *Christianity Not Mysterious*, 53.

in great measure known by the last.”¹²⁷ To this end, Toland anticipated strains of Mansel’s own thinking, and he lashed out against what he regarded as the evident consequences: “The very supposition, that reason might authorize one thing, and the Spirit of God another, throws us into inevitable Scepticism; for we shall be at a perpetual uncertainty which to obey.”¹²⁸ Toland’s concern for certainty in this case seems to be what drove him to take such a strong position against the idea of scriptural mysteries. If the words of Scripture are merely the foreground for an illimitable depth that extends beyond the definite and plain sense of the words, there is no limit to what theologians might import into their meaning.

Toland, unlike deist writers after him, made a strong appeal to the Scriptures and in particular to their plain sense.¹²⁹ But this plain sense was rooted in an epistemology that clearly extended its controlling reach into Scripture’s meaning. This allowed Toland to sever the connection between certain doctrinal claims and the appeal to natural analogies, or, in other words, the supposed mysteries of the Scriptures were entirely alien to the created world and the proper mode of human reasoning within it. Toland writes,

we knew nothing of things, but such of their properties as were necessary and useful. We may say the same of God; every act of religion is directed by the consideration of some of his attributes, without ever thinking of his essence.¹³⁰

Strangely, Mansel—and Berkeley and Browne as well—would say remarkably similar things, but with the opposite intent. They had to show not only that it was possible to

¹²⁷ John Toland, *Christianity Not Mysterious*, xxv.

¹²⁸ John Toland, *Christianity Not Mysterious*, 32.

¹²⁹ Daniel Fouke argues that Toland used the public language of Scripture in order to subvert its meaning, a method which conceals his atheism. While this may be true, his stated intention still seems plausible, especially given the similar arguments and concerns that he draws from Locke. Daniel Clifford Fouke, *Philosophy and Theology in a Burlesque Mode: John Toland and “the Way of Paradox”* (Amherst: Humanity Books, 2007).

¹³⁰ John Toland, *Christianity Not Mysterious*, 86.

believe in something that could not be conceived in thought but also that it was useful or beneficial to do this. Toland's view was clear: the insistence on various mysterious aspects of Scripture simply reflected the prejudices of interested theological parties.

2.3.2 Berkeley and Browne: A Divided Response

Both Berkeley and Browne considered deeply the arguments of Toland and the other deists and mounted responses that turn on highly similar themes. So it was with some surprise that Browne read Berkeley's criticism of his position in the *Alciphron*. Berkeley had likely read Browne's *Procedure, Extent, and Limits of Human Understanding*, which was a fuller statement of Browne's already established rebuttal against Toland in a much earlier letter.¹³¹ In this letter Browne lays down his skeptical position about the knowledge of God, which he would never depart from:

We have no proper ideas of the things of another world, but frame to ourselves conceptions of them, from those things in this world whereof we have clear and distinct ideas...there are but two ways of God's revealing anything to us; either by giving us new faculties, or by adapting his revelations to those we have, which are our senses and our reason.¹³²

Here Browne's argument about God's manner of revelation anticipates Mansel's theory of regulative truth, and it is based on a similar analysis of the concept of infinity.¹³³ In contrast to Toland's argument that something without recognizable empirical properties is inconceivable, Browne suggests that inconceivable realities are represented in revelation within the realm of human sense and reason. In some sense, Toland and Browne are agreed that knowledge requires clear and distinct ideas, but Browne does not

¹³¹ Jean-Paul Pittion and David Berman, "A New Letter by Berkeley to Browne on Divine Analogy," 376.

¹³² Peter Browne, *A Letter in Answer to a Book Entitled, Christianity not mysterious*, 31.

¹³³ Mansel did read Browne and quoted him, but not extensively. Mansel's critique of the human understanding of the infinite and the absolute was derived primarily from William Hamilton in direct response to idealist philosophers in Germany and France. Still, Mansel was fully aware of Browne's arguments, and Peter Winnett has suggested that Mansel was the first important Anglican theologian to make use of Browne's arguments that fell into disrepute. A. R. Winnett, *Peter Browne: Provost, Bishop, Metaphysician* (London: S.P.C.K., 1974).

want this concept of knowledge to deform or shape God's revelation. For example Browne argues that we cannot form an idea of the Infinite by simply accumulating instances; God is Infinite but the human mind cannot represent this attribute in any meaningful manner.¹³⁴ Thus, Browne concludes,

Therefore it is that the Spirit of God in all his revelations, hath made use, not only of the words and phrases commonly received and understood; but likewise of those common notions in the minds of men, of things in this world, to represent truths, which are in respect of us now unconceivable; and for which there are as yet no capacities in our nature.¹³⁵

So Browne's skepticism is not so much about the senses but rather about the limitation of the senses and their proper domain or use. And his skeptical arguments are not used to sow distrust in common knowledge but to show how reason cannot be the judge of revelation, however successful he might have been. This position inevitably led Browne into a discussion of analogy as the question was put to him by Berkeley, among others, of just what connection pertained between the phrases employed in revelation and the realities that they refer to.

In response to this question, Browne drew a sharp distinction between analogy and metaphor. Metaphor, he claims, "has no real foundation in the nature of things compared,"¹³⁶ and scriptural descriptions of God as light, or discussions of His breath, the strength of his arm and so on, are merely intended as figures for moral instruction. This is because ideas of sense have no analogical relation to the immaterial world.¹³⁷ But because humanity is created in the image of God, Browne claims that the more complex ideas of the mind can relate analogically to the immaterial, because the mind, operating at

¹³⁴ Peter Browne, *A Letter in Answer to a Book Entitled, Christianity not mysterious*, 35.

¹³⁵ Peter Browne, *A Letter in Answer to a Book Entitled, Christianity not mysterious*, 38.

¹³⁶ Peter Browne, *The Procedure, Extent, and Limits of Human Understanding* (London: William Innys, 1728), 142.

¹³⁷ Peter Browne, *The Procedure, Extent, and Limits of Human Understanding*, 142.

a certain level, is combined of matter and spirit.¹³⁸ For Browne, created reality referred analogically to God on a graduated Platonic scale: “All the perfections of intelligent beings must be greater or less, as they make nearer or more distant approaches in their kind to a resemblance of Him, who is the only source and fountain of all perfection.”¹³⁹ While these analogies could never reach full conception, they approached varying degrees of certainty based on their proximity to or combination with the Spirit.¹⁴⁰ While this is a brief summary, it is enough to establish the grounds of Berkeley’s criticism against Browne, which focused on this very partitioning of knowledge.¹⁴¹

In the *Alciphron* Berkeley does not mention Browne by name, but the references are quite clear, and his criticisms of Browne’s position reveal the division within orthodox responses to the deist onslaught. Berkeley’s reply to deist objections against the mysterious aspects of Christian belief hinged upon his understanding of abstract ideas and his criticism of Locke’s clear and distinct ideas. In the dialogue, Euphanor explains to Alciphron,

I do not see Alciphron, i.e. that individual thinking thing, but only such visible signs and tokens as suggest and infer the being of that invisible thinking principle or soul. Even so, in the self-same manner, it seems to me that, though I cannot with eyes of flesh behold the invisible God, yet I do in the strictest sense behold and perceive by all my senses such signs and tokens, such effects and operations, as suggest, indicate, and demonstrate an invisible God,

¹³⁸ Peter Browne, *The Procedure, Extent, and Limits of Human Understanding*, 139.

¹³⁹ Peter Browne, *Things Divine and Supernatural Conceived by Analogy with Things Natural and Human* (London: William Innys and Richard Manby, 1733), 51.

¹⁴⁰ Peter Browne had a place for the illumination of the Spirit in epistemology based upon this basic analogical structure of the world. This, to some degree, marked him off from many of his contemporaries, and for this reason he had a traceable influence on John Wesley and the Methodist movement. Richard Brantley has made this argument in *Locke, Wesley, and the Method of English Romanticism* (Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1984).

¹⁴¹ Bob Tennant argues that Browne did not understand the scholastic subtleties of analogical reasoning and that he tended to “compare objects, not relations.” Bob Tennant, *Conscience, Consciousness and Ethics in Joseph Butler's Philosophy and Ministry* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2011), 84. In part this fault derives from the modern attempt to “graft together scholastic rationalism with post-Cartesian empiricism,” a self-defeating task within a philosophical worldview that was hostile to metaphysical systems and schemes.

as certainly, and with the same evidence, at least, as any other signs, perceived by sense, do suggest to me the existence of your soul, spirit, or thinking principle.¹⁴²

This method of argument Berkeley calls the parity of reason; in other words, the same standards of reasoning applied to God apply in some sense to the natural world. In relation to *Alciphron*, Euphanor argues that we see only the effects and activity of a thinking subject but not the subject himself, which is to say that we have no abstract idea of the subject. Language, or individual words and phrases, do not necessarily correspond to clear ideas, but “the mind overlooks them, so as to carry its attention immediately on to the things signified.”¹⁴³ This is the character of language for Berkeley, and he expands this theory into the theological realm:

Since you cannot deny that the great Mover and Author of nature constantly explaineth Himself to the eyes of men by the sensible intervention of arbitrary signs, which have no similitude or connexion with the things signified; so as, by compounding and disposing them, to suggest and exhibit an endless variety of objects, differing in nature, time, and place; thereby informing and directing men how to act with respect to things distant and future, as well as near and present.¹⁴⁴

Based on this notion of language, Berkeley famously claimed that the human mind can no more form a clear idea of divine grace than it can of gravity.¹⁴⁵ Both are known by their effects, not by their essence. Michael Hooker describes Berkeley’s theory of divine language as follows: “In the case of spoken language it is the speaker’s intention that ensures the reference relationship, and in the case of the language of nature it is the theophonic deity, always speaking to us through our senses, who ensures the reference of

¹⁴² David Berman, *George Berkeley Alciphron in Focus* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1993), 90.

¹⁴³ David Berman, *George Berkeley*, 98.

¹⁴⁴ David Berman, *George Berkeley*, 99.

¹⁴⁵ David Berman, *George Berkeley*, 129.

our sense experience.”¹⁴⁶ This makes sense of the preceding passage from Berkeley, and unlike with Browne, it is the divine intention that ensures the accuracy of revelatory and natural language, which operate in the same created realm and retain the same powers of signification.

Berkeley’s concern with Browne’s theory was that the language of revelation—the clear and distinct depictions of God in Scripture—did not actually refer to a reality in any way that was recognizable. So Berkeley puts Browne’s argument in the mouth of the freethinking Lysicles, who suggests that nothing can be drawn or inferred from a God whose attributes, in the end, cannot be known: “Since, therefore, nothing can be inferred from such an account of God, about conscience, or worship, or religion, you may even make the best of it. And, not to be singular, we will use the name too, and so at once there is an end of atheism.”¹⁴⁷ But Berkeley responds with a long disquisition on the nature of analogy in the theological tradition, appealing to Cajetan, Suarez and Aquinas, in order to argue for an analogy of proportionality.¹⁴⁸ At first glance, Berkeley’s view of analogy is scarcely distinguishable from Browne’s: he too draws a distinction between metaphorical language about God—the finger or breath of God—and proper analogical referents such as knowledge or wisdom.¹⁴⁹ But Berkeley perhaps preserves a greater stress on the likeness of these latter analogies. For instance, on knowledge he writes,

Knowledge, therefore, in the proper formal meaning of the word, may be attributed to God proportionably, that is, preserving a proportion to the infinite nature of God. We may say, therefore, that as God is infinitely

¹⁴⁶ Michael Hooker, “Berkeley’s Argument from Design,” in *Berkeley: Critical and Interpretive Essays*, ed. Colin M. Turbayne, 261-270 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 26.

¹⁴⁷ David Berman, *George Berkeley*, 107.

¹⁴⁸ Winnett remarks that both Browne and Berkeley appealed to the scholastics in this regard. But Browne, perhaps, is less clear in his use of analogy: “Inevitably Browne tends at one moment to stress the element of difference and at another that of resemblance in analogy.” Peter Winnett, *Peter Browne*, 140.

¹⁴⁹ David Berman, *George Berkeley*, 111.

above man, so is the knowledge of God infinitely above the knowledge of man, and this is what Cajetan calls *analogia proprie facta*.¹⁵⁰

Proportion in this case simply intends to guard the distinction between God and humanity; that is, the perfections in humanity exist in God in an eminent manner.

In a later letter to Browne, Berkeley tries to clear up the point of analogy by speaking of divine wisdom:

This, methinks, brings the controversy to a point, and I call upon your Lordship to speak out, and either own to the glory of your Maker, that he is properly and literally wise, or plainly tell mankind, that the Being they adore does not design good ends, nor use consistent methods to attain them. Between these, there is no medium, God has ends in view, or he has not; if he has, they are either good, or otherwise suitably pursued, or improperly attempted.¹⁵¹

Wisdom, in this case divine, must have a recognizable form, even if God's activities and purposes cannot be discerned. The form that is common in human and divine wisdom is the establishment of desired ends and the corresponding means to attain these ends. In other words, it is one thing to deny any abstract conception of divine wisdom—both Berkeley and Browne were agreed on this point—but it is another thing to claim that God's wisdom bears no common features to humanity's. This is the conclusion that Berkeley drew from the analogy of proportionality, which allowed for both agreement and disagreement.

Browne was incensed at Berkeley's criticism in the *Alciphron* and responded with a large volume on the topic of divine analogy and a chapter devoted to Berkeley. Browne argued that Berkeley had misread his opponents, because it was not that Toland and company demanded abstract ideas of God but any ideas at all, abstract or particular. To

¹⁵⁰ David Berman, *George Berkeley*, 111.

¹⁵¹ Jean-Paul Pittion and David Berman, "A New Letter by Berkeley to Browne on Divine Analogy," 391.

this end, Berkeley's argument had not accomplished anything, because it still could not prove that there was a God who produced these visible signs. Browne writes,

But what they demand is, any ideas of them as different from all the ideas and conceptions of things sensible and human, as these are from things imperceptible and divine: and accordingly they tell you that when they look inward for such ideas to annex to the terms, their mind is an empty void; and therefore they look no farther than the strictly proper and formal and literal acceptation of those words.¹⁵²

Thus

their fatal error is, that upon their principle they must necessarily reject the truth and reality of everything that is thus inconceivable to us as it is in itself, and of whatever is not otherwise conceivable than by analogy with things natural and human; even the attributes of God included.¹⁵³

Just as Berkeley worried that Browne had given in to the deists by rendering God unknowable, Browne now worried that Berkeley had removed the special province of faith to assent to theological realities that could not be conceived in the mind through reason or observation. In Berkeley's case, according to Browne, faith is placed on the same ground as science and the natural order. So Browne concludes,

You may confess indeed to believe in father, son, and spirit; in the grace of God; and in the mediation and intercession of Christ; but yet it is not always necessary or possible for you to acquire, or exhibit to your mind, any ideas, conceptions or notions of the things marked out by those words: tho' by this rule you may as well be said to have faith in the noise of sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. Nay your believing a God would be very useful; tho' upon his scheme it may be no more than faith in a monosyllable.¹⁵⁴

This conclusion is striking, because Browne accuses Berkeley of employing language about God that is meaningless or, in Berkeley's sense, intended primarily for a person's

¹⁵² Peter Browne, "Divine Analogy," in David Berman, *George Berkeley*, 165.

¹⁵³ Peter Browne, "Divine Analogy," 166.

¹⁵⁴ Peter Browne, "Divine Analogy," 167.

emotive and practical living—“influencing his life and actions.”¹⁵⁵ For Browne, this was the cost of relinquishing clear and distinct ideas of God.

The irony here is great; Browne’s own clear ideas of God were themselves considered quite opaque. As Berkeley pointed out, the attributes of God in Scripture, for Browne, might not bear any resemblance to anything recognizable in human experience, but still they were related as clear and plain. And furthermore, much like with Berkeley and Toland, the primary purpose of scriptural language was to teach moral and practical duties, not metaphysics.

Admittedly, the difference between Berkeley and Browne is quite slight, despite the mutual fear that each other’s skeptical approach somehow risked the perspicuity and immediacy of the Christian’s knowledge of God.¹⁵⁶ But the difference is still important: For Berkeley God’s revelation in Scripture is immersed within the complicated and dynamic field of natural and human language. His parallel between gravity, or force, and grace demonstrates the manner in which these realities, while different, perhaps in agency still operate within the same realm and are experienced empirically with all of the attendant difficulties of any human experience. The essence or truth of force and grace alike are inaccessible to human perception and cognition.

Whereas for Browne, this is not quite true. Like Berkeley, he agrees that the contents of revelation should not be conformed to Locke’s clear and distinct ideas, but rather than question Locke’s basic epistemology, he simply pushes revelatory claims

¹⁵⁵ David Berman, *George Berkeley*, 130.

¹⁵⁶ In Mansel’s *A Letter to Goldwin Smith*, he defends Browne against Berkeley, partly on the supposition that Berkeley was unjust to attack a fellow clergyman on such a slight point of difference, and furthermore, he believed that Berkeley misrepresented Browne, when in fact their positions were quite close. Mansel believed that Berkeley had Archbishop King in mind, or at least a more incautious version of Browne. In any case, after quoting from Berkeley and noting the misrepresentation, Mansel notes, “But great and good as Berkeley undoubtedly was, the above language will not appear undeserved to those who have read his satirical attack upon a prelate of his own church, under the cover of a fictitious character” (8).

beyond the field of Lockean application. To be sure, Scripture represents God in a clear and understandable manner, but these representations bear only a slight resemblance to the realities that they refer to. So in Browne's case, the limits of human knowledge do not really alter Toland's view of reality or the experienced world; instead he stakes his case on the argument that human reason can credibly assent to truths that are inconceivable, though represented in conceivable terms. This is an important point, because though Browne accused Berkeley of not addressing Toland's true concern that no idea of God could be formed in the mind, whether abstract or particular, Browne created a scheme of analogy that in a certain sense divided up the world—and the Scriptures as well—into objects with varying referential power. The Scriptures, then, are grafted on to this description of reality and derive their intelligibility from the extent to which certain referents approach the spiritual or immaterial realm. This is the danger of accommodation theories of revelation: that, in effect, they leave the created world to some degree unaltered by the gospel. This is what Alan Sell calls the “natural-theology-supplemented-by-revealed-approach,” so characteristic of Locke's influence on 18th century theology.¹⁵⁷ The result for Browne is that while he labored exhaustively to show how scriptural statements might be true, in one sense or another, the Scriptures themselves are treated almost piecemeal and pulled painstakingly back and forth between his two domains of knowledge. In this respect, Browne's employment of the limitations of human thought, despite his specific efforts, struggled to show how the Scriptures might

¹⁵⁷ Alan Sell, *John Locke and the Eighteenth-Century Divines* (Wales: University of Wales Press, 1997), 270.

encompass or describe an overarching theological vision of both God and the created world.¹⁵⁸

Berkeley at least tried to demonstrate that the limits of human thought pertained analogously to both natural and revealed knowledge. In this case, his skepticism linked the mystery of the world with the mystery of God, which allows God to be known empirically by His effects and actions, without compromising His otherness. Though, as Browne noted, God's otherness then became equated with the otherness of empirical forces and objects, most notably gravity. To this end, it might be said that Berkeley's appeal to analogy sits uncomfortably within his theory of emotive language, or at least the connection is not clear. The analogy of proportionality is predicated entirely upon the distinction between God and creation.

The criticism made here against Browne's theory of revelation and human knowledge comes close to hitting at the heart of Mansel's theology, though, I argue, in the end it misses the mark.¹⁵⁹ Still, Browne's ideas are not without merit in this discussion, though historically he was interpreted in the same manner as Mansel would be a century later, somewhat unjustly. Still, as much as Mansel was influenced by

¹⁵⁸ This is not to say that Browne's thought tended toward atheism, an argument made by Berkeley and seemingly endorsed by Tennant (*Conscience, Consciousness and Ethics in Joseph Butler's Philosophy and Ministry*, 84). Genealogically this does not seem to be the case, but even more, a failure to articulate a satisfactorily comprehensive theological worldview must not always end in the charge of implicit atheism. Browne's position was mostly defensive and, to this degree, perhaps not creative or visionary enough to compel his contemporaries.

¹⁵⁹ Mansel's main appeal to Browne was on the issue of analogy and the distinctions between analogous, figurative and metaphorical language. Perhaps like Browne, Mansel's overall acquaintance with the history of analogy in scholastic theology was only cursory in some sense. In Mansel's eyes Browne was simply repeating the long-held wisdom of the Church, represented in figures like Aquinas and Augustine. But Winnett's claim that Browne lacked the scholastic precision on the topic could just as easily be applied to Mansel. Nonetheless, however much Mansel needed to discuss analogy in relation to his theory of regulative truth, it was not the main focus of his argument, and by and large he seems to have assumed a general theological consensus on the analogical character of theological language.

Browne, he also drew from Berkeley¹⁶⁰ and even more from Butler, so it is important to get a sense of Butler's position within this contested circle of Anglican apologetics.

2.4 Butler and the Scheme of Salvation

Despite being an established work within the Oxford curriculum for over a century, Butler's *Analogy* is a curious book that stands aloof in some senses from the theological and philosophical world that he inhabited, even while it continually circles many of the great themes of the age. Terence Penelhum suggests that Butler's skepticism has no known origin, or, at the very least, his sources are unclear.¹⁶¹ Scholars have traced the influence of Locke and the similarity to Pascal, among others, but Butler rarely registers in the skeptical literature about the period, and despite writing his great work on the topic of analogy, he is not easy to place within the theological tradition. Aside from this anomaly, Butler's work is intensely theological as it represents the patient and still pressing search for a coherent worldview that is ordered and formed by the narrative of Scripture.¹⁶²

At first, to draw a parallel between Mansel and Butler may seem like a stretch. Though Mansel quotes Butler frequently, their respective styles differ considerably: Mansel was a polemicist and a rigorous philosopher who pursued definitions to their bare bones, while Butler concealed his opponents and preferred to hesitate before drawing sharp conclusions; he traced trajectories and probabilities while remaining understated about his deepest commitments. Butler did not see the world quite like Mansel and was

¹⁶⁰ Mansel's published Bampton Lectures contain a quote from the *Alciphron* on the opening page: "The objections made to faith are by no means an effect of knowledge, but proceed rather from an ignorance of what knowledge is."

¹⁶¹ Terence Penelhum, "Butler and Human Ignorance," in *Joseph Butler's Moral and Religious Thought: Tercentenary Essays*, ed. Christopher Cunliffe (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 117–140.

¹⁶² The most recent work on Butler by Bob Tennant (*Conscience, Consciousness and Ethics in Joseph Butler's Philosophy and Ministry*) has made the case that Butler should be read primarily from a theological and pastoral perspective, despite his relevance to philosophical ethics.

adverse to highly analytical accounts of the human person or mind: “We know little more of ourselves, than we do of the world about us: how we were made, how our being is continued and preserved, what the faculties of our minds are, and upon what the power of exercising them depends.”¹⁶³ For Butler, an overly determined account of reality obscured rather than clarified the world around,¹⁶⁴ whereas for Mansel a lack of precision risked the disordering of human knowledge of both the world and God.¹⁶⁵ Yet for all of these apparent differences, Mansel was a Butlerian, and it is important to stress the sense in which this was true.¹⁶⁶ I will spell out more fully in the second and third chapters Mansel’s own indebtedness to Butler, but here I will focus more singularly on Butler’s own thinking on the Christian Scriptures and their place in the created world.

Butler was very much a contemporary of Browne and Berkeley and wrote in response to the same crisis posed by the English deists. On the surface, to be sure, it appears that Butler had little interest in the questions concerning the status of human knowledge and the mediation between the human and divine spheres. At the least, he did not approach these questions in a manner that had much in common with many of his contemporaries. But as an orthodox theologian and apologist he was faced with the same task of rendering the claims of Scripture intelligible and credible, which he did by using

¹⁶³ Joseph Butler, “Upon the Ignorance of Man,” in *The Works of Bishop Butler*, vol. 2, ed. David E. White (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2006), 141.

¹⁶⁴ Joseph Butler, “The Analogy of Religion,” in *The Works of Bishop Butler*, vol. 1, ed. David E. White, (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2005), 152.

¹⁶⁵ Jane Garnett suggests that in the Victorian period Butler suffered by association with Mansel for similar reasons and that Mansel drew only on the negative aspects of Butler’s analogy, without stressing his positive vision. Jane Garnett, “Bishop Butler and the *Zeitgeist*: Butler and the Development of Christian Moral Philosophy in Victorian Britain,” in *Joseph Butler’s Moral and Religious Thought: Tercentenary Essays*, ed. Christopher Cunliffe, 63–96 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 70, 71.

¹⁶⁶ The majority of 20th century scholars who have written on Mansel have not stressed this point, largely due to Mansel’s self-acknowledged debts to Immanuel Kant and William Hamilton. Don Cupitt, in an early and insightful article on Mansel’s theory of regulative truth, interprets Mansel through the lens of Butler. But in general this represents an exception. Don Cupitt, “Mansel’s Theory of Regulative Truth” in *Journal of Theological Studies* 18 (April 1976): 104–126.

an informal and empirical form of reasoning that make his larger theological commitments, at times, more difficult to sort out.

In this sense, Butler seems to have assumed a basic theological and doctrinal consensus and instead devoted his energy to illustrating and depicting the manner in which scriptural claims cohere or fit with the human experience of reality. So Butler introduces his argument in the *Analogy* with a well-known endorsement of Origen's observation that "He who believes Scripture to have proceeded from him who is the author of nature, may well expect to find the same sort of difficulties in it, as are found in the constitution of nature."¹⁶⁷ Berkeley made a similar claim, but Butler pursued this idea into a deeper theological insight about the character of reality and the lived Christian experience. Both Browne and Berkeley seemed to agree that the purpose of theological knowledge was for practical living, and the veracity of Scripture was ordered around this concern. And while this is true for Butler as well, Scripture's function is not simply its ability to teach clear and plain truths, but in addition, even its obscurity and difficulty may be essential to its formative character. Ignorance of the world and God, according to Butler, is somehow integral to the probationary aspect of human life.¹⁶⁸

Bob Tennant makes the distinction as follows:

In opposition to a whole climate of intellectual opinion, he wishes to demonstrate that the limits of human knowledge are to be discussed not in terms of adequacy (approximation to truth) but sufficiency for the purposes set out in the Christian revelation: an apparently drastic narrowing of intellectual ambition.¹⁶⁹

This is a narrowing perhaps in the sense that Butler did not pursue questions of knowledge and truth outside of the context of scriptural claims; or, in other words, he

¹⁶⁷ Joseph Butler, "The Analogy of Religion," 153.

¹⁶⁸ Joseph Butler, "The Analogy of Religion," 190.

¹⁶⁹ Tennant, *Conscience, Consciousness and Ethics in Joseph Butler's Philosophy and Ministry*, 78.

attempted to measure the internal coherence of the Christian worldview and its ability to achieve its own desired outcomes. But in another sense, this represented an expansion or escalation of intellectual ambition, to stay with the phrase. Butler writes, “But the thing here insisted upon is, that the state of trial which religion teaches us we are in, is rendered credible, by its being throughout uniform and of a piece with the general conduct of providence towards us, in all other respects within the compass of our knowledge.”¹⁷⁰

Thus, Butler’s response to the various criticisms that deist authors brought against the Scriptures—its lack of universality and historical veracity, among others—was not to rebuff the criticisms outright but to show that these problems are rooted in all of created life. To use the example of universality, Butler writes, “Indeed he appears to bestow all his gifts with the most promiscuous variety, among creatures of the same species: health and strength, capacities of prudence and of knowledge, means of improvement, riches and all external advantages.”¹⁷¹ Of course, Butler’s point is not that Scripture is just as bad as nature but that Scripture shares in the created character of the world—in many cases beyond human comprehension. But given this, the revelatory claims of the Bible emerge from within the historical and created context of human and natural life. Again, he claims,

A system of constitution, in its notion, implies variety; and so complicated a one as this world, very great variety. So that were revelation universal, yet from men’s different capacities of understanding, from the different lengths of their lives, their different educations and other external circumstances, and from their difference of temper and bodily constitution, their religious situations would be widely different.¹⁷²

¹⁷⁰ Joseph Butler, “The Analogy of Religion,” 190.

¹⁷¹ Joseph Butler, “The Analogy of Religion,” 264.

¹⁷² Joseph Butler, “The Analogy of Religion,” 266.

The whole idea of a purely universal revelation, for Butler, does not make any sense within the endless and unfathomable variety of created life. The reason for this condition, he admits, is beyond human understanding, though he offers the familiar explanation of moral probation: regardless of the proximity with which one stands to the light revelation, every human location provides the possibility for the exercise of prudence, moral examination and free will.¹⁷³

Even more, these endlessly diverse and particular human situations are rooted in natural providential tendency, and the meaning of this tendency is deepened and extended through the Scriptures. For example, Butler acknowledges that in the ordinary course of things, vice is not always punished or virtue rewarded. However, there is a tendency in the world, despite some appearances, that this might be so: “And these tendencies are to be considered as intimations, as implicit promises and threatenings, from the author of nature, of much greater rewards and punishments to follow virtue and vice, than do at present.”¹⁷⁴ The appeal to probability is rooted in Butler’s belief that the general course of progress is necessarily beyond our comprehension: “So that we are placed, as one may speak, in the middle of a scheme, not a fixed, but a progressive one, every way incomprehensible; incomprehensible in a manner equally with respect to what has been, what now is, and what shall be hereafter.”¹⁷⁵ There are traces of this tendency or scheme

¹⁷³ Joseph Butler, “The Analogy of Religion,” 266.

¹⁷⁴ Joseph Butler, “The Analogy of Religion,” 183. Tennant provides this description: “he believed that the laws governing the Creation, physical and spiritual, had a mutually reinforcing quality which naturally carried the person’s (free) will in a certain direction, and that the effects of these laws, and their affective mechanisms, could be described probabilistically.” Tennant, *Conscience, Consciousness and Ethics in Joseph Butler’s Philosophy and Ministry*, 97.

¹⁷⁵ Joseph Butler, “The Analogy of Religion,” 220.

in nature, and Butler draws on these—analogy of judgment and mercy, growth and maturation—though they exist in a set of relations that are only perceived in part.¹⁷⁶

Scripture, then, for Butler is not rooted in a larger philosophical framework or in an architectural account of human understanding or knowledge. Rather, Scripture itself is an authorized account of the world, its natural tendencies and God's redemptive activity within His creation. Butler suggests, in his typically subdued fashion, that Scripture serves "First as a republication and external institution of natural or essential or essential religion, adapted to the present circumstances of mankind, and intended to promote natural piety and virtue; and secondly, as containing an account of a dispensation of things, not discoverable by reason."¹⁷⁷ In the first sense, Scripture confirms the already apparent, though fragmented, intuition that nature, in general, tends toward the good, the just and the harmonious. In the second sense, Scripture reveals a new set of relations that the world finds itself engaged with, namely, the Spirit and the Son, who are revealed for "the recovery and salvation of mankind, who are represented in Scripture, to be in a state of ruin."¹⁷⁸ And while nature demonstrates the continual need for improvement and growth by "immediate means," nature itself cannot provide these means.¹⁷⁹ Thus, despite the natural coherence of revelation and nature, this is discovered almost retrospectively, following the sustained engagement with the Scriptures:

The account now given of Christianity most strongly shews and enforces upon us the obligation of searching the scriptures, in order to see what the scheme of revelation really is instead of determining beforehand, from reason, what the scheme of it must be.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁶ Joseph Butler, "The Analogy of Religion," 215.

¹⁷⁷ Joseph Butler, "The Analogy of Religion," 228.

¹⁷⁸ Joseph Butler, "The Analogy of Religion," 229.

¹⁷⁹ Joseph Butler, "The Analogy of Religion," 231.

¹⁸⁰ Joseph Butler, "The Analogy of Religion," 233.

The Scriptures inform people about the world and the natural analogies that Butler pursues in such painstaking detail are only evident in the light of revelation. This is not to say that they emerge clearly and without obscurity, but only that they are fitted into the scheme of salvation, as always, imperfectly understood.

From a theological point of view, there is nothing remarkable about Butler's positive affirmations. He believes in the mediation of Christ, the sanctification of the Spirit, and the Church as the place where people experience God and serve Him in the world. These facts alone are obvious and barely worth explication aside from the manner in which they are situated and fitted within the Christian scheme. And like the world in which they are revealed, the teachings of Scripture are likewise not fully understood; their meaning is explored, much as in the natural world, "by the continuance and progress of learning and of liberty, and by particular person, attending to, comparing and pursuing, intimations scattered up and down it, which are overlooked and disregarded by the generality of the world."¹⁸¹ In this way, the particularities of scriptural teaching, while being irreducible beyond their revealed meaning, still contain a further depth that extends beyond their immediate explication. This "further depth" is both historically rooted and inexhaustible in light of humanity's enduring ignorance, but for Butler, the particular claims of Scripture run through the depths of the created world, even if they cannot be followed at every step.

In an essay on Butler's theology of the incarnation, Gordon Kendal writes that for Butler

particular events embody meaning prior to our launching ourselves upon them, and the content of any particular event has ramifications stretching

¹⁸¹ Joseph Butler, "The Analogy of Religion," 244.

far beyond itself; it may stand for more than it shows. The world is such that moral agents not only must but can emerge and grow in it.¹⁸²

However, this depth or something more is articulated and circumscribed by the language of Scripture, which creates a patchwork of boundaries that describe the basic Christian mysteries. For example, when Butler speaks about the sacrifice of Christ, he quotes a long list of passages from the Old Testament law and prophets that speak to and foretell the nature of sacrifice.¹⁸³ Much as in his accounting of natural instances of sacrifice, these references are intended to denote a tendency and pattern, the full extent of which remains elusive. Butler writes,

If the scripture has...left this matter of the satisfaction of Christ mysterious, left somewhat in it unrevealed, all conjecture about it must be, if not evidently absurd, yet at least uncertain...Some have endeavored to explain the efficacy of what Christ had done and suffered for us, beyond what the scripture has authorized; others, probably because they could not explain it, have been for taking it away...(but) it is our wisdom thankfully to accept the benefit, by performing the conditions upon which it is offered, on our part, without disputing how it was procured for us.¹⁸⁴

Butler's defence against the charge of fideism here is that this is the manner in which reason normally proceeds, by pursuing patterns and probabilities, allowing them to accumulate, and then drawing inferences about general laws and conclusions. In the case of the sacrifice of Christ, the patterns exist clearly in Scripture and in nature, and for that reason there are compelling reasons to believe, even if the evidence is not conclusive. The meaning of the event of Christ's sacrifice is marked off by the revealed words of Scripture, but the practical experience of this event can be lived into, deepened and more

¹⁸² Gordon Kendal, "A God Most Particular: Aspects of Incarnation in Butler's Morality," in *Joseph Butler's Moral and Religious Thought: Tercentenary Essays*, ed. Christopher Cunliffe, 141-168 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 153.

¹⁸³ Joseph Butler, "The Analogy of Religion," 255-258.

¹⁸⁴ Joseph Butler, "The Analogy of Religion," 258.

fully understood without altering the arrangement of words in Scripture that make it known. This is primarily what Butler intends with his notions of progress and tendency in theological knowledge.

In light of this conviction, it is no surprise to read Butler's overarching summary of the Scriptures:

For prophecy is nothing but the history of events before they come to pass: doctrines also are matters of fact; and precepts come under the same notion. And the general design of scripture, which contains in it this revelation, thus considered as historical, may be said to be, to give us an account of the world, in this one single view, as God's world.¹⁸⁵

Or, as he also says, Scripture is an "abridgement of history," though one that he admits is open to the "largest scope of criticism," given the range and diversity of its material.¹⁸⁶

This is the area where modern scholars seem to think that Butler is most dated in light of modern biblical and historical criticism.¹⁸⁷ But Butler is not worried that the Bible might contain historical errors or problems of transmission; these may even have a morally probationary role to play in the life of the Church.¹⁸⁸ Further still, the narrative of Scripture, the pattern of prophecy and fulfillment, the propagation of the gospel—all admittedly circumstantial evidence—bear continuities with the present world. The existence of the Jews alone, Butler thinks, ought to incline an unbiased observer to taking the claims of Scripture seriously.¹⁸⁹ The important point is that Scripture provides a picture of the world as God's, and its rough outlines, porousness and obscurity, though

¹⁸⁵ Joseph Butler, "The Analogy of Religion," 283.

¹⁸⁶ Joseph Butler, "The Analogy of Religion," 284.

¹⁸⁷ David Brown, "Butler and Deism," in *Joseph Butler's Moral and Religious Thought: Tercentenary Essays*, ed. Christopher Cunliffe (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 20.

¹⁸⁸ "And therefore neither obscurity, nor seeming inaccuracy of style, nor various readings, nor early disputes about the authors of particular parts, nor any other things of the like kind, though they had been much more considerable in degree than they are, could overthrow the authority of the scripture; unless the prophets, apostles, or our Lord, had promised, that the book, containing the divine revelation, should be secure from those things." Joseph Butler, "The Analogy of Religion," 241.

¹⁸⁹ Joseph Butler, "The Analogy of Religion," 288.

sufficient for godliness, indicate the manner in which humanity relates to the world and to God.

Certain modern scholars seem to agree that Butler's skepticism, or appeals to human ignorance, do not date well precisely because so much of his skeptical thinking relies on the mysterious aspects of the natural world that, perhaps, have been obviated to some extent by modern science. More sympathetic readers have drawn attention to Butler's subtlety and his patience for particularity and diversity in ethical and theological thinking. Donald Mackinnon, for instance, writes, "Because he is agnostic, Butler is ready to set out the moral life piecemeal, now letting his attention fall on one set of problems, now on another."¹⁹⁰ In other words, Butler's skepticism or agnosticism makes his thought more pliable and amenable in the face of modern complexities and, even more, the contemporary distaste for theory-driven ethics. This seems to be true, but even more, Butler's skillful attention to the particularities and complexities of human life are situated in a world providentially ordered and attended by God. The Scriptures describe this world and a God who took on flesh and lived within it, adjusted and surrendered to it, while carrying out His providential plan. As Gordon Kendal writes of Butler, there is a "providential kinship" between humanity and the natural world that is revealed in Christ and accounted for in the Scriptures.¹⁹¹

In this way, the account of the world offered in Scripture—the "abridgement of history"—is a revealed account that, in the end, will be shown to bear a deep and unbreakable coherence with the natural world. However, for Butler, human ignorance is a brute fact that hinders the perception of this full unity, though there are traces in the

¹⁹⁰ Donald Mackinnon, *A Study in Ethical Theory* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1957), 200.

¹⁹¹ Gordon Kendal, "A God Most Particular," 160.

world—analogies—that draw the Christian into a deeper trust in the God of the Bible. Butler even writes that to love God is not to love an idea wholly imperceptible but to believe that those things that are most loveable in humanity—kindness, love, wisdom—are virtues that reach their perfection in God.¹⁹² Butler’s skepticism, in this regard, is not merely an attempt to safeguard Christian truths, but, much more, it is a method of allowing the particularities of Scripture to emerge, albeit ambiguously, within the context of the Christian experience.

Butler, then, is probably closer to Berkeley than Browne; but even still, he pursues the idea of Scripture as an account of God’s world further than Berkeley, or in far greater detail, despite the fact that both emphatically agree that every aspect of created life is bound up with God’s providential ordering. It is in this sense that Mansel was most deeply influenced by Butler. For Mansel, much as for Butler, the revelation of God in the Scriptures is embedded within the course of human history—this is what it means for God to have taken on flesh—and the whole range of Scripture, somehow, provides the most truthful account of the world.¹⁹³

¹⁹² Joseph Butler, “Sermon XIII: Upon the Love of God,” in *The Works of Bishop Butler*, ed. David E. White (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2005), 131. This is not true also for the entire created order: “to say, that every thing of grace and beauty throughout the whole of nature, every thing excellent and amiable shared in differently lower degrees by the whole creation, meet in the Author and cause of all things; this an inadequate, and perhaps improper way of speaking of the divine nature. But it is manifest, that absolute rectitude, the perfection of being, must be in all sense, and in every respect, the highest object to the mind.” Joseph Butler, “Sermon XIV: Upon the Love of God,” 137.

¹⁹³ I will make this case more fully in the second and third chapters on Mansel. In the third lecture of *The Limits of Religious Thought*, Mansel writes, “The analogy, which Bishop Butler has pointed out, between Religion and the constitution and the course of Nature, may be in some degree extended to the constitution and processes of the human mind. The representations of God which Scripture presents to us may be shown to be analogous to those which the laws of our minds require us to form; and therefore such as may naturally be supposed to have emanated from the same author” (19). In the seventh lecture, Mansel attributes all of his conclusions about the analogous character of Christian doctrines to Butler: “The very philosopher whose writings have most contributed to establish the supreme authority of Conscience in man, is also the one who has pointed out most clearly the existence of analogous moral difficulties in nature and in religion, and the true answer to both—the admission that God’s government, natural as well as spiritual, is a scheme imperfectly comprehended” (160).

2.5 Coleridge, Idealism and Scripture

Despite the wide variety of approaches in the 18th century to natural theology and the veracity of scriptural and revelatory truth claims, by the early 19th century there emerged an increasing unrest with the whole framework of apologetic theology in England. While Coleridge retained a soft spot for Butler, he turned aggressively against figures like Paley. Others simply lumped Paley and Butler together as representatives of a diminishing age who tried to hold the crumbling traditional views of the Bible together with the new scientific worldview.¹⁹⁴ These perceptions, precipitated by a wide range of theological and social transitions in England, stirred an interest and receptivity to German idealistic philosophy that would in many ways come to characterize 19th century intellectual life in England.¹⁹⁵ By 1857, Mark Pattison was able to state that German theology and philosophy, though not without controversy, was

no insulated phenomenon. Though generated in Germany, it belongs to Christendom. It is the theological movement of the age. It is only because there is fuller intellectual life in Germany than elsewhere, only because it so happens that, at present, European speculation is transacted by Germans, as our financial affairs are by Jews, that German characteristics are impressed on the substance of the Christian science.¹⁹⁶

As mentioned in chapter one, many of these impressions and themes come together most forcefully in Coleridge, by all respects the most influential mediator of German philosophy in early 19th century England. Mansel, too, was one of the early and capable readers of Kant and Hegel, though, despite borrowing, heavily at times, from *The Critique of Pure Reason*, Mansel made little constructive use of Kant or Hegel in his

¹⁹⁴ Jane Garnett, "Bishop Butler and the Zeitgeist," 67.

¹⁹⁵ See chapter one for an account of England's reception of German Idealism in the 19th century.

¹⁹⁶ Mark Pattison, "Present State of Theology in Germany," ed. Mark Pattison and Henry Nettleship, in *Essays by the Late Mark Pattison, Sometime Rector of Lincoln College* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1857), 216.

positive articulations of Christian orthodoxy. As Lightman has pointed out, Mansel's borrowing from Kant is somewhat deceptive: "The sporadic borrowing from the critique of pure reason gives Mansel's work a deceptive Kantian quality, and the illusion is only dispelled when their fundamental opposition is perceived."¹⁹⁷ With Coleridge the opposition is not quite as clear, though I will argue that it still exists. However, Coleridge's interpretation and use of Kant still differs from Mansel's, and the contrast with Mansel becomes clear in the third chapter. In this context the struggles of Coleridge's philosophy illustrate the difficulties of framing Christian orthodoxy within a Kantian or idealistic context. Despite these difficulties, Coleridge's views of Scripture, as we will see, are still highly influenced by his idealistic inclinations. To this extent, Coleridge's position can be contrasted with Butler's and, later, with Mansel's.

For Coleridge, Kant's distinction between reason and understanding was paramount to stemming the tide of unbelief in England. The application of the understanding to spiritual truths that are not fitted for the faculty inevitably tended toward unbelief or atheism: "Wherever the forms of Reasoning appropriate only to the natural world are applied to spiritual realities, it may be truly said, that the more strictly logical the Reasoning is in all its parts, the more irrational it is as a whole."¹⁹⁸ His appeal to a separate and spiritual form of reasoning was derived, in part, from Kant's practical reason, but as mentioned previously, Coleridge was ill at ease with the constraints this placed on revelation and the Scriptures in particular. Much as with Butler, Coleridge was seeking a resonance between Christian truth claims and lived human experience, though

¹⁹⁷ Bernard Lightman, *The Origins of Agnosticism*, 50.

¹⁹⁸ S. T. Coleridge, *Aids to Reflection and the Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit* (London: G. Bell, 1901), 168.

he sought this not through scriptural analogy but through the yearnings and intuitions of spiritual reason.

In *Aids to Reflection* Coleridge writes, “The utter rejection of all present and living communion with the Universal Spirit present and living communion with the Universal Spirit impoverishes Deism”¹⁹⁹ and, for that matter, the views of Christians who defend the faith on these terms. So the stated aim of his most well-known work is to reinterpret those aspects of the Christian faith, those parts of the Scriptures that do not fit with this faculty of reason:

It is only where the belief required of them jars with their moral feelings; where a doctrine in the sense, in which they have been taught to receive it, appears to contradict their clear notions of right and wrong, or to be at variance with the divine attributes of goodness and justice; that these men are surprised, perplexed and alas! Not seldom offended and alienated.²⁰⁰

Coleridge goes on to list these various doctrines: arbitrary election, hell, substitutionary atonement, the wrath of God.

In pursuing this task Coleridge sounds initially much like Butler: “the purpose of Scripture was to teach us our duty, not to enable us to sit in judgment on the souls of our fellow creatures.”²⁰¹ Later on he states, “How can I comprehend this? How is this to be proved? To the first question I should answer: Christianity is not a Theory, or a Speculation; but a Life. Not a Philosophy of Life, but a Life and a living Process. To the second: TRY IT.”²⁰² As Butler did, Coleridge employs a form of skepticism to put forward the essential lived quality of the Christian faith, and the doctrines and teachings of the Church are primarily purposed toward this end. This is exactly why he seeks to

¹⁹⁹ S. T. Coleridge, *Aids to Reflection*, 50.

²⁰⁰ S. T. Coleridge, *Aids to Reflection*, 103.

²⁰¹ S. T. Coleridge, *Aids to Reflection*, 165.

²⁰² S. T. Coleridge, *Aids to Reflection*, 195.

reinterpret those aspects of Christian teaching that offend or distract from this goal. But for Butler the difficult and potentially offensive aspects of the Scriptures were situated within a set of relations and a providential scheme that are beyond human searching. Yet they are still integral to Christian truth claims and, just as much, essential to the moral and probationary aspect of Christian living. Butler argued that the Scriptures in their entirety reveal the most comprehensive perspective on God's world, and he sought to establish a resonance between their overall character and the human experience of the world.

For Coleridge this is not quite the case. Jeffrey Barbeau is surely right in claiming that Coleridge's emphasis on Scripture has been neglected: he was an experienced exegete and was deeply concerned in articulating his views within a scriptural context.²⁰³ The biblical theme of redemption for Coleridge, Barbeau claims, is at the heart of his theology. But given this fact, Coleridge's method of reading the Scriptures is not immediately obvious. Much like Browne before him and Mansel after, Coleridge expresses a view of scriptural language that is mediated through human conceptions and terms. For example, he writes,

The truths that are given to us...are spiritual things which must be spiritually discerned. Such, however, being the means of the effects of our redemption, well might the fervent Apostle associate it with whatever was eminently dear and precious to erring and afflicted mortals, and seek from similitude of effect to describe the superlative boon by successively transferring to it, as by a superior claim, the name of each several act and ordinance, habitually connected in the minds of all his hearers with feelings of joy, confidence and gratitude.²⁰⁴

²⁰³ Jeffrey Barbeau, "Coleridge, Christology and the Language of Redemption" in the *Anglican Theological Review* 93, no. 2 (Spring 2011): 263–282.

²⁰⁴ S. T. Coleridge, *Aids to Reflection*, 218.

In some sense, Coleridge is using here an accommodation theory of scriptural language: biblical writers speak in terms that readers can understand. But the language itself, it would seem, or the events that it speaks explicitly about are not the mediating lens through which the truth is perceived but rather the associations that they call to mind and provoke in the heart. The words in this sense frame the inward conception, the spiritual meaning, of the particular text.

However, Coleridge was not lighthearted about the historical character of the Bible. As he said, the Bible “is a History, a series of Facts and Events related or announced. These do indeed, involve, or rather I should say they at the same time are, most important doctrinal Truths; but still Facts and Declaration of Facts.”²⁰⁵ Even more, in the *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit* he writes, “all history must be providential, and this a providence, a preparation, and a looking forward to Christ.”²⁰⁶ Yet despite this, Coleridge, in the same work, speaks disparagingly about typological attempts to underline this providential character of the world that Scripture speaks about:

Of minor importance, yet not to be overlooked, are the forced and fantastic interpretations, the arbitrary allegories and mystic expansions of proper names, to which this indiscriminate Bibliolatry furnished fuel, spark, and wind...add to all these the strange—in all other writings unexampled—practice of bringing together into logical dependency detached sentences from books composed at the distances of centuries...under different dispensations.²⁰⁷

In *The Confessions of the Inquiring Spirit* Coleridge’s own voice is obscured somewhat by the severe caricature he provides of his opponent’s theory of verbal inspiration. He might here be referring to extreme instances of this method. Yet it does seem that for

²⁰⁵ S. T. Coleridge, *Aids to Reflection*, 198.

²⁰⁶ S. T. Coleridge, *The Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit*, 293.

²⁰⁷ S. T. Coleridge, *The Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit*, 314.

Coleridge, the words of the Bible, at least in certain places, derive their power from the inward images and sentiments they provoke and not from their surface or plain referents.

And this, in part, is also an apologetic strategy for Coleridge:

But let a man be once fully persuaded that there is no difference between the two positions—“The Bible contains the religion revealed by God”—and “Whatever is contained in the Bible is religion, and was revealed by God,”—and that whatever can be said of the Bible, collectively taken, may and must be said of each and every sentence of the Bible, taken for and by itself,—and I no longer wonder at these paradoxes. I only object to the inconsistency of those who profess the same belief, and yet affect to look down with a contemptuous or compassionate smile on John Wesley for rejecting the Copernican system as incompatible therewith.²⁰⁸

Wesley, it would seem to Coleridge, was simply following this logic to its absurd conclusion. Coleridge’s answer to the problem is that the Bible contains Christianity, but not every last sentence or word; the truth needs to be sifted according to some criteria. He alludes at one point to Irenaeus and the rule of faith, but in a peculiar manner: “Is it not a fact that the Books of the New Testament were tried by their consonance with the rule, and according to the analogy of Faith. Does not the universally admitted canon—that each part of Scripture must be interpreted by the spirit of the whole—lead to the same practical conclusion as that for which I am now contending; —namely, that it is the spirit of the Bible, and not the detached words and sentences, that is infallible and absolute?”²⁰⁹ While this distinction between the “words” and the “spirit” of the Bible is somewhat confusing, or unnecessarily polarizing, it allows Coleridge to root the Scriptures in a larger framework of spiritual communion. In the end, he writes, “Revealed Religion is in its highest contemplation the unity, that is, the identity or co-inherence, of Subjective and

²⁰⁸ S. T. Coleridge, *The Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit*, 311.

²⁰⁹ S. T. Coleridge, *The Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit*, 326.

Objective. It is in itself...at once inward Life and Truth, and outward Fact and Luminary.”²¹⁰ The subjective experience of the believer must cohere with the spirit of the Scriptures in the spiritual drive toward unity and comprehensiveness. For this reason, a patient and non-literal reading of the Bible will eventually render the reader’s life objectively:

I say that no Christian probationer...can find his own state brought before him and, as it were, antedated, in writings reverend even for their antiquity and enduring permanence, and far more, and more abundantly, consecrated by the reverence, love, and grateful testimonies of good men through the long succession of ages, in every generation, and under all states of minds and circumstances of fortune,—that no man, I say, can recognize his own inward experiences in such Writings, and not find an objectiveness, a confirming and assuring outwardness.²¹¹

It seems that the inward experience of conscience and the struggle of reason to follow its inclinations finds in Scripture a history of human experience that is “antedated.” Furthermore, the errors and inconsistencies of the scriptural account are a human and necessary part of this history: “how could these Writings be or become the history?”²¹² In statements like these, Coleridge veers toward Butler’s own conception of Scripture: the narrative of Scripture in its full arc describes the experience of people as they live their lives before God. Even errors and inconsistencies are a part of this providential rendering, though for Butler, the full comprehension of this description is hidden from human eyes and grasped through faith.

But for Coleridge, Scripture’s ability to locate an individual’s life, to objectify it, is rooted largely in those places where the person is able to recognize it:

In the Bible there is more that finds me than I have experienced in all other books put together; that the words of the Bible find me at greater

²¹⁰ S. T. Coleridge, *The Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit*, 335.

²¹¹ S. T. Coleridge, *The Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit*, 336.

²¹² S. T. Coleridge, *The Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit*, 337.

depths of my being; and that whatever finds me brings with it an irresistible evidence of its having proceeded from the Holy Spirit. But the Doctrine in question requires me to believe, that not only what finds me, but that all that exists in the sacred volume, and which I am bound to find therein, was...dictated by an Infallible Intelligence;—that the writers, each and all, were divinely informed as well as inspired.²¹³

In some ways this is the heart of Coleridge's hermeneutic: Scripture is read through the criteria of interior coherence or resonance. While this interior experience is theologically understood, and the inner person is redeemed by the mediation of Christ, Scripture's intelligibility rests upon the subject-object recognition, the identification of a person's experience with the objectified form.

One might say that Coleridge's attempt to relate scriptural claims to the faltering faith of his generation risked streamlining the Scriptures into a subjective groove, while the already difficult portions of the Bible were driven further into obscurity. In addition, it provided a method for further revision of scriptural claims along subjective or experiential lines. But to make this claim, I would have to show that this in fact took place, with this writer or that. However, it is more to my point to simply show the way in which Coleridge attempted to establish a coherence between the Scriptures—their central teachings—and the life of the individual. In this way, Coleridge's task was much like Butler's, but whereas Butler employed a form of skepticism to demonstrate that the narrative of Scripture provided the most faithful account of the world and God's providential scheme, Coleridge's skepticism allowed him to separate those aspects of

²¹³ S. T. Coleridge, *The Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit*, 296. It is useful to contrast this statement of Coleridge's with Mansel's, made along similar lines: "But we may avail ourselves of that which satisfies our own peculiar needs, only by accepting it as part and parcel of the one indivisible whole" (Henry Mansel, *The Limits of Religious Thought*, 187). In other words, Mansel agrees with Coleridge that the believer is likely to find in Scripture those things that meet his or her needs, but for Mansel, these findings are still inseparable from the whole account of Scripture.

Scripture that applied to the understanding and reason. In other words, Coleridge gave a particular status to the moral inclinations of his generation through a theological variation of Kant's categorical imperative, realized in the practical reason, and he allowed this faculty, lifted from a temporal or contextual origin, to operate as a cipher for scriptural interpretation. Coleridge could still speak severely about "the evil heart of Unbelief."²¹⁴ But this "apostasy" included those theologians for whom the "Gospel gave way to speculative Systems, and Religion became a Science of Shadows under the name of Theology, or at best a bare Skeleton of Truth, without life or interest, alike inaccessible and unintelligible to the majority of Christians."²¹⁵

Coleridge might have agreed with Aquinas that unbelief originates in the will, but for Coleridge the will became an emboldened faculty that exercised a formative influence on central Christian truth claims: it demanded realization, expression and a deeply resonant encounter with its object of faith. He seemed fully convinced that no thinking person could not find this in the gospel, if read through the proper epistemological lens. This is undoubtedly Coleridge's greatest strength and what made him so attractive to Victorian writers. In this way Coleridge managed to set up an antagonistic polarity between orthodox writers who were moved to defend the faith by "that faithless and love less spirit of fear"²¹⁶ and those who sought "to rouse and emancipate the Soul from this debasing Slavery to the outward Senses, to awaken the mind to the true Criteria of Reality."²¹⁷ This criticism would have applied, in varying degrees, to Browne and Butler, writers whose skepticism was regarded as highly defensive in tenor. And it seems quite

²¹⁴ S. T. Coleridge, *Aids to Reflection*, 243.

²¹⁵ S. T. Coleridge, *Aids to Reflection*, 185.

²¹⁶ S. T. Coleridge, *Aids to Reflection*, 237.

²¹⁷ S. T. Coleridge, *Aids to Reflection*, 398.

certain these were the charges brought against Mansel, who, by his own admission, did not try to “build the fortress” which he defended, because “the fortress is built already.”²¹⁸

2.6 Conclusion

By the 18th century, and much more in the 19th, theology in England was bound to the apologetic mode and was in a constant state of anxiety to show how a Christian scriptural conception of reality could still be maintained as moral, scientific and philosophical trends began to shift. Part of this shift I have explained by Popkin’s argument that the Reformation, and ensuing theological controversies, loosened a skeptical crisis in the retreating absence of any agreed upon criterion for consensually establishing Christian claims. Certainly by the time of Toland and the deists, Christianity’s lack of universality—the Scripture’s intense particularity and local character—presented one of greatest difficulties to rational belief. This problem would only be expanded and extended in the philosophies of Kant and Hegel, who invested the subject and reason with incredible, though circumscribed, mediating powers between heaven and earth. Coleridge’s theology, I have argued, displays the relative discomforts of articulating Christian orthodoxy within an idealistic framework. Even more, despite his attention to the Scriptures, the mediating role between God and humanity shifted slightly away from the scriptural account of Christ and providential history, toward an interior or subjective center. For Coleridge this was a highly self-conscious move, as he struggled to understand how the full range of the Scriptures could mediate a God whose character was appropriable and attractive within his account of spiritual communion and reason’s ascent to God. The empirically driven apologetic theology of the 18th century,

²¹⁸ Henry Mansel, “Philosophy and Theology,” 340.

Coleridge maintained, pushed God away and impoverished any attempt to describe the communion or encounter between God and humanity.

Mansel seldom referred to Coleridge, but he clearly identified himself with the Browne, Berkeley and Butler trajectory, if it can be described as such.²¹⁹ I have argued that Mansel drew most consistently from Butler. He could not quite follow Berkeley all the way in his idealism, and Browne's theory of analogy drifted, in some senses, from a scriptural rooting into a somewhat idiosyncratic metaphysical dualism.²²⁰ It must be said, however, that Mansel heartily endorsed Browne's theology, without taking up many of these features for his own purposes. But most importantly, Mansel followed Butler in his insistence that the Scriptures—read, as commonly understood, through the first four ecumenical councils—were the primary form of mediation between God and humanity. Like Butler, his skepticism was employed to allow the whole range of scriptural writings to speak truthfully about God and the world, and this conviction was rooted in an incarnational theology wherein God adjusted and accommodated Himself to the vast and inscrutable complexity of human life. In many ways, Mansel and Butler are characteristic examples of what Hampsher-Monk calls the “textual” emphasis of Anglican theology.²²¹

However, the common criticism, from Coleridge and others, that this style of theology lacks a certain amount of existential import is one that needs to be taken seriously. Coleridge's insistence that only certain portions of the Bible could “find him,”

²¹⁹ In *A Second Letter to Goldwin Smith* (1862), Mansel quotes, with a hesitating approval, Coleridge's understanding of metaphor, though mostly in an attempt to speak in Smith's language. Mansel also makes a point of establishing his dissent from Coleridge's main ideas (70).

²²⁰ Mansel began an essay on the topic of Berkeley's philosophy, but unfortunately he died before bringing it to completion. What little survives of the fragment suggests a strong affinity with the Bishop's thinking, though he foreshadows an ultimate disagreement, most likely relating to Berkeley's idiosyncratic denial of matter. Mansel agreed with Berkeley, against Reid, that consciousness is the basic fact of existence. Henry Mansel, “On the Idealism of Berkeley,” in *Letter, Lectures and Reviews, Including the Phrontisterion, or, Oxford in the 19th Century* (London: John Murray, 1873), 387.

²²¹ Ian Hampsher-Monk, “Burke and the Religious Sources of Conservative Skepticism,” 237.

or put in reverse, that he could only recognize his experience in certain portions of the Scriptures, was exactly what Mansel feared. This, for Mansel, was a form of spiritual dislocation brought on by rational theological accounts that did not pay heed to the particular claims of the Bible or that reached out for theological accounts of the world that eased this sense of disruption. In a certain way, Mansel risked a further dislocation by claiming that God—in Himself unknowable—concealed Himself in every aspect of the Scriptures. But it was a risk he was willing to take in order to preserve a traditional textually based understanding of God and the world.

To this end, Maurice Cowling's summation of Mansel's theology seems at once to be fairly accurate and yet misleading:

Mansel's strength, and also his weakness, was that Christian agnosticism reflected the loss of authority which Christianity had suffered at the hands of philosophy and science. Because he knew what he was doing, Mansel was able to be intellectually aggressive but he also reflected the loss. Retreat, doubtless, was essential, if the ramparts were to be manned or an equality of esteem to be established for religion and theology in relation to science and philosophy...In leading a retreat, however, he was assisting at the slide which led through "incognoscibility" to the subjective religion of the Aesthetes and the intellectual anarchy of modern Anglicanism.²²²

Cowling is perhaps right to say that Mansel's theology reflects a loss, in some sense, but his skepticism or agnosticism should in no way be associated with the "subjective religion of Aesthetes" and much less the "intellectual anarchy of modern Anglicanism."

On the contrary, Mansel's skeptical theology was an attempt to carve out a space in which the Scriptures and the traditions of the Church could function as they more or less always had, but now within a very different environment. It is true that Mansel's and perhaps even Butler's theology might appear like a bare scripturalism, lacking in the

²²² Maurice Cowling, *Religion and Public Doctrine in Modern England*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

intellectual enrichment that it might have needed to survive in the Victorian era. As already noted, Mansel's contemporaries insisted that such a method made God seem more distant, a betrayal of his intention to defend a certain portrait of the biblical God. But my purpose in the following chapters is to show that this accusation need not attend to Mansel's style of theology, and even more, Mansel's theology still holds promise for articulating a Christian worldview in our contemporary pluralistic context.

Chapter Three: Mansel and the Theology of Skepticism

3.1 Introduction

I argued in the Introduction that Mansel has often been read as a Kantian religious philosopher who, much like Coleridge, confused Kant's thinking in an attempt to retain certain features of Christian orthodoxy. While it is true that Mansel was indebted to Kant for aspects of his epistemological skepticism, Mansel's skepticism was never intended to be separated from his theological commitments and his understanding of Scripture. The charge of fideism made against Mansel by his contemporaries and later scholars, seems more plausible when his skepticism is divorced from the actual purpose and character of Scripture. The next two chapters will take up this critique and argue that Mansel's skepticism and his theory of regulative truth of Scripture were designed to create a space wherein the Scriptures could reliably and exclusively reveal the character and actions of God.

In this particular chapter I describe the features of Mansel's skepticism and theory of the regulative truth of Scripture. Mansel's skepticism denied an immediate knowledge of God's being and many critics objected that the regulative truth of Scripture drew a veil between God's being and His witness in the world. But far from severing the connection between the language of Scripture and the life and character of God, I argue that Mansel's theory of regulative truth actually enabled the language and narrative of the entire Scriptures to reliably and consistently reveal God's presence in the world.

Interpreters of Mansel have typically confined their focus to Mansel's Bampton Lectures and a handful of other philosophical texts. This is perhaps sufficient to gain a general outline of his views, but these representative texts give only glimpses of how his

philosophical position might actually function in engagement with Scripture. Part of my purpose in chapter four is to look more closely at Mansel's sermons and more intentional theological works, but for now I restrict my focus to the lectures and his other key philosophical works, as these have been the dominant medium through which Mansel's ideas have been encountered. Nevertheless, though Mansel admitted that his lectures were heavily philosophical in their content, *The Limits of Religious Thought* is a work that is suffused with Scriptural references. Even more, the stated goal of the entire book is to illuminate and protect the Scriptural account of the Triune God.

3.2 Consciousness and the Limits of Religious Knowledge

3.2.1 Skepticism

To call Mansel a skeptic about religious knowledge is perhaps misleading, unless the term is given further definition. Rowan Williams describes a certain form of skepticism that has been common in the Anglican tradition, a skepticism

about formulae and dogma that is fundamentally scepticism about the capacities of the human mind. It assumes that we are liable to self-deceit, that our knowledge is affected by our moral and spiritual lack. In this context, to be cautious about hermeneutical or dogmatic closure is not to discard or relativise sanctioned words; you occupy the territory marked out by those words, but you will not know where the boundaries are, because the search for definite boundaries suggests that you might be 'in possession' of the territory...And this contrasts with a scepticism more obviously generated by Enlightenment suspicion of authority, in which the target of the questioning is the formulae as such and the processes by which they were shaped.²²³

Williams' description of Anglican skepticism is perhaps not far off from Mansel's, but there is a shade of difference that will become clearer throughout this chapter. Mansel as well defines two varying forms of skepticism:

²²³ Rowan Williams, *Anglican Identities* (Cambridge: Cowley Publications, 2003), 81.

The one is based on the assumption that the human mind is divided against itself, the testimony of one faculty contradicting that of another,—the reason, for example, being opposed to the senses, and the senses to reason...The other proceeds on the assumption that the human mind, though at unity with itself, is at variance with some higher truth unattainable by it, things as they see to us being different from things as they are in themselves. The inference from the latter is, that human consciousness, however trustworthy within its own sphere, is trustworthy as regards phenomena only, and is in error from the point of view of a higher intelligence, the nature of the phenomena being different from that of reality.²²⁴

Clearly, Mansel's preferred form of skepticism is not unlike Williams' as it relates to the limits of the human mind, though there is a philosophical underpinning that sets it apart. It seems he is less concerned with the "territory" of sanctioned words and the manner in which they are inhabited—whether in humility or possessiveness—but more so, he wishes to examine the context in which they can be affirmed and the laws under which such affirmations are made. In both forms of skepticism, Mansel is operating within a Kantian realm: in the first instance he is criticizing Kant's antinomies of reason, but in the second he seems to endorse the unknowability of things in themselves, set apart from phenomena. So while Mansel clearly uses Kantian terms to begin his discussion of the limits of the human mind, it is equally clear that his purposes are markedly different.

To some degree, then, it confuses the origins of these ideas. Hamish Swanston speculates along these lines: "It may be, however, that Mansel was not following Kant at all, but had already a notion of man's being confined to the finite, and employed the model of vision because it occurs in the Bible and common speech."²²⁵ Mansel said as much himself: "All that Kant did in relation to these doctrines, was to supply a psychological confirmation of conclusions which had been previously held on

²²⁴ Henry Mansel, "Philosophy and Theology," 343.

²²⁵ Hamish Swanston, *Ideas of Order*, 65.

metaphysical and theological grounds.”²²⁶ However, despite Mansel’s own words, it is possible that he was being slightly disingenuous; certainly his early psychological work, *Prolegomena Logica* (1853), displays only minor discomfort with Kantian epistemology, though, as we will see, this discomfort would increase in his later works. Still, regardless of the chronology and order of these concepts, Mansel came to see the psychological interpretation of Kant—an interpretation, however misguided, that was common in 19th century England²²⁷—as a natural confirmation of revealed truths. In other words, where Butler searched the natural world for corresponding analogies between nature and the scriptural scheme of salvation, Mansel turned to the human mind, where he perceived that the 19th century struggle for truth was being waged.

3.2.2 *The Limits of Human Consciousness*

Mansel himself stands within a complicated philosophical matrix influenced by a range of figures and traditions, including Kantian idealism, Butlerian probabalism and common sense realism, represented by William Hamilton. What these figures have in common is the emphasis upon human ignorance and the limits of human reason, however those limits might be configured. It is from Hamilton primarily that Mansel derives his examination of human consciousness, the keystone of his skepticism. For Mansel, as for Hamilton, the examination of human consciousness reveals the conditions under which we are able to know both the world and God. Mansel writes,

²²⁶ Henry Mansel, *A Second Letter to Goldwin Smith*, 48.

²²⁷ Rene Wellek in *Immanuel Kant in England* argues that early English interpretations of Kant confused the psychological for the epistemological aspects of Kant’s thought. Edmund Husserl’s *Logical Investigations* provides on the best critiques of the psychological interpretation and its reduction to empiricism: “It therefore fails to see that, having no insightful justification for our mediate assumptions, no justification, therefore, for the relevant proof-procedures from the immediately evident general principles that they follow, its whole psychological theory, its whole mediately known doctrine of empiricism, is without rational foundation, is, in fact, a mere assumption, no more than a common prejudice” (116). Though it seems that Husserl’s criticisms apply more to Mill and, before him, Hume. Mansel was clearly not a pure empiricist, though his theological foundations would not have satisfied Husserl either.

Revelation represents the infinite God under finite symbols, in condescension to the finite capacity of man; indicating at the same time the existence of a further reality beyond the symbol, and bidding us look forward in faith to the promise of a more perfect knowledge hereafter. Rationalism, in the hands of these expositors, adopts an opposite view of man's powers and duties. It claims to behold God as He is now: it finds a common object of religion and philosophy in the explanation of God.²²⁸

The limitations of consciousness that the rationalist violates in ascending to an unmediated conception of God are discovered in the exercising of this very manner of reasoning. The contradictions of reason that Mansel demonstrates parallel the antinomies of Kant in order to show up the limitations of reason, though they are more closely related to the structure of the mind than the transcendental character of reason.²²⁹

Mansel uses the concepts of the Infinite and the Absolute as examples, but here I will focus on the Infinite. Hamilton's basic proposition was that "to think is to condition,"²³⁰ or that all thinking revolves around relations of objects and subjects. To speak of the unconditioned is to speak of something that cannot possibly be conceived; the unconditioned represents the dissolution of thinking altogether.²³¹ In other words, thinking has no shape unless it has objects or limitations to run up against. Mansel follows Hamilton almost word for word in this regard:

The very conception of Consciousness, in whatever mode it may be manifested, necessarily implies *distinction between an object and another*...But distinction is necessarily limitation; for if one object is to be distinguished from another, it must possess some form of existence which the other has not.²³²

²²⁸ Henry Mansel, *Limits of Religious Thought*, 21.

²²⁹ Bernard Lightman, *The Origins of Agnosticism*, 50.

²³⁰ William Hamilton, "The Philosophy of the Unconditioned," 20.

²³¹ William Hamilton, "The Philosophy of Perception," 91.

²³² Henry Mansel, *Limits of Religious Thought*, 49.

If this is true of human consciousness, then a contradiction creeps into our conception of the Infinite: “But it is obvious that the Infinite cannot be distinguished, as such, from the Finite, by the absence of any quality which the Finite possesses; for such absence would be a limitation.”²³³ The Infinite, by definition, transcends such distinctions, and yet it is only through distinction that humans can form and distinguish one thought from another. Thoughts, after all, like all human activities, are subject to duration—the succession of moments—that are the precise conditions that cannot be present within the Infinite.

Yet the contradiction inherent within reason’s conception of the Infinite does not banish the idea altogether; rather, the notion of a negative limit, Mansel claims, necessarily implies an existence beyond the boundary that the limit establishes: “it is a duty, enjoined by Reason itself, to believe in that which we are unable to comprehend.”²³⁴ Reason drives the human mind toward a collision with its own limits and toward the departure of faith. Thus, Mansel concludes, the Infinite must exist even though it cannot be conceived, and human consciousness can reach this point by reason, even if reason exhausts itself in faith. The fate of English empiricism, Mansel claims, is that it had no mechanism for retaining a credible belief in the incomprehensible, or, in other words, it had no concept of a negative limit.²³⁵ This is an important distinction, because on the surface Mansel’s theology shares a similar tenor to Locke’s *The Reasonableness of Christianity*: a moralistic stress, a simplified Christian existence and an open hostility to religious speculation.²³⁶ Yet a negative limit holds open the possibility of an incomprehensible reality—a reality that is unintelligible to human

²³³ Henry Mansel, *Limits of Religious Thought*, 49.

²³⁴ Henry Mansel, *Limits of Religious Thought*, 69.

²³⁵ Henry Mansel, *Prolegomena Logica*, 133.

²³⁶ John Locke, *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, 76.

reason—that still impinges upon human life and is articulated in the wide range of revealed language. Without this notion, even Scripture can be sifted along the lines of intelligibility, which, as I have begun to argue, is Mansel’s principle worry.

Mansel’s notion of a negative limit also related to his critique of Kant. Kant, for instance, argued that

I cannot infer the magnitude of the regress from the quantity or magnitude of the world, and determine the former by means of the latter; on the contrary, I must first of all form a conception of the quantity or magnitude of the world from the magnitude of the empirical regress. But of this regress I know nothing more than that I ought to proceed from every given member of the series of conditions to one still higher. But the quantity of the universe is not thereby determined, and we cannot affirm that this regress proceeds *in infinitum*.²³⁷

Kant’s distinction between the “*regressus in indefinitum*” and the “*regressus in infinitum*,”²³⁸ for Mansel, confused the nature of a limitation in thought. Mansel writes,

Kant confesses that we have no intuition of the unconditioned; that we only infer its existence as implied by the conception of the conditioned. But this admission reduces the former idea to the mere negation of the latter; a negation is as empty regulatively as speculatively, and assuredly not needing a special faculty for its conception, inasmuch as it is never conceived at all.²³⁹

In other words, Mansel concludes, “He treats an impotence of thought as if it were a faculty. The infinite and the indefinite may be thus distinguished: the former implies an actual conceiving the absence of limits; the latter is a not conceiving the presence of limits.”²⁴⁰ Therefore to distinguish between reason—which tends toward the unconditioned in order to unify our thoughts—and understanding is misleading. The

²³⁷ Immanuel Kant and J. M. D. Meiklejohn, *Critique of Pure Reason*.

²³⁸ Immanuel Kant and J. M. D. Meiklejohn, *Critique of Pure Reason*.

²³⁹ Henry Mansel, “The Philosophy of Kant,” 174.

²⁴⁰ Henry Mansel, “The Philosophy of Kant,” 174.

understanding, Mansel suggests, constantly “implies the indefinite” already, and so “Reason does no more.”²⁴¹

In effect Mansel denies the distinction between the understanding and reason, especially, as already mentioned above, Kant’s use of practical reason. “Kant’s head and heart led him in two opposite directions,”²⁴² Mansel claims: though Kant gives up knowledge of the unconditioned, the Infinite, through speculative reason, he in effect claws it back through practical reason.²⁴³ And despite the subtleties of Kant’s distinctions between these faculties, Mansel regarded the latter as yet another attempt to surpass the negative limits of consciousness.

While Mansel considered his skepticism to be within the mainstream of Christian theology, his strictures upon the conceivability of the Infinite especially provoked visceral rejoinders. He seemed somewhat surprised that fellow theologians would take up the causes of Kantian and idealistic philosophy against him. F. D. Maurice’s response is perhaps best known: “He seems to me to crush the search after Truth, all that is expressed in the word philosophy, by crushing at the same time the discovery of truth, all that is expressed in the word revelation.”²⁴⁴ Maurice was quick to perceive the threat that Mansel’s lectures represented to his own theological convictions: the core of Christian belief is that the infinite God has been “manifested in the Eternal Word, and the only

²⁴¹ Henry Mansel, “The Philosophy of Kant,” 175.

²⁴² Henry Mansel, “The Philosophy of Kant,” 172.

²⁴³ Henry Mansel on Kant: “The moral reason is thus a source of absolute and unchangeable realities; while the Speculative reason is concerned only with phenomena, or things modified by the constitution of the human mind. As a corollary to this theory, it follows that the law of human morality must be regarded as the measure and adequate representative of the moral nature of God. Applying these principles to the criticism of Revealed Religion, the philosopher maintains that no code of laws claiming divine authority can have any religious values, except as approved by the moral reason.” Henry Mansel, *The Limits of Religious Thought*, 142.

²⁴⁴ Frederick Denison Maurice, *What Is Revelation?: A Series of Sermons on the Epiphany, to Which Are Added Letters to a Student of Theology on the Bampton Lectures of Mr. Mansel* (New York: AMS Press, 1975), 163.

begotten son,”²⁴⁵ which of course, in some manner, implied the transcendence of the limited, finite human situation. To know God required the communion of the finite with the infinite, which was the hallmark of English romantic theology derived from Coleridge and the German idealists.

In some sense, Maurice’s outrage and puzzlement seems justified: how can anyone know God if he cannot, by definition, conceive of the infinite? A modern reader might ask, in an age where Christian orthodoxy was being pried apart from every side, why would Mansel risk offending a fellow Anglican on such a fine point of distinction? Hamish Swanston insightfully remarks that this was a period characterized by an “inability to recognize a friend.”²⁴⁶ In a certain way Swanston’s remark seems obviously true, and yet Mansel’s concerns were derived from a complex set of circumstances, not least of which was the emergence of German biblical criticism. Mansel regarded the new forms of biblical criticism, represented by Strauss and Jowett, among others, as the natural extension of philosophical rationalism into the domain of Scripture, with the same inevitable results.

It may be true that Mansel needlessly alienated a potential ally in someone like F. D. Maurice, but the danger he perceived in employing the infinite as a description of God is that it distracts readers of the Scriptures from the manner in which God has in fact revealed Himself. Mansel believed that God was infinite, but because the term defies human conception, God revealed Himself under finite symbols so that His people could know Him. The conditions and relations of consciousness—subject to object and the succession of time—are the conditions through which God speaks to humanity through

²⁴⁵ Frederick Denison Maurice, *What Is Revelation?*, 143.

²⁴⁶ Hamish Swanston, *Ideas of Order*, 209.

the Scriptures. Mansel summarizes these conditions with the term “personality”; that is, humans relate to the world as distinct persons who make choices, perceive objects and relate to others.²⁴⁷ It is as persons that the succeeding moments of time are held together in unity, and for this reason Christians are bound to think of God as a person, even though this notion seems to contradict God’s infinity:

It is our duty then to think of God as personal; and it is our duty to believe that He is infinite. It is true that we cannot reconcile these two representations with each other; as our conception of personality involves attributes apparently contradictory to the notion of infinity. But it is not clear that this contradiction exists anywhere but in our own minds.²⁴⁸

These “two representations” do not elide each other; rather, they are held together by some imperceptible unity that cannot be conceived within the limits of human imagination.

For Mansel, consciousness is the foundation of all human knowledge, or rather the lens through anything can be known or perceived, though in no way can the philosopher move behind or beyond his consciousness to examine its origins: “This self-personality, like all other simple and immediate presentations, is indefinable; but it is so, because it is superior to definition. It can be analyzed into no simpler elements, for it is itself the simplest of all: it can be made no clearer by description or comparison, for it is revealed to us in all the clearness of an original intuition, of which description and comparison can furnish only faint and partial resemblances.”²⁴⁹ From a theological point of view it would seem that Mansel’s emphasis upon the laws and limits of human consciousness are perhaps unusual, even if theologians have employed similar language

²⁴⁷ Henry Mansel, *Limits of Religious Thought*, 61.

²⁴⁸ Henry Mansel, *Limits of Religious Thought*, 63.

²⁴⁹ Henry Mansel, *Prolegomena Logica*, 129. To this end, he would depart from Reid and the Scottish School, whose fundamental belief was in the existence of matter. Henry Mansel, *Prolegomena Logica*, 129.

with regard to the capacity of human reason. Mansel had no trouble marshaling long lists of theological authorities to support his notion that the human mind cannot directly conceive of God, even if the critical tools of Kant and Hamilton were not available for these figures to ground their claims.²⁵⁰

But it is in this light that it is important to regard Mansel's debt to Butler and his arguments against deist objections to Christian revelation:

Since it is as unreasonable as it is common, to urge objections against revelation, which are of equal weight against natural religion; and those who do this, if they are not confuted themselves, deal unfairly with others, in making it seem that they are arguing only against revelation, or particular doctrines of it, when in reality they are arguing against moral providence.²⁵¹

In Mansel's eyes the deist attacks against Christian orthodoxy derived from moral and providential concerns had migrated, in the 19th century, into arguments of consciousness and the limits of knowledge. To this extent, he tried to show that the character of human consciousness and Christian revelation are in fact analogous and that the former cannot be used to adjust, modify or discard the latter. Perhaps Mansel's orthodox critics did not understand the nature of his strategy. The erstwhile Tractarian, J. B. Mozley, for example, cautiously critiqued Mansel's skepticism for being too overdrawn because there was "little recognition in these lectures of the truth, that, however theoretically distinct these modes of philosophy may be, yet in practice they will be always entrenching upon each other's ground."²⁵² This was a common complaint against Mansel's lectures, but any theological account of how these "distinct modes" overlap in practice was never really pursued in response. For Mansel, theoretical precision in accounting for the character of

²⁵⁰ Henry Mansel, *An Examination of Maurice*, 15.

²⁵¹ Joseph Butler, "The Analogy of Religion," 293.

²⁵² J. B. Mozley, "Mansel's Bampton Lectures," *The Christian Remembrancer* 37 (April 1859): 358–61, 104.

consciousness allowed greater freedom in the reading and affirming of scriptural claims, in all of their obscurity and diversity. This is a theme that I will return to toward the end of this chapter and into the next.

3.3 Regulative Truth and the Language of Scripture

3.3.1 Regulative Truth

If Mansel's skepticism was received by churchmen as too stark and formulated, his notion of regulative truth was regarded with similar confusion and hesitance. The constraints of consciousness are bound to conceive of God as personal; this is what Mansel calls regulative truth, and he contrasts it with speculative truth. Speculative truth seeks knowledge of God as He is in Himself, and regulative truth accepts God's representation of Himself within finite symbols—the Scriptures—for the purpose of practical living. This is the Christian's first clue to reading Scripture in the modern age:

How far that knowledge represents God as He is, we know not, and we have no need to know. The testimony of Scripture, like that of our natural faculties, is plain and intelligible, when we are content to accept it as a fact intended for our practical guidance; it becomes incomprehensible, only when we attempt to explain it as a theory capable of speculative analysis.²⁵³

Scripture becomes unintelligible for the reasons outlined previously: How can human reason conceive of an infinite God who acts in time or who responds to human prayers and engages humanity as persons subject to time? Scripture does not resolve this dilemma but rather sets before the Christian the manner in which he or she is to act and think about God in this life.

It was this notion of regulative truth, even more than Mansel's barring of the infinite that struck his contemporaries as absurd and even dangerous. It seemed he was

²⁵³ Henry Mansel, *Limits of Religious Thought*, 103.

implying, for Maurice and others, that humanity could not actually know God and that the Scriptures, rather than revealing God, in fact concealed Him. Gavin Hyman has more recently stated the objection in relation to the “real God” and the “available God” as follows: “the constitutive, transcendent God must give way to the regulative ‘working God’ of practical religion. With this move, truth becomes subjective and realism gives way to non-realism.”²⁵⁴ Distinctions like Mansel’s between speculative and regulative knowledge of God contain an intrinsic slide toward atheism or unbelief.²⁵⁵ But for Mansel, his intention was exactly the opposite, and he related his notion of regulative truth to the central Christological character of Christian doctrine: “Is it irrational to contemplate God under symbols drawn from the human consciousness? Christ is our pattern: ‘for in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily? It was when the fullness of time was come, that God sent forth his Son.’”²⁵⁶ God’s condescension to our limited capacities is at the heart of Christian understandings of salvation and should not be dismissed as somehow beneath God:

Those who, in their horror of what they call anthropomorphism, or anthropopathy, refuse to represent the Deity under symbols borrowed from the limitations of human consciousness, are bound, in consistency, to deny that God exists; for the conception of existence is as human and as limited as any other.²⁵⁷

Here Mansel, in fact, reverses the accusation and suggests that the refusal to see God in that which is limited and human is a refusal to see God at all. Mansel clearly believed that

²⁵⁴ Gavin Hyman, *The Predicament of Postmodern Theology: Radical Orthodoxy or Nihilist Textualism?* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 47.

²⁵⁵ This would seem to correlate with Lightman’s theory concerning the assimilation of Mansel’s ideas into English agnosticism, though it should be noted that Lightman does not argue that Mansel’s ideas contained any necessary push in this direction, though they were convenient. In part, Spencer and Huxley used Mansel as an orthodox smokescreen behind which they could advance their more radical attacks against Christian revelation. Bernard Lightman, *Origins of Agnosticism*, 84.

²⁵⁶ Henry Mansel, *Limits of Religious Thought*, 109.

²⁵⁷ Henry Mansel, *Limits of Religious Thought*, 52.

there was an analogy between human regulative conceptions of God and God as He truly is, but this analogy must remain imperfect until the beatific vision on the last day:

So should it be during this transitory life, in which we see through a glass, darkly, in which God reveals himself in types and shadows, under human images and attributes, to meet graciously and deal tenderly with the human sympathies of his creatures...we may trust that not wholly alien to such feelings will be our communion with God face to face.²⁵⁸

It is fairly clear that what Mansel thought he was doing with the concept of regulative truth was simply defending the integrity of Scripture against philosophical attempts to subvert its rationality. Yet the concept's origin is somewhat difficult to discern. In an exchange in the *Journal of Theological Studies* (1971), Don Cupitt maintains, against the criticisms of D. W. Dockrill, that Mansel's idea of regulative truth is in fact a theologically and scripturally derived notion. Cupitt suggests,

Christian theology has always affirmed the incomprehensibility of God. Scripture is a practical, not a speculative book, and Christian dogmas have always been authoritative guides to conduct rather than authoritative diagrams of deity...so the doctrine of regulative truth is, quite simply, orthodoxy.²⁵⁹

That Mansel was simply trying to defend orthodoxy is undoubtedly true, but that the notion can be found in Scripture might be contested. Mansel, in a letter to Goldwin Smith, attributed the idea to Bishop Copleston and Archbishop Whately in their defence of God's passions.²⁶⁰ But clearly the term itself comes from Kant, though to Mansel's point, it is used in a manner very different than that of Kant: the ideas of God, freedom and immortality are derived not from the demands of a moral imperative but from the representation of God in Scripture, His relationship to His people as described in the very

²⁵⁸ Henry Mansel, *Limits of Religious Thought*, 93.

²⁵⁹ Don Cupitt, "What Was Mansel Trying To Do?" *Journal of Theological Studies* 22, no. 2 (October 1971): 544–547, 545.

²⁶⁰ Henry Mansel, *A Letter to Goldwin Smith*, 11, 12.

words of the Bible. Thus there is no mediating feature or principle between God and humanity but the words of the Bible, symbolized in the creed and represented most fully in the person of Christ.²⁶¹

3.3.2 Anthropomorphic Language and the Attributes of God

It was hard for Mansel's critics to understand how someone could actually know God if the manner of revelation was only regulatively true. Mozley, for example, was uneasy about the distinction between regulative and speculative truth but felt as though he could not cast off speculative truth of God:

Either God represents Himself to us as He is, or as He is not;—and leave our readers to make their choice. But, we believe, more fallacies lie beneath these bipartite divisions than is commonly suspected. Dichotomies are almost always arranged for a foregone conclusion; and we, therefore, prefer stating the case more directly; that it is involved in the very idea of God that He will reveal Himself to His creatures, if at all, in a mode which is speculatively true.²⁶²

The idea that God is couched in language that does not fully express His character is less the issue than that the language may not in fact describe Him in any way. Newman's comments to Charles Meynell express some of the same discomfort: "To assert, with the School of Sir W. H. [Hamilton] and Mansel, that nothing is known because nothing is known luminously and exactly, seems to me saying that we do not see the stars because we cannot tell the number, size, or distance from each other."²⁶³ These types of concerns

²⁶¹ It should be noted that Mansel's view of scriptural mediation did not preclude the results of the physical sciences; he only maintained that these empirical truths could not attain a priori validity, and they could not be used to validate arguments against the existence of God and the character of revelation. This is for the same reason that philosophical arguments concerning the infinite and the absolute cannot be used against Scripture, namely, because of the limitations of human thought. *Prolegomena Logica: An Inquiry into the Psychological Character of Logical Processes* (Oxford: Graham, 1851), 204; "The Limits of Demonstrative Science Considered," in *Letter, Lectures and Reviews, Including the Phrontisterion, or, Oxford in the 19th Century* (London: John Murray, 1873), 99; *An Examination of The Rev. F.D. Maurice's Strictures on the Bampton Lectures of 1858 by the Lecturer* (London: John Murray, 1859), 21.

²⁶² J. B. Mozley, "Mansel's Bampton Lectures," 375.

²⁶³ John Henry Newman to Charles Meynell, May 9, 1860, in *Letters and Diaries: Volume XIX*, ed. Charles Stephen Dessain and Francis J. McGrath (London: T. Nelson, 1961), 335.

are no doubt legitimate, and perhaps Mansel could have worked harder to make himself clear on this point, but Newman's analogy, however hastily thought out, shows at least some sense of the confusion. Naturally, Mansel would have responded that vague and incomplete empirical knowledge is of a different sort than knowledge of an entirely different order, in this case of God. Yet how language that is only regulatively true is able to reveal God needs to be further sorted out.

In a footnote in his first letter to Goldwin Smith, Mansel makes an important distinction by contrasting his position with that of Spinoza:

Spinoza's views and mine are the exact reverse of each other. Spinoza asserts that there are no mysteries in Scripture; but that things simple and intelligible by all men are taught in figurative language; the figures being mere accommodations to the temperament or capacity of each individual writer, which others are at liberty to accept or reject as they please. I assert, on the contrary, that Scripture reveals mysteries incomprehensible by man, through the medium of conceptions and terms adapted to human comprehension; the adaptation being such as is needed by the laws of human thought in general, and such as no philosophy can enable us to surmount. Spinoza declares that religion consists of nothing but moral duties; that the historical portions of Scripture are not necessary for those who can attain to clear conceptions without them; and that no dogma which admits of controversy among good men can be part of the Catholic faith. This is exactly the position of later German rationalists.²⁶⁴

The distinction is admittedly subtle. For Spinoza the "figurative language" of Scripture is an accommodation to human minds that is entirely for a moral effect; that is, it may not say anything about God at all.²⁶⁵ Furthermore, the language of Scripture even risks obscuring God's nature, as in the case of miracles:

Wherefore if we would conceive that anything could be done in nature by any power whatsoever which would be contrary to the laws of nature, it would also be contrary to our primary ideas, and we should have either to reject it as absurd, or else to cast doubt (as just shown) on our primary

²⁶⁴ Henry Mansel, *A Letter to Goldwin Smith*, 47.

²⁶⁵ Benedict De Spinoza, "Theological Political Treatise," 92.

ideas, and consequently on the existence of God, and on everything howsoever perceived.²⁶⁶

Scripture risks this contradiction between primary ideas and depictions of miracles merely to “excite wonder” and command obedience.²⁶⁷ Likewise, God does not get angry or change His mind, as the Bible might suggest; in the best case, Spinoza argues, these types of scriptural descriptions are used poetically to “excite wonder,” but in the worst case they are delusions “foisted into the sacred writings by irreligious hands” who have no knowledge of the natural laws.²⁶⁸

It would seem that Mansel’s theological critics read his theory of regulative truth as an idea akin to Spinoza’s hermeneutics, however the spirit of the respective authors might have differed.²⁶⁹ Maurice, for example, was bothered especially by Mansel’s suggestion that truth and falsehood pertained not to objects but to human conceptions, a common understanding used in logic.²⁷⁰ Maurice was not a logician, and he was clearly frustrated that such technical rules should be used to obscure a simple Scripture declaration such as “I am the truth.”²⁷¹ In a sequel to his initial criticism of Mansel, Maurice maintains his original point on this theme: “The very question at issue between me and the writer of those Sermons was about the nature of Speculative and Regulative Truth; whether they can be distinguished, what is the distinction, whether truth itself does

²⁶⁶ Benedict De Spinoza, “Theological Political Treatise,” 85.

²⁶⁷ Benedict De Spinoza, “Theological Political Treatise,” 90.

²⁶⁸ Benedict De Spinoza, “Theological Political Treatise,” 92.

²⁶⁹ It is also possible that Mansel’s position was confused with Feuerbach’s, but in *Prolegomena Logica* (257) he makes this distinction: “The history of mankind in general, as well as the consciousness of each individual, alike testify that religion is not a function of thought; and that the attempt to make it so, if consistently carried out, necessarily leads, firstly to Anthropomorphism, and ultimately to Atheism.” He agrees with Feuerbach that we can only think in finite terms, but this does not mean that we must measure God by these standards. Rather, his mistake is that he thought of religion as a positive act of thinking.

²⁷⁰ Frederick Denison Maurice, *Sequel to the Inquiry, What Is Revelation? in a Series of Letters to a Friend; Containing a Reply to Mr. Mansel’s “Examination of the Rev. F. D. Maurice’s Strictures on the Bampton Lectures of 1858”* (Cambridge: Macmillan and Co., 1860), 207.

²⁷¹ Frederick Denison Maurice, *Sequel to the Inquiry*, 206.

not vanish if it is such as he tried to make it.”²⁷² Formulated differently, Maurice’s question asks, what exactly holds together the reference and the referent if the reference cannot be taken at face value?²⁷³ Or, as in Spinoza, if scriptural language is an accommodation to our limited capacity, how does this language retain any correspondence with the truth, as Mansel still wanted to maintain?

Naturally Mansel had every desire to affirm Maurice’s selected statement of Christ: “I am the truth.” But Mansel uses this text to describe what he perceived to be the main difference in their argument:

I believe, with him, that God is revealed in Christ. But I believe also that this Revelation (while designed to answer other and most momentous purposes in the Divine Economy, which we need not speak of now) is, as a manner of teaching us the Nature of God, analogous in some degree, however fuller and higher, to those earlier manifestations in which God revealed Himself under symbols borrowed from the consciousness of man. In other words, I do not regard the manifestation of God in the flesh, as a direct manifestation of the Absolute and Eternal Essence of the Deity; but as the assumption of a nature in which the manifestation is adapted to human faculties and limited to a mode in which man is capable of receiving it. In this belief I think I am supported by the language of that Article of our Church which expressly asserts that the Human Nature of Christ is not coeternal with His Divinity, but was assumed, as a subsequent nature, at a certain period of time.²⁷⁴

For Mansel, the revelation of Christ does not alter the ordering of human knowledge or the manner in which people come to know. Christ, of course, is a revelation of God,

²⁷² Frederick Denison Maurice, *Sequel to the Inquiry*, 209.

²⁷³ In the preface to the second edition of *The Patriarchs and Lawgivers of the Old Testament: A Series of Sermons Preached in the Chapel of Lincoln’s Inn* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1855), Maurice expresses his concern that Mansel’s ideas have begun to gain some influence in England: “The notion of a revelation that tells us things which are not in themselves true, but which it is right for us to believe and to act upon as if they were true, has, I fear, penetrated very deeply into the heart of our English schools, and of our English world. It may be traced among person who are apparently most unlike each other who live to oppose and confute each other. Those who speak most of the old Catholic creeds seem to love them because they have been handed down to us, not because they utter the Name in which we are living, and moving and having our being, the name of the Father” (v).

²⁷⁴ Henry Mansel, *An Examination*, 106.

though one that is in accordance with the tradition of God's revealing. Mansel goes on to characterize Maurice's own view as follows:

Mr. Maurice's teaching, on the other hand, so far as I can understand it, appears to be this. He holds that the Incarnation of Christ as a Man was not the assumption, by the Son of God, of a new nature; but an unveiling to man of that which had existed from all eternity. He seems to maintain that God the Son is, in His Eternal and Infinite Essence, very and perfect Man; and that, in His manifestation to the world in the likeness of sinful flesh, He did not "empty Himself, taking the form of a servant," but manifested his Divine Glory in all its infinite perfection.²⁷⁵

This characterization of Maurice may be unfair; certainly Maurice did not think that he was contradicting the articles of the Church on this particular point especially.²⁷⁶ But Mansel's criticism perhaps relates more to a perceived trajectory in Maurice's theology that leads to affirmations that, Mansel would claim, contradict the clear words of Scripture.²⁷⁷

In particular, the issue at stake for Mansel is how the theologian unites the philosophical attributes of God with the representations of God in Scripture. Along these lines, Mansel very much follows Butler's assertion of human ignorance of the scheme of salvation: "the account now given of Christianity most strongly shews and enforces upon us the obligation of searching the scriptures, in order to see what the scheme of revelation really is instead of determining beforehand, from reason, what the scheme of it must

²⁷⁵ Henry Mansel, *An Examination*, 106.

²⁷⁶ Jeremy Morris's *F.D. Maurice and the Crisis of Christian Authority*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) makes a spirited defence of Maurice's commitment to the basic structure and narrative of Scripture: "Yet, on the other hand, he was very much a biblical theologian, fully committed to the narrative of creation, fall, and redemption that constituted the doctrinal core of traditional Christian belief. The seeming ambiguity of his treatment of sin illustrates the point perfectly. He could be read as implying that sin was something of an illusion, affecting at most superficially the permanent, underlying union of humanity with God. Yet his language about sin was also intense and vehement, and shot through with a sense of shock and tragedy at the human rejection of God." 191.

²⁷⁷ Mansel criticized Maurice's position on eternal punishment and the atonement. In both cases, he suggested that Maurice's theology did not permit him to admit that God might be capable of anger and that his inability deformed Maurice's account of God's judgment. *An Examination*, 44, 88.

be.”²⁷⁸ It is from this standpoint—the standpoint of human ignorance of God’s ways—that Mansel takes issue with Maurice’s rendering of Christ’s atonement and universal salvation.²⁷⁹ The reason for this will become clearer as I lay out Mansel’s views in more detail.

The basic problem of God’s attributes for Mansel stems from his position that all human thought takes place within the realm of possible human experience. So, logically speaking,

A form of words, uniting attributes not presentable in an intuition, is not the sign of a thought, but of the negation of all thinking. Conception must thus be carefully distinguished, as well from mere imagination, as from a mere understanding of the meaning of words.²⁸⁰

As we have already seen, a negation in thinking, or a negative limit to thinking, can still imply the existence of God beyond the limit, though God in this respect cannot be conceived in thought. Thus when speaking about the attributes of God, the problem arises as to how such attributes can be predicated of an invisible God who is unavailable to human intuitions. So in a later essay, called “Free Thinking—Its History and Tendencies,” Mansel attempts to draw on Aquinas in delineating the manner in which the attributes of God function in human thought:

When the older theologians declared the essence of God to be mysterious and incomprehensible, they were not thinking of Locke’s real essence, of which they knew nothing, but of that logical essence which is comprised in attributes, and can be expressed in a definition, and which Locke calls the Nominal Essence. This is most distinctly stated in the language of Aquinas: “the name of God does not express the Divine essence as it is, as the name of man expresses in its signification the essence of man as it is—that is to say, by signifying the definition which declares the essence.” The ground of this distinction was the conviction that finite things cannot indicate the nature of the infinite God otherwise than by imperfect

²⁷⁸ Joseph Butler, “The Analogy of Religion,” 233.

²⁷⁹ Henry Mansel, *An Examination*, 88.

²⁸⁰ Henry Mansel, *Prolegomena Logica*, 32.

analogies. “The attributes of God” it was argued “must be represented to our minds, so far as they can be represented at all, under the similitude of the corresponding attributes of man.”...Hence the divine attributes may properly be called mysterious; for, though we believe in the co-existence, we are unable to conceive the manner of their co-existence.²⁸¹

Mansel does not enter into a detailed discussion of Aquinas at this point but he merely retrieves a rather simple point from what has become a highly complicated theological topic concerning divine predication and analogical language in Thomas: namely, God is represented and mediated through human significations.²⁸²

However, like Aquinas, Mansel argues that these signifying terms refer to God on a varying scale of signification. The Infinite and the Absolute, as already mentioned, are negative conceptions that cannot be represented by any reasonable intuition. Mill, for example, suggested that Hamilton, and thus Mansel, employed these terms as meaningless abstractions devoid of any predicates, and as result they must simply include every possible predicate and so devolve into endless contradiction.²⁸³ But on this score, Mill mistook Hamilton’s criticism of these terms for his actual position.²⁸⁴ Mansel was quick to point this out:

Now, in the first place, “the Infinite” and “the Absolute,” even in the sense in which they are both predicable of God, are no more names of God than

²⁸¹ Henry Mansel, “Freethinking—Its History and Tendencies,” 313.

²⁸² Mansel’s argument is not unlike David Burrell’s in his controversial book *Aquinas: God and Action* (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1979). Burrell, for example, writes of Aquinas, “While it may be true to assert that God is wise, therefore, the manner in which we express that fact will fail to exhibit God’s manner of being wise. In fact our mode of expression will give a false impression because we cannot say anything about God’s wisdom without thereby showing it to be an accident of a subject. Thus even acceptable predicates will fall short of describing God” (25). Burrell argues that Aquinas’ discussion of compositeness, simplicity and limitlessness in God is an attempt to speak linguistically about God and not substantively (16). This is similar, I would argue, to how Mansel uses “logical essence” in the preceding quote.

²⁸³ J. S. Mill, *An Examination of Sir William Hamilton’s Philosophy*, 46. Mill suggested that if the absolute and infinite are employed this way, one would need to follow Hegel and his reconciliation of opposites and contradictions through the process of dialectic.

²⁸⁴ Hamilton criticized the notion of the absolute in philosophers such as Cousins and Schelling. For Schelling, according to Hamilton, the absolute could be comprehended through the intellectual intuition. But for Hamilton, this represents the annihilation of consciousness and its most basic laws.

“the creature” and the “finite” are names of men. They are the names of certain attributes, which further inquiry may, perhaps, show to belong to God and to no other being, but which do not in their signification express this, and do not constitute our primary idea of God, which is that of a Person.²⁸⁵

The terms “Absolute” and “Infinite” are used by Mansel in a manner that is not unlike David Burrell’s understanding of Aquinas. That is, Burrell argues that Aquinas investigates the simplicity, compositeness and limitedness of God as a linguistic exercise to mark off God’s otherness, but the terms themselves provide no positive conception.²⁸⁶ At least for Mansel, these terms cannot be related analogically to anything in human experience.

But this is obviously not true for all the attributes of God, such as His goodness, wisdom and justice, and it was on this score that Mansel had to prove that his theory of regulative truth of Scripture could still reliably speak of God in a manner that was not entirely misleading. Again in a manner that is similar to Aquinas,²⁸⁷ Mansel argues that we know of God’s goodness, love and wisdom, however imperfectly, through human and finite representations of these virtues:

We have no immediate intuition of the Divine attributes, even as phenomena; we only infer their existence and nature from certain similar attributes of which we are immediately conscious in ourselves...Our knowledge of God, originally derived from personal consciousness, receives accession from two other sources (Revelation and the World).²⁸⁸

²⁸⁵ Henry Mansel, *Philosophy of the Conditioned, Comprising Some Remarks on Sir William Hamilton’s Philosophy and on Mr. J. S. Mill’s Examination of that Philosophy* (London: Alexander Strahan Publisher, 1866), 90, 91.

²⁸⁶ David Burrell, *Aquinas*, 16.

²⁸⁷ “Now since our intellect knows God from creatures, it knows Him as far as creatures represent Him, and is like Him, so far as it possesses some perfection: yet not so far as to represent Him as something of the same species or genus, but as the excelling source of whose form the effects fall short, although they derive some kind of likeness thereto, even as the forms of inferior bodies represent the power of the sun...Therefore, the aforesaid names signify the divine substance, but in an imperfect manner, even as creatures represent it imperfectly.” Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, part 1, question 13, article 2.

²⁸⁸ Henry Mansel, *Philosophy of the Conditioned*, 88.

While the goodness, love and wisdom of God are only intelligible to humanity through human analogies, Mansel is at pains to emphasize that these humanly understood virtues do not exhaust the manner in which they exist in God. As with the Infinite and the Absolute, Mansel's concern is that finite definitions of God will be used to measure God as He appears in Scripture:

The main foundation of skeptical arguments, both in ancient and modern times, against the existence of moral and intellectual attributes in God, has been the assumption, that these attributes, if they exist at all, must be literally the same in God as they are in man, and may be reasoned about in the same manner.²⁸⁹

The problem that critics of the Scriptures raise relates precisely to this point: how can the humanly depicted God in the Bible—passionate, angry, jealous—be united with the supposedly stable virtues of love, goodness and justice?

Spinoza's answer to this question was to suggest that the Scriptures represent God in this way in order to quicken and excite moral sentiment, though these representations inevitably obscure the truth of God's character. Mansel agrees with Spinoza that such depictions of God have moral and religious benefits, but he is unwilling to sever the connection between these representations and God's actual character:

There is a religious influence to be imparted to us by the thought of God's anger, no less than by that of His punishments; by the thought of His love, no less than by that of His benefits: that both, inadequate and human as they are, yet dimly indicate some corresponding reality in the Divine nature; and that to merge one in the other is not to gain a purer representation of God as He is, but only to mutilate that under which He has been pleased to reveal Himself.²⁹⁰

²⁸⁹ Henry Mansel, *A Letter to Goldwin Smith*, 34.

²⁹⁰ Henry Mansel, *The Limits of Religious Thought*, 223.

Mansel's denial of a "purer representation" does not mean that God does not somehow supersede His representations but only that humanity cannot seek Him beyond these signs:

We do not suppose that he sees with eyes or hears with ears, and we have no direct knowledge of any other mode of seeing or hearing. But that language is regulatively true, as stating the fact, that God has a knowledge of what we do and say; though the manner of that knowledge is unknown to us...But when we speak of the anger or the pity of God, we do not mean that He is affected in precisely the same manner as we are when we feel those passions, and yet we have no positive conception of any other manner. Here again the statement is regulatively true, as expressing God's relation to us to such an extent and in such a manner as we are capable of understanding.²⁹¹

The regulative truth of these figures is not emptied of all claims to the truth; in fact they speak truthfully of God in the fullest sense in which humans can understand Him. And naturally, the language of the Bible admits of varying degrees of analogy:

I do not believe that the anger and pity of God are figures in the same sense in which the hand and the eye are figures; nor do I believe that the power and the wisdom and the goodness of God can be called figures, as his anger and pity might perhaps in a wide sense be called so.²⁹²

Yet all of these representations are accommodated, in one sense or another, to the capacity of human understanding. Outside of these representations, Mansel argues, nothing at all can be known about God's essence: "The mind is thus unable to frame for itself any speculative representation of the divine essence."²⁹³ Furthermore, the images and words of Scripture are fixed in a manner that cannot be further adapted or accommodated to particular times or inclinations:

It is obvious, indeed, that the theory of an adaptation of divine truths to human faculties entirely changes its significance, as soon as we attempt to

²⁹¹ Henry Mansel, *A Letter to Goldwin Smith*, 32.

²⁹² Henry Mansel, *A Letter to Goldwin Smith*, 33.

²⁹³ Henry Mansel, *Limits of Religious Thought*, 127.

give a further adaptation to the adapted symbol itself;—to modify into a still lower truth that which is itself a modification of a higher. The instant we undertake to say that this or that speculative or practical interpretation is the only real meaning of that which Scripture represents to us under a different image, we abandon at once the supposition of an accommodation to the necessary limits of human thought, and virtually admit that the ulterior significance of the representation falls as much within those limits as the representation itself. Thus interpreted, the principle no longer offers the slightest safeguard against Rationalism;—nay, it becomes identified with the fundamental vice of rationalism itself;—that of explaining away what we are unable to comprehend.²⁹⁴

Mansel was aware that his theory was separated only by a slim margin from the rationalism that he sought to criticize. The words of Scripture hover between these “higher” and “lower” referents, and while the original accommodation makes a divine truth comprehensible in a regulative manner, any further attempt to adjust the image to fit it into a speculative understanding of God unravels the entire purpose of Scripture. Scripture for Mansel is paradoxical: it is adapted to human minds and to this degree fluid; yet at the same time, it is rigid in its accommodated signification and remains capable of perplexing the readers to which it is accommodated.²⁹⁵

Clearly Mansel’s view of the regulative truth of Scripture allows for the truthful reference of Scripture’s language. In fact, he employs the theory precisely to provide a manner in which all of Scripture can speak truthfully, even when its images and depictions of God appear to violate certain rational principles. It is true that the coherence between scriptural language and the character of God is dependent upon faith—the Christian hopes and believes that these images correspond to God—even though the manner of this correspondence may escape the capacity of human reason. Mansel might

²⁹⁴ Henry Mansel, *Limits of Religious Thought*, 183.

²⁹⁵ In this way, Mansel follows Butler in arguing that Scripture’s difficulties form part of the Christian’s moral and intellectual trial on earth: “It is reasonable to believe that, in matters of belief as well as of practice, God has not thought fit to annihilate the free will of man; but has permitted speculative difficulties to exist as the trial and the discipline of sharp and subtle intellects, as He has permitted moral temptations to form the trial and the discipline of strong and eager passions.” *The Limits of Religious Thought*, 178.

have been more precise on the topic of analogy; at times, he suggests that human language “dimly” represents God or will not be “wholly unlike” God in the end. These are not definite terms, and they admit of categorical confusion when cast in the broader theological discussion of analogy. At most Mansel speaks of God’s “intention” to represent Himself in such a manner, and it is in this way that the analogy is strongest: in Scripture we clearly perceive God’s intention, which bears upon His character and being, but they also hover behind the foreground of God’s intended mode of communication. His imprecision in this regard might have been deliberate, or perhaps he did not foresee the consequences of a more subtle treatment of the topic.²⁹⁶ He was happy to recognize his position in both Butler and Aquinas, two figures who approached analogical reasoning in markedly different fashions. It is possible that Mansel’s view of analogy has more in common with Barth’s *Analogia Fidei* than with Aquinas’ *Analogia Entis*. But Mansel was not aware of the supposed stakes of this dispute, and his concerns, I suggest, were not remote from either thinker.²⁹⁷ So while his theory of regulative truth may have appeared to some as a risk, it is clear that in this theory Mansel was searching for a framework in order to defend the Scriptures against moral criticisms of Christian doctrine and the scriptural witness.

²⁹⁶ While analogy does not receive a long treatment by Mansel, and his references to the scholastic are slight, it seems Pusey consulted him on fine points of scholastic philosophy. In a letter, for example, in 1867, Mansel replies to Pusey’s question about the role of substance and materiality in Eucharistic theology. Mansel quotes references Suarez, Scotus and *The Sentences* but laments that he cannot find the exact reference for the discussion: “I was looking in Scotus and *The Sentences* but I was unable to find it this morning.” Letter to E. B. Pusey, MS. PUS 51.16 (Oxford: Pusey House Library, 1866).

²⁹⁷ The recent trend is to downplay the apparent conflict between Barth and Aquinas on analogy. David Burrell, Eugene Rogers and Timothy Furry are a few examples of theologians who argue that both Barth and Aquinas are primarily driven by the priority of revelation, Scripture and theological knowledge through the incarnation of Christ.

3.3.3 *Scripture and Morality*

J. S. Mill's critique of Mansel, while covering the whole range of his philosophy, seemed to center on this very topic of divine and human morality. It is fair to say that regardless of the outcome of the debate, Mill managed to frame the issue in a memorable fashion that survived among even orthodox readers of Mansel. Rather than review this debate extensively, I briefly argue how Mill's criticism seemed to miss the mark on precisely this issue of analogy.

Writing in 1894, the prominent evangelical theologian R. W. Dale fully endorsed Mill's critique: "I wholly agree with the criticism of Mr. John Stuart Mill on the famous Bampton Lecture of Mr. Mansel: 'Language has no meaning for the words Just, Merciful, Benevolent, save that in which we predicate them of our fellow creatures.'"²⁹⁸ Of course, Dale was hardly sympathetic with Mill's overall philosophy, but on this point he sensed that Mansel was pushing God into an intolerably voluntarist mode. To be sure, Mansel had no difficulty affirming Butler's maxim that God's "moral government must be a scheme quite beyond our comprehension."²⁹⁹ But like Butler, for Mansel there were clear indications of this governance written into the character of created life, and these created realities—in this case, human virtues—somehow shadowed forth God's life, though in a way that is imperfect.

Ironically, it would seem that when Mill criticized Mansel, he thought he was criticizing long-held theological views that "God's ways are not our ways." In other words, it was not Mansel's conclusions that made him offensive but his attempt to describe these views in modern philosophical language: "the novelty is in presenting this conclusion as a corollary from the most advanced doctrines of modern philosophy—from

²⁹⁸ R. W. Dale, *Christian Doctrine: A Series of Discourses* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1894), 238.

²⁹⁹ Joseph Butler, *The Analogy*, 214.

the true theory of the powers and limitations of the human mind, on religious and on all other subjects.”³⁰⁰ In this light it is not quite clear what Dale thought he was dissenting from. For Mill, theology and philosophy were incommensurate worlds, and Mansel’s lectures represented a particularly bold attempt to extend religious heteronomy into the secular sphere. Mill played on this image of Mansel’s authoritarian God, and his famous epithet seemed to sum up the entire debate: “I will call no being good, who is not what I mean when I apply that epithet to my fellow creatures.”³⁰¹ Of course, as I have already shown, Mansel was not a pure voluntarist, and he made an express point of emphasizing the analogy between divine and human virtues and morality. Yet he could not reduce one to the other, for the obvious reason that Scripture provides an account of God that presents clear problems for any such reduction.

Still, he did not discard the analogy in his defence against Mill, and he cautioned Mill that they were discussing this issue from vastly different perspectives.³⁰² For Mansel, the conditions of human morality are created: “(morality) in its human character, depends upon conditions not coeternal with God, but created along with man.”³⁰³ Mansel made this argument in opposition to both Mill and Kant, whom he interpreted as holding to an immutable and universal form of morality, however differently construed,³⁰⁴

³⁰⁰ J. S. Mill, *An Examination of Sir William Hamilton’s Philosophy*, 90.

³⁰¹ J. S. Mill, *An Examination of Sir William Hamilton’s Philosophy*, 103.

³⁰² Henry Mansel, *The Philosophy of the Conditioned*, 147.

³⁰³ Henry Mansel, *The Limits of Religious Thought*, 148. Though it should be noted that Mansel believed the human moral sense to be an a priori form given before experience. However, characteristic of his method, Mansel denied the moral sense any real positive content but rather argued that morality builds experientially upon the a priori moral sense and accrues a particular character in the course of living. “Its nature, like that of the tree, cannot be changed by the soil in which it is planted, though its growth may be advanced or stunted by this or other accidental circumstances.” Henry Mansel, *Metaphysics or the Philosophy of Consciousness, Phenomenal or Real*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1866), 260.

³⁰⁴ Henry Mansel, *The Limits of Religious Thought*, 146. In some sense Mansel and Mill were both moral empiricists in opposition to Kant. Mill argued that “moral feelings are not innate, but acquired” [J. S. Mill, *Utilitarianism, Liberty [and] Representative Government* (London: Dent, 1960), 27], and for Mill, the

whereas Mansel argues that while human morality has its origin in God, it acquires particular and contingent forms in light of created existence.³⁰⁵ This is not to say that these forms are relative in some absolute sense but only that all human action is situated in particular circumstances.³⁰⁶ In a human context, the word “good,” for example, has a “community of meanings,” whether it is embodied by a mother, daughter, ruler or employer.³⁰⁷ The argument that the good must always mean the same thing for each person, in Mansel’s eyes, is simply not true of reality.

Mansel then extends this analogy to God:

So, again, there is a divine mercy and there is a human mercy; but God is merciful in such a manner as is fitting compatibly with the righteous government of the universe; and man is merciful in a certain limited range, the exercise of the attribute being guided by considerations affecting the welfare of society or of individuals.³⁰⁸

Mill’s criticism that Mansel’s God is not describable according to humanly derived notions of goodness is inaccurate, at least on a theoretical level. However, for epistemological reasons, and just as much for scriptural reasons, Mansel is forced to place a distance or imperfection within this analogy, which, as I have argued previously,

content of moral ends and goals must await deliberation within the empirical circumstances of experience. Furthermore, Mill defended utilitarian morality against the charge of being godless: “If it be meant that utilitarianism does not recognize the revealed will of God as the supreme law of morals, I answer, that a utilitarian who believes in the perfect goodness and wisdom of God necessarily believes that whatever God has thought fit to reveal on the subject of moral, must fulfill the requirements of utility in a supreme degree” (*Utilitarianism*, 20). Mill even upholds the golden rule. There may have been a large area of overlap between Mansel and Mill regarding the actual contents of morality—Mansel certainly did not believe that Old Testament violence was a sanction for human violence—but it was Mill’s insistence that God’s character must be fitted to human conceptions of morality that Mansel could not tolerate. In some sense, Mill’s invocation of God is a supreme instance of utility; that is, God is useful if He fits into the general model of utilitarian philosophy.

³⁰⁵ See Donald Mackinnon’s *A Study in Ethical Theory* for a well-articulated contrast between the ethical thinking of Kant and Butler. Mackinnon demonstrates the weaknesses of Kant’s universal account and argues for a more particularistic approach as seen in Butler.

³⁰⁶ Christopher Miles Coope’s article on this debate between Mansel and Mill points out that, in at least this instance, Mansel’s more subtle and varied construal of human morality is closer to contemporary understanding. “Good-bye to the problem of evil, hello to the problem of veracity,” *Religious Studies* 37, no. 4 (2001): 373–396, 379.

³⁰⁷ Henry Mansel, *The Philosophy of the Conditioned*, 168.

³⁰⁸ Henry Mansel, *The Philosophy of the Conditioned*, 165.

is a legitimate position within the theological tradition, whether stemming from Aquinas or Butler.

Yet, to the extent that Mansel's modifications of the divine and human analogy permit a level of unintelligibility, Mill was perhaps right that this idea can be used by theologians to defend what Mill would regard as indefensible actions carried out by God:

The divine power is always interpreted in a completely human signification, but the Divine goodness and justice must be understood to be such only in an unintelligible sense. Is it unfair to surmise that this is because those who speak in the name of God, have need of the human conception of his power, since an idea which can overawe and enforce obedience must address itself to real feelings; but are content that his goodness should be conceived only as something inconceivable, because they are so often required to teach doctrines respecting him which conflict irreconcilably with all goodness that we can conceive?³⁰⁹

In this respect, Mansel did not shy away from defending what can only be termed the violence of God in the Scriptures, in particular in the Old Testament. It is true, at least in the lectures and his philosophical writings, that Mansel defends these difficult texts—for example, Israel's invasion of Canaan³¹⁰—with little theological explanation as to how they might be understood within a larger scriptural framework. In chapter four I make this case more carefully. For now it is important to note that while it may appear that he allows these texts to simply hover as deliberate offences to the form of reasoning that he criticizes, Mansel considers the difficulty of these representations of God as critical to central Christian claims.³¹¹

³⁰⁹ J. S. Mill, *An Examination of Sir William Hamilton's Philosophy*, 104.

³¹⁰ Henry Mansel, *Limits of Religious Thought*, 29.

³¹¹ See Christopher Seitz's essay "Canon and Conquest: The Character of the God of the Hebrew Bible," in *Divine Evil?: The Moral Character of the God of Abraham*, eds. Michael Bergman, Michael J. Murray, and Michael C. Rea (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 292. Seitz argues that difficult portions of the Scripture like the Canaanite invasion can be read within a canonical comprehensive of the Bible that presents a coherent and unified picture of God's character—just and loving, merciful and severe.

For example, when Maurice speaks of the atonement, he derides the notion that God could be angry and in need of some kind of satisfaction, and he suggests that early Christian understandings of the atonement were of a different kind: “They have believed that He rescued them out of the power of an enemy, by yielding to his power, not that He rescued them out of the hand of God by paying a penalty to Him.”³¹² Along these lines Maurice suggests that “Christ satisfied the Father by presenting the image of His own holiness and love,”³¹³ not by bearing the penalty of sin, as if God needed satisfying. The sacrifice of the Son is an eternal reality that becomes concrete in the life of Christ, a rendering of the atonement that is made possible by Maurice’s Platonic metaphysics.³¹⁴

Mansel, however, argued that Maurice’s theology of the atonement was driven by an aversion to the plain texts of Scripture that depict God’s anger and, furthermore, the sacrificial character of Christ’s death. In his response to Maurice, Mansel parallels Maurice’s words with relevant Scripture passages:

I believe that if God cannot in any sense “be angry,” and therefore does not “need to be propitiated,” then is Christ not “the propitiation for our sins”? I believe that if it is inconsistent with Divine Justice that the innocent should suffer for the sins of the guilty,” then did Christ not suffer, “the just for the unjust”? I believe that if “it is more reasonable to believe that God forgives our sins freely,” without any satisfaction or redemption, then is it not true that “we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins”? I believe that if, “because we cannot conceive how the punishment of one can do away with the guilt of another,” we are therefore justified in denying that it is so, then is it not true that “with His stripes we are healed”? And I believe that all these consequents are opposed no less to the language of Scripture, than to the teaching of that Church to whose Articles Mr. Maurice and I have both subscribed.³¹⁵

³¹² Frederick Denison Maurice, *Theological Essays* (London: James Clarke & Co., 1957), 112.

³¹³ Frederick Denison Maurice, *Theological Essays*, 113.

³¹⁴ Torben Christensen, *The Divine Order: A Study in F. D. Maurice’s Theology* (Leiden, E. J. Brill, 1973), 212.

³¹⁵ Henry Mansel, *An Examination of The Rev. F. D. Maurice’s Strictures*, 45.

This is undoubtedly a severe criticism of Maurice's position, and it is likely that Mansel regarded Maurice's theology as a capitulation to the concerns of people like Mill. It is well known that Maurice was deeply concerned with drawing the "young men" of England³¹⁶ who had strayed from the faith back into the fold. But Mansel's concern was that such a method of accommodation would only place the Christian within a continuing cycle of insoluble difficulties. While it may appear at times that his method shows little concern for the scruples of the inquirer or the doubter, Mansel, as much as Maurice, directed his work toward those who were troubled by unbelief:

It is painful, but at the same time instructive, to trace the gradual progress by which an unstable disciple often tears off strip by strip the wedding garment of his faith,—scarce conscious the while of his own increasing nakedness,—and to mark how the language of Christian belief may remain almost untouched, when the substance and the life have departed from it. While Philosophy speaks nothing but the language of Christianity, we may be tempted to think that the two are really one; that our own speculations are but leading us to Christ by another and a more excellent way. Many a young aspirant after a philosophical faith, trusts himself to the trackless ocean of rationalism in the spirit of the too-confident Apostle: "Lord, bid me to come unto thee on the water." And for a while he knows not how deep he sinks, till the treacherous surface on which he treads is yielding on every side, and the dark abyss of utter unbelief is yawning to swallow him up. Well is it indeed with those who, even in that last fearful hour, can yet cry, "Lord, save me!" and can feel that supporting hand stretched out to grasp them, and hear that voice, so warning, yet so comforting, "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?"³¹⁷

It is perhaps not quite apparent just how far Mansel had considered Maurice to have wandered out on this "treacherous surface." In all likelihood, comments like these were directed more toward Mansel's contemporaries like Francis Newman and Benjamin Jowett, figures who appear frequently in his lectures. But to be sure, Mansel perceived in Maurice a more moderate attempt to modify traditional Christian doctrines with a set of

³¹⁶ Frederick Denison Maurice, *What Is Revelation?*, 183.

³¹⁷ Henry Mansel, *Limits of Religious Thought*, 71.

overriding moral concerns, concerns that Scripture itself raises. In cases such as these, Mansel writes in his lectures, “Theology gains nothing; but she is in danger of losing everything.”³¹⁸ What theology stands to lose, presumably, is its ability to articulate a view of God that derives its coherence and contours from its own authorized sources. Naturally this includes reason and the investigation of the world, but there is a certain ordering to these sources that Mansel tries to arrange so that the Scriptures are allowed to speak truthfully and, in his own words, plainly.

3.4 Conclusion

The difficulty in reading Mansel theologically as I have done is that, while his thought bears directly upon theological thinking, he does not frequently engage traditional theological topics head on. In this way, the vast majority of his work reads more as a theological method than as a constructive theology. Maurice, in *What Is Revelation?*, pleads with Mansel that if he does not like Maurice’s theology of the atonement, he should at least provide his own account.³¹⁹ Further, Maurice argues that even the Scriptures need filling out and application, which must undoubtedly be a function of reason working in concert with revelation.³²⁰ Mansel recognized this as a weakness, but he understood it as his vocation to risk the appearance of being theologically thin in order to clarify how he thought theological knowledge should be ordered:

In one respect, indeed, I have perhaps departed from the customary language of the pulpit, to a greater extent than was absolutely necessary;—namely, in dealing with the ideas common to Theology and Metaphysics in the terms of the latter, rather than in those of the former. But there is a line of argument, in which the vague generalities of the Absolute and the

³¹⁸ Henry Mansel, *Limits of Religious Thought*, 10.

³¹⁹ Frederick Denison Maurice, *What Is Revelation?*, 203.

³²⁰ Frederick Denison Maurice, *What Is Revelation?*, 203.

Infinite may be more reverently and appropriately employed than the sacred names and titles of God. For we almost instinctively shrink back from the recklessness which thrusts forward, on every occasion, the holiest names and things, to be tossed to and fro, and trampled under foot, in the excitement of controversy. We feel that the name of Him whom we worship may not lightly be held up as a riddle for prying curiosity to puzzle over... We feel that, though God is indeed, in His incomprehensible Essence, absolute and infinite, it is not as the Absolute and Infinite that He appeals to the love and the fear and the reverence of His creatures.³²¹

Given Mansel's long appeals to the Church fathers, his reliance on Aquinas and the Anglican divines, it seems implausible that he would have any prejudice against dogmatic theology as such. Rather, it is more the case that his peculiar form of skepticism was intended as a ground-clearing exercise in an intellectual climate where philosophical and theological lines had become exceedingly blurred. One might make the case that this has always been the case in Christian history: Platonism in the early Church and Aristotelianism in the late Middle Ages would seem like obvious examples. But it can also be argued that 19th century England, along with the continent, was in a novel circumstance where the traditional status of Christian claims was not entirely clear. Mansel labeled Hegel as a pantheist and a pagan, but if he was either, he was a pagan who placed the Trinity at the heart of his philosophy along with the Incarnation. Likewise, what was one to make of Matthew Arnold's apostle Paul or Jesus, especially considering his ambiguous place in the Church of England? To speak in the abstract about faith and reason, theology and philosophy in this context is potentially confusing and even misleading. These concepts were shifting rapidly within a complicated matrix that spanned figures like Locke, Hume, Kant and Hegel and the just as complex tradition of English theology. In *The Secular Age*, Charles Taylor tracks the proliferation of what he calls "middle positions" in Victorian England, which claimed to be more reasonable or

³²¹ Henry Mansel, *Limits of Religious Thought*, 44, 45.

purified forms of Christianity. But he remarks, “They look rational within a certain framework, indeed, but this framework attracts us for a host of reasons, including ethical ones...that of a free, invulnerable, disengaged agent.”³²² Taylor’s comment is only intended to show that frameworks of rationality carry with them a number of considerations that may have little to do with the “purely rational,” whatever this might mean. This was certainly the case in Mansel’s England, and the strength of his thought was the insight that indeed rival frameworks were competing, however traditional or Christian they might appear.

It is true then, in Maurice Cowling’s sense, that Mansel represented a theological retreat, but this was not, as some claim, because he failed to unite faith and reason. He had a place for reason in theological thinking, and he belabored this point again and again: reason is capable of describing the limits of the human mind and showing in what ways higher truths, grasped in faith, might be represented in human terms. Of course, this configuration of faith and reason did not and probably will continue to not satisfy those who criticize from the outset his commitment to Scripture. Nevertheless, his retreat was not into a fideistic world devoid of any appeal to reason; much more, his retreat represented an effort to articulate a consistently scriptural worldview within emerging and vying frameworks of rationality that were, in many ways, incommensurate with the scriptural “scheme”. This scheme, in Butler’s sense, has a rationality of its own that may or may not cohere with rival frameworks, but on its own terms it is capable, within certain constraints, of describing the world and God’s activity within it. In this regard, Scripture was profoundly reasonable for Mansel, in its manner of accommodation to the character of human life in the world. This will be the subject of the fourth chapter.

³²² Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 387.

Finally, it should be noted that Mansel's skepticism should not be confused with a simply pious, humble disposition or an anti-dogmatic attitude. He derided Tennyson's famous phrase that "honest doubt" has "more faith than half the creeds" as yet another veiling of "a spirit of rudeness and bitterness towards the clergy in general"³²³, a spirit that Mansel sensed was not only dubious of but also hostile toward inflexible creedal and scriptural claims. But for Mansel, if skepticism led to humility of mind, such humility allowed the ordinary Christian to embrace in faith those aspects of revelation that, in one way or another, confounded many of the instincts of the age. In this sense, Mansel's skepticism carries a strong affinity for what Williams' describes as typical of classical Anglicanism. Writers such as Hooker, Andrews and Herbert—I would add Browne, Berkeley and Butler—were not indifferent toward doctrine, but rather, the "great doctrinal themes are a steady backdrop, sensed and believed but not to be pulled center-stage for debate and explanation."³²⁴ It is almost the case for Mansel that it is irreverent and in poor taste to "toss to and fro" the mysteries of God. But it was not the case for Mansel, as it was not the case for early Anglican writers, that these doctrinal themes were to be doubted; rather, they were to be wholly affirmed and passively received.

What separates Mansel's skepticism from many of the older Anglican divines such as Hooker and Andrews is that his passive reception of Christian doctrine no longer depended upon the assumption of a society ordered upon Christian principles. Instead, he grounded his skepticism in an epistemological and theological frame that took for granted the presence of competing truth claims in a pluralistic setting that have come to

³²³ Mansel, *Free Thinking*, 333.

³²⁴ Rowan Williams, "General Introductions," in *Love's Redeeming Work: The Anglican Quest for Holiness*, comp. Geoffrey Rowell, Kenneth Stevenson and Rowan Williams (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), xxv.

characterize the modern world. To this end, Mansel was a descendant of the Tractarian movement, and he represented its oppositional posture toward an increasingly secularized society. But the fact that many Tractarian figures or descendants such as Mozley and Newman were unable to recognize their position in Mansel's lectures would also seem to indicate that Mansel's position did not necessarily symbolize the spirit of the movement.³²⁵ Williams notes that the Tractarian movement unwittingly contained a liberal trajectory: "Once they had claimed the right to redefine Anglican identity from within, they opened the flood gate to an attitude of mind that assumed it was acceptable to debate the nature of this identity with practically no boundaries set in advance, and to opt for a version that you found suitable."³²⁶ While the Tractarians remained doctrinally serious, Williams suggests that this latent attitude generated a skepticism that was more akin to his first, enlightenment, variety, "a skepticism that focused on how I am liable to be deceived by history and community. This was an attitude of mind more liable to collude with a reluctance to believe anything that does not make sense in primarily individual and experiential terms."³²⁷ In this context, Anglican moralism and ritualism developed in a "growing haziness about the integral theological vision within which the Church as a whole, never mind Anglicanism in particular, operated."³²⁸

It is not clear how Mansel's skepticism fits into Williams' account. Self-consciously he cast himself in the mold of classical Anglican theology represented by figures like Hooker, Copleston and Butler. But historically he was a product of the

³²⁵ In a letter to E. B. Pusey announcing Mansel's sudden death in 1871, Henry Parry Liddon praises Mansel's role in the establishment of the "positive truth" but immediately qualifies his commendation with the caveat "whether he was right or wrong in his use of the Hamiltonian philosophy in his Bampton Lectures." Hamilton, in this case, represented the skeptical aspects of Mansel's work that made even his closest allies uncomfortable. H. P. Liddon to E. B. Pusey, August 2, 1871 (Oxford: Pusey House Library).

³²⁶ Rowan Williams, *Love's Redeeming Work*, xxx.

³²⁷ Rowan Williams, *Love's Redeeming Work*, xxx.

³²⁸ Rowan Williams, *Love's Redeeming Work*, xxx.

Tractarian movement, however he might have differed from its various expressions. While Cowling views Mansel's skepticism as a precursor to the Anglican theological "anarchy" of the 20th century—perhaps in the way that Williams traces this development through the Tractarian movement—what Mansel desired to offer was the possibility of a scriptural worldview in a society that had begun to see the world otherwise. Unlike Williams' characterization of Tractarian insularity, Mansel struggled to situate his traditional Christian convictions within the emerging philosophical context of the 19th century. In other words, despite retreating in a certain way, Mansel was still deeply committed to the public exchange of ideas without altering the shape of Christian orthodoxy. Mansel's skepticism was not a particular cast of mind or an attitude toward doctrinal theology but a structural attempt to make space for the Scriptures, rooted in the life of the Church, to form and describe God's created world and His relationship to His people. In this sense, Mansel was very much a traditional Anglican, but what he offered was also a new possibility for understanding reality within the collapse of traditional metaphysics and the rapid rise of unbelief.

Chapter Four: Mansel and the Theology of Scripture

4.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I laid out Mansel's epistemological skepticism and his corresponding theory of regulative truth. The main purpose of these theories for Mansel, I argued, was to protect the words of Scripture and the whole range of the Scriptures in their capacity to speak truthfully about the Christian God. In addition, I placed these claims within the criticisms of Mansel's theological and philosophical opponents who argued, from a variety of perspectives, that Mansel's ideas achieved the opposite effect of their intention; that is, they actually separated God from the scriptural account and rendered God unknowable and distant from His own witness. These criticisms, I believe, are based on a simplified and hasty judgment upon Mansel's argument, and they pay little heed not only to his understanding of analogy but, even more, to the theological vision that upholds his understanding of the limitations of human thought and the nature of scriptural language. While admittedly, Mansel's more positive theological views must be cobbled together from the whole range of his writings, a consistent theological picture does emerge within Mansel's work that cannot be separated from his philosophical positions. Part of the difficulty in reading Mansel in the past is that his theological views have been limited to his Bampton Lectures almost exclusively, while little attention has been paid to his other works. In this chapter I show a fuller picture of Mansel's theology by engaging his more theological writings along with his sermons and letters in an effort to articulate his theological vision, something many of his critics claimed did not exist.³²⁹

³²⁹ The following are a list of titles by Henry Manse that I refer to throughout the chapter: *Essays and Reviews*, ed. William Thomson (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1862); *The Spirit a Divine Person*,

The sermons and other works by Mansel referred to in this chapter were all written in the period following the lectures, in which he was forced to clarify the features of his theological thinking.³³⁰ These works, read in conjunction with his better known philosophical writings, I argue, do not describe a world where God is isolated within the non-realist language of revelation; rather, they confirm the notion that Mansel's theory of regulative truth sought to place the world within the scriptural account of God's personal and providential engagement with creation.

Despite initial acclaim for the lectures, Mansel quickly fell into disrepute within Victorian theological publications, in large measure because of the ill association between his skepticism or agnosticism and the materialism of Herbert Spencer.³³¹ This is

to be Worshipped and Glorified, A Sermon Preached in the Church of the St. Mary-The-Virgin, Oxford, on Friday, Feb. 20, 1863 (Oxford and London: John Henry and James Parker, 1863); *The Witness of the Church to the Promise of Christ's Coming: A Sermon Preached in the Cathedral Church of Canterbury, on St. Peter's Day, 1864* (Oxford and London: John Henry and James Parker, 1864); "The Conflict and Defeat in Eden," in *The Conflict of Christ in His Church with Spiritual Wickedness in High Places. Sermons Preached During...Lent, 1866, in Oxford*, ed. Samuel Wilberforce (Oxford: James Parker and Co, 1866); "Revelation: iii," in Henry Mansel and Sidney Gedge, *Two Sermons Preached in Peterborough Cathedral, On August 30, 1868, the Sunday Succeeding the Entertment of the Right Rev. Francis Jeune, D.C.L., Lord Bishop of Peterborough* (Oxford: James Parker and Co, 1868); "Personal Responsibility of Man, as Individually Dealt with by God," in *Personal Responsibility of Man: Sermons Preached During the Season of Lent, 1868, in Oxford*, ed. Samuel Wilberforce et al. (Oxford: James Parker & Co., 1869); "It is Finished: A Sermon Preached by the Very Rev. Dr. Mansel, Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral on Good Friday Evening, March 26th, 1869," in *Preaching for the Million: Three Sermons* (London: James Paul, 1869); *Higher Vocation: A Sermon Preached by the Dean of St. Paul's, Preached in St. Paul's Cathedral on Sunday Evening, February 27, 1870* (London: James Paul, 1870); "St. Matthew's Gospel: Commentary and Critical Notes, Chapter i-xxvi," in *The Holy Bible According to the Authorized Version A.D. 1611, with an Explanatory and Critical Commentary*, ed. F.C. Cook, vol. 1 (London: John Murray, 1878); *Labourers in the Vineyard: A Sermon Preached by the Dean of St. Paul's (H.L. Mansel), Preached in St. Paul's Cathedral, on Sunday Evening, January 22nd, 1871* (London: James Paul, 1871).

³³⁰ In *The Quarterly Review* an article on Mansel appeared in 1885. The author here makes the following reference to Mansel's sermons: "Mansel on being appointed 'Select Preacher,' viz. from October 1860 till June 1862, availed himself of the opportunity to give breadth and symmetry to his philosophical system by enlarging on certain departments of his great subject which he had before but slightly treated. His sermons at this time bear the following titles:— 'Faith and Sight,'—'Faith and Reason,'—'Moral Sense in Theology,'—and 'Man's Relation to God.'" There is, however, no record of these sermons being published. Anon, "Dean Mansel," *The Quarterly Review* 159 (January 1885).

³³¹ Michael Wolff helpfully places *The Limits of Religious Thought* within the context of other notable works in 1859 as they appear in a list of 25 prominent journals: "Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* was reviewed in twenty-two of our twenty-five periodicals; Fitzgerald's *Rubaiyat*, on the other hand, was reviewed by only one. Darwin's *Origin* was noticed at least in twenty-two periodicals and *Adam Bede* was, for a mere novel, exceptionally widely noticed, scoring twenty out of twenty-five. Mill's *On Liberty* comes

the image of Mansel's ideas that would endure well into the 20th century and, to the degree that they are still engaged, until the present.³³² However, there is something slightly misleading about this description, and in chapter five I detail Mansel's surprisingly enduring but hidden influence on the British idealism that would take hold of Oxford for a generation. Despite the continual accumulation of negative reviews, Mansel's lectures seemed to exercise an influence that is not easily captured in the publications of the time.³³³ There is real sense that Mansel's early critics, like the later idealists, were inclined toward a more holistic, integrated vision of the world, and Mansel's ideas became a caricatured symbol for the "project of dividing," or marking off, human knowledge of God.

Decades after the publication of the lecture, R. H. Hutton, for example, was still defending Maurice against Mansel's caricatured ambition

to prove that God does not and cannot so unveil Himself to men as Maurice believed, but can only give us "regulative" hints, carefully

next with sixteen out of twenty-five possible reviews, then the Mansel-Maurice controversy with fourteen." Of course, Wolff's representative list does not favor theological reviews. Michael Wolff, "Victorian Reviewers and Cultural Responsibility," 273.

³³² Clement Webb's *A Study of English Thought in England from 1850* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933) provides the now usual summary of Mansel's ideas: "It is by a singular irony of fate that the ingenious champion of the ancient creeds who would fain have put the aspiring human reason helpless under the feet of a wholly transcendent revelation has his niche in the history of philosophy as the immediate forerunner of Herbert Spencer, the most ambitious projector of a system of pure naturalism that the nineteenth century knew" (92).

³³³ R. G. Collingwood in an essay on F. H. Bradley, for example, makes this striking statement: "My suggestion is that Bradley's *Appearance and Reality* is in the first instance a polemic against Mansel. It is from Mansel that Bradley borrows the antithesis of Appearance and Reality; it is against the project of dividing the one from the other that his book is directed, and that project is the task assigned by Mansel to metaphysics in his famous Encyclopaedia Britannica article, which everyone was reading when Bradley was young." R. G. Collingwood, "The Metaphysics of F. H. Bradley," 236. There are other interesting correspondences with Mansel's work. While this is only speculative, the Scottish-Canadian theologian William Robinson Clark, in his book *Witnesses to Christ*, provides a number of arguments in the fifth chapter that are virtually identical to Mansel's views on human consciousness, personality and human knowledge of the infinite and absolute. Clark does not refer to Mansel, but he was a student at Magdalen College in the mid-1860s when Mansel held the Waynflete Chair of Metaphysics. William Robinson Clark, *Witnesses to Christ: A Contribution to Christian Apologetics* (Chicago: McClurg, 1888).

adapted rules of action—working hypotheses concerning Himself—on the assumption of which He directs us for all practical purposes to proceed.³³⁴

Charles Meynell complained that Mansel's ideas "impugned the light of reason"³³⁵ and commissioned the "end of philosophy" so that we may "burn our books."³³⁶ Mansel had shrunk the world and reduced the powers of human reason, a price that was too high or not necessary to pay for the preservation of Christian orthodoxy.

Mansel's epistemological skepticism and theory of regulative truth were tools intended to protect the Christian Scriptures from the pressures of "unbelief," pressures that he regarded as perennial forces that historically have always accompanied the Christian gospel.³³⁷ But more recently, a number of works have appeared that argue that apologetic efforts of theologians to defend the Scriptures have in fact contributed to the decline of a scriptural or Christian worldview. William Abraham's *Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology* is one striking example of a genealogical account of Scripture's demise that, it might seem, would include Mansel as one of its suspects.³³⁸ Abraham argues that over the scope of Church history, epistemological concerns regarding Scripture gained ascension over the early Church's broader, more organic canonical

³³⁴ R. H. Hutton, *Essays on Some of the Modern Guides to English Thought in Matters of Faith* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1891), 326.

³³⁵ Charles Meynell, "The Limits of our Thought," *Rambler* (May 1860: 83–106), 105.

³³⁶ Charles Meynell, "The Limits of our Thought," 106. The words of a writer in *Eclectic Review* are most telling: "The true ally of Christianity, its faithful expositor and its staunchest defender, we shall find, not in a philosophy which curbs and fetters, enfeebles and enslaves, which treads down the human faculties and casts on them suspicion and contempt, but in one elevating, inspiring, and stimulative in tendency, —a philosophy which sees God in man's powers, and honours them because it honours him." Anon., "The Philosophy of the Conditioned," 457.

³³⁷ Mansel's posthumously published lectures on the Gnostic heresies make repeated parallels between early Christian heresies and modern philosophical and biblical criticism. "There are not wanting teachers at the present time who tell us, in the spirit of the Gnostics of old, that dogmas and historical facts are no part of the Christian religion; that there is a spiritual sense in which these things may be understood which is superior to the letter; that we may be Christian in spirit without troubling ourselves about the facts of Christ's earthly life, or the supernatural doctrines connected with His person." Henry Mansel, *The Gnostic Heresies of the First and Second Centuries*, ed. J. B. Lightfoot (London: John Murray, 1875), 78.

³³⁸ William Abraham, *Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology: From the Fathers to Feminism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

criteria. He defines the contrast as follows: “An ecclesial canon is essentially a means of grace: that is, materials, persons, and practices intended to initiate one into the divine life. By contrast, an epistemic norm is essentially a criterion of rationality, justification, and knowledge.”³³⁹ Historically, this transition from ecclesial canon to epistemic norm had to do with the very pressures that concerned Mansel but predated him: concerns about the validity of Christian truth claims and the defense of these claims against rival Christian confessions or rationalist objections.³⁴⁰ In short, the Scriptures came to be the sole locus of canonical authority, divorced from the creedal, liturgical and traditional aspects of Church life.³⁴¹

But the Scriptures, Abraham argues, were not intended to bear this kind of epistemological load, and this shift transformed the manner in which they were traditionally used as they came “to misrepresent anew the canonical heritage of the Church by treating it as an inert datum to be captured at will rather than as a subtle gift of the Holy Spirit which should be appropriated with skill, humility, and divine guidance.”³⁴² The troubling consequences of these epistemological developments is that they

helped precipitate a massive epistemological crisis for Christian intellectuals, which naturally led into Enlightenment theories of knowledge and justification. Equally important, this quest has led to a series of dead ends in modern Christianity, leaving large tracts of it intellectually exhausted and spiritually suffocated.³⁴³

The loss represented here by Abraham’s thesis is the fullness and comprehensiveness of Christian experience, more fully captured in his canonical understanding.

³³⁹ William Abraham, *Canon and Criterion*, 27.

³⁴⁰ William Abraham, *Canon and Criterion*, 208.

³⁴¹ William Abraham, *Canon and Criterion*, 27.

³⁴² William Abraham, *Canon and Criterion*, 22.

³⁴³ William Abraham, *Canon and Criterion*, 21.

Abraham's thesis turns on different themes than Mansel's contemporary critics, but a common feature is the ensuing spiritual impoverishment that can accompany epistemological accounts of Scripture and Christian knowledge. This chapter assesses Mansel's theological views—primarily his anthropology, Christology and account of revelation—in the context of the criticisms previously described, in an effort to show that Mansel's theology is not necessarily bound to the spiritual “suffocation” that Abraham and others have suggested is characteristic of his approach. While Mansel's ideas have survived predominantly as a link in the genealogy of Western unbelief, I argue that his theory of regulative truth provided him with a method to describe God's providential presence as an all-embracing reality, detailed in the Scriptures. It is true that Mansel stands in intellectual proximity to figures like Spencer and Huxley, but his concern to place human history within a scriptural frame challenges our theological narration of ideas to consider the providential context in which they are framed.

4.2 Genealogies of Unbelief

Mansel, like many current writers, had his own genealogical account of the history of unbelief in England and Christian Europe. In his essay on freethinking he documents the passage of Locke's ideas into the hands of 18th century deists, who in turn exercised a profound influence on continental philosophy, especially in Germany.³⁴⁴ Perhaps mindful of his own fate, Mansel was concerned to commend “the personal piety and sincere Christian belief of Locke.”³⁴⁵ Locke's ideas were vulnerable to distortion, but Mansel argues that the deist's extension of Locke required a certain “hostility” of

³⁴⁴ Henry Mansel, “Freethinking.”

³⁴⁵ Henry Mansel, “Freethinking,” 306.

spirit.³⁴⁶ In light of this, Mansel's views on the escalating popularity of German philosophy in England were unambiguous: "a good deal of what is paraded as a demonstration of modern German erudition is in substance a *rechauffe* of the forgotten criticisms of one of our old English deists."³⁴⁷ As in the 18th century, Mansel worried that the Church was once again in a position of temptation:

To such a state we may expect to see the Church of England again reduced, if she consent to listen again to the voice of the charmer, to be allured again by the promise of peace and unity, and to abandon the reaction, which the present century has happily witnessed, towards the Catholic teaching of her earlier and better days.³⁴⁸

In this respect Mansel reflected the views of many high churchmen in England—Tractarian or otherwise—who looked to the 17th century as the golden age of English theology.³⁴⁹

"The voice of the charmer" indicates the theological component of Mansel's understanding of unbelief. While "unbelieving" philosophy has a distinct theoretical or philosophical lineage, Mansel thought that unbelief had a permanent and recurring character:

When we look at the words of the Apostle himself, so framed as to indicate, not the transient form, but the permanent spirit, of the error against which he is contending, we can hardly avoid the conviction that in this, as in so many other of the prophetic passages of Scripture, the witness of the Holy Spirit is designedly extended far beyond the circumstances immediately present to the human vision of the writer, and conveys its direct lesson and warning to all ages of the Church that were yet to come.³⁵⁰

³⁴⁶ Henry Mansel, "Freethinking," 298.

³⁴⁷ Henry Mansel, "Freethinking," 321. This is an account that has large support today. See Henning Graf Reventlow's *The Authority of the Bible and the Rise of the Modern World* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985).

³⁴⁸ Henry Mansel, "Freethinking," 336.

³⁴⁹ Henry Mansel, "Freethinking," 307.

³⁵⁰ Henry Mansel, "The Witness of the Church," 7.

In a sermon on the Church, Mansel writes that “we are unable to tolerate the thought of a supernatural presence of God in the world, manifesting itself at times in glimpses and partial aspects of a purpose beyond or above that which is carried on by the ordinary manifestations of His natural presence.”³⁵¹ The history of unbelief has oscillated between materialist philosophies, the “eternal separation” between God and His creation, and the opposite tendency to elevate the created world to the status of divinity.³⁵²

In this case the “permanent spirit” of error is the enduring desire of human beings to free themselves of their humanity and transcend the humanly accommodated character of revelation. A dissatisfaction with the character of revelation has led to human attempts to build more completed and coherent accounts of reality. In his lectures on the Gnostic heresies, Mansel writes,

The knowledge professed by the Gnostic teachers, on the other hand, was a knowledge designed to subordinate the revelation of Christ to the speculations of human philosophy, a curious inquiry, searching after an apprehension of God, not in what He has revealed of Himself, but in that which He has not revealed; an inquiry which, under the pretence of giving a deeper and more spiritual meaning to the Christian revelation, in fact uprooted its very foundations by making it subservient to theories incompatible with its first principles, theories of human invention, originating in heathen philosophies, and making those philosophies the criterion and end of revelation, instead of regarding revelation as the discovery by God of those truths which human wisdom had desired to see and had not seen.³⁵³

This desire to surpass human limits has a moral character for Mansel that is rooted in humanity’s fall, which represents the drive to overcome our humanity altogether. The perennial nature of this temptation led Mansel to believe that the current crisis of unbelief in his own time would pass, as it always had, more or less, before. Speaking about the

³⁵¹ Henry Mansel, “The Witness of the Church,” 8.

³⁵² Henry Mansel, “The Witness of the Church,” 9.

³⁵³ Henry Mansel, *The Gnostic Heresies*, 8.

“great anti-Christian movements, the deism of England, the infidelity of France, the rationalism of Germany,” Mansel argues that

when each of these in its turn had played its little part on the stage of history, giving itself out as some great one, the nation whom it bewitched for a while has turned in very weariness and disgust from its empty boasting and unfulfilled promises, and come back with its baffled hopes and unsatisfied longings to the feet of its forsaken master, taught by its own bitter experience to repeat again and again the words of the Apostle, “Lord to whom shall we go?”³⁵⁴

In this case, Mansel’s understanding of the theological and historical character of unbelief is not unlike Barth’s criticism and understanding of religion. Barth, in his writing on religion, frames atheism or unbelief within the “magic circle of religion,”³⁵⁵ the constantly fluctuating but ultimately stable forms of “belief in man”³⁵⁶ that characterize humanity’s resistance to God.

Mansel had at least a dim notion and an increasing unease that the unbelief of his own era was unprecedented in its scope. In a sermon on Revelation, he describes the Victorian Church within the figure of the Philadelphian church in chapter 3:

No one can look at the events passing around us, without being aware that there is fermenting, at the base of society, a leaven of lawlessness, a spirit of violence and intimidation, a spirit so far directly anti-Christian that it acts in open defiance of the Apostolic precept of subjection to the higher powers.³⁵⁷

The prospect of such lawlessness, Mansel writes, should act as a warning to his own age, and to those who are “tempted to seek the ‘open door’ of Christian fellowship elsewhere than in dutiful submission to the revealed word, and full acknowledgment of all that

³⁵⁴ Henry Mansel, “The Witness of the Church,” 17.

³⁵⁵ Karl Barth and Garret Green Barth, *On Religion: The Revelation of God As the Sublimation of Religion* (London: T & T Clark, 2006), 83.

³⁵⁶ Karl Barth and Garret Green Barth, *On Religion*, 71. The actual historical character of humanity’s “belief in man” may have looked different for both writers: Mansel was a high churchman for whom established religious practices were indispensable. The comparison here is more related to the recurring or oscillating waves of unbelief that characterize human history.

³⁵⁷ Henry Mansel and Sidney Gedge, “Revelation: iii,” 9.

belongs to Christ's name."³⁵⁸ His belief in the endurance of the Church seemed to remain strong, but like many people today, he began to look abroad for signs of hope:

It is in this season of trouble and doubt at home, that she is encouraged to lengthen her cords and strengthen her stakes, to consecrate to her service the firstfruits of another race...knowing that the intervening ages are the time allotted to her to do her Master's work upon earth.³⁵⁹

To account for such a development Mansel placed his own generation within the parable of the Labourers:

To the five classes of labourers mentioned in the parable there might have been added a sixth—those who were offered employment and refused it, and such are all they who, born in a Christian land, living in the midst of Christian institutions, within sight of Christian places of worship, within hearing of Christian preachers, within reach of the prayers and the sacraments of a Christian Church, yet live as men who care for none of these things. In all these things, Christ who hath hired you, nay, who hath bought you with a price, even the price of His own precious blood, is calling you daily and hourly to fulfil that service which is due to him.³⁶⁰

Clearly, Mansel's understanding of unbelief has an intensely scriptural aspect, both in its characterization of unbelief—the various attempts to surpass or deepen the scriptural account—and in the manner in which he located the unbelief of his era within the scriptural narrative.

Mansel's particular theological view of unbelief may not appear strikingly creative or even interesting. It has much in common with that of Barth and countless other preachers and theologians over the centuries who adhere, more or less, to an Augustinian notion of original sin and human pride. But it is important to notice here that Mansel was searching for a way to locate history, and his own moment in time, within the narrative of Scripture and God's providential presence in the world. This, I argue in the

³⁵⁸ Henry Mansel and Sidney Gedge, "Revelation: iii," 9.

³⁵⁹ Henry Mansel, "The Witness of the Church," 14.

³⁶⁰ Henry Mansel, "Labourers in the Vineyard" 420.

following pages, is really the heart of Mansel's theology and theory of regulative truth. However, it is important to note that such an attempt to describe modern unbelief within an approximate scriptural frame is not an abundantly obvious move to make. It is, of course, ironic that Mansel's attempt to do this very thing has formed the grounds upon which he has been repeatedly dismissed by subsequent writers admittedly trying to establish a similar vision.

In this way Abraham's argument is typical of numerous recent efforts to locate the loss of a Christian or scriptural worldview—unbelief, in Mansel's terms—within emerging attitudes toward the Scriptures themselves. Abraham's point is that a broad-based canonical view of Christianity was streamlined into a strictly epistemological view of the Bible, and in the process Christian understanding of the world became more narrow and impoverished. Peter Harrison's book *The Bible, Protestantism, and the Rise of Natural Science* is another example of a genealogical account of unbelief or secularism, as it were, that is related directly to scriptural interpretation. Harrison argues that the Protestant reformers' attempt to ground religious authority in the Bible forced them to embrace a literalist interpretation of the Bible:

The demise of allegory, in turn, was due largely to the efforts of Protestant reformers, who in their search for an unambiguous religious authority, insisted that the book of scripture be interpreted only in its literal, historical sense. This insistence on the primacy of the literal sense had the unforeseen consequence of cutting short a potentially endless chain of reference, in which word refers to object, and object refers to other objects.³⁶¹

Allegory, for Harrison, was the device that held the Scriptures open to the world or allowed the Scriptures to refer to creation in a broad and spiritual manner. The loss of

³⁶¹ Peter Harrison, *The Bible, Protestantism, and the Rise of Natural Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 4.

allegory, in short, evacuated “nature of its symbolic significance” and opened the door to naturalistic scientific and philosophical accounts of the world.³⁶²

In one way, Abraham and Harrison argue persuasively for the gradual impoverishment of scriptural interpretation and degenerative effects of these interpretive schemes on Christian belief. But the question that lurks behind accounts like these relates precisely to the goals that they are both respectively pursuing: namely, in a world that is created and animated by God’s presence—a world both authors seem to want—what exactly drives the descent toward such a narrowing of theological vision? Harrison’s explanation is straightforward:

While the Protestants’ insistence that passages of scripture be given a determinate meaning proceeded from the purest of religious motives, they were inadvertently setting in train a process which would ultimately result in the undermining of that biblical authority which they so adamantly promoted.³⁶³

On one hand, this might be plausible, at least as an account of what drove the interpretations of Reformation theologians and the methods that they actually pursued, though it is not clear that Protestant theologians entirely abandoned allegorical or typological interpretations. On the other hand, the providential implications are almost stunning: from the “purest of religious motives,” Christian Europe was set adrift into naturalistic and secular renderings of the world.

Such arguments can be read as verging toward the implication of an overwhelming yet unnamed tragic context that repeatedly turns the efforts of Christian writers and apologists against their own intentions.³⁶⁴ One thinks of Reventlow’s

³⁶² Peter Harrison, *The Bible, Protestantism, and the Rise of Natural Science*, 204.

³⁶³ Peter Harrison, *The Bible, Protestantism, and the Rise of Natural Science*, 269.

³⁶⁴ Michael Buckley’s *The Origins of Modern Atheism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987) is one of the paradigmatic examples of this approach: ““Atheism is the secret of that religious reflection which

conclusion that in Butler's *Analogy* "the Christian substance has already been largely evacuated so as to become a general worldview" in which faith becomes an "exclusively intellectual process, based on the evaluation of grounds for and against the reliability of external witnesses to facts."³⁶⁵ This despite Butler's insistence that Christianity is essentially practical, or "existential" in Reventlow's terms.³⁶⁶ Whether the engine is modernity, secularism, the rise of science or something altogether unacknowledged, the impression left by these authors is that either Christian writers were helpless to resist the course of history or their resistance contributed to the inevitable change, whether that change is regarded as gain or dissolution.³⁶⁷

Yet there is a way in which these accounts are theologically unsatisfying in their inability to relate historical developments to the Scriptures and the God of the Bible or to view these developments within a narrative scriptural lens. In the case of Abraham, he reaches for a more comprehensive theological vision with his appeal to the broad canonical context and the Church's life, yet to some degree his own accounting of Christian history relays the same narrow impoverishment that he has set out to expand and enliven.

justifies the sacred and its access to the sacred primarily through its own transfiguration into another form of human knowledge and practice, as though the only alternative to fideism were such an alienation, as though religion had to become philosophy to remain religion. The unique character of religious knowledge does not survive this reduction" (359). In other words, Christian apologists contributed to the rise of atheism by speaking philosophically about God and ignoring the central confessional aspects of Christian theology. The merit of Buckley's position is that he wrests the history of modern philosophy into a theological context by rejecting the notion that "Atheism is taken as if it were simply a matter of retrieving the philosophical positions of the past, rather than a profound and current rejection of the meaning and reality of Jesus Christ" (47). Though Buckley attributes modern atheism to the inadvertent intention of Christians, he relates this inadvertence to central theological claims.

³⁶⁵ Henning Graf Reventlow, *The Authority of the Bible and the Rise of the Modern World*, 349.

³⁶⁶ Henning Graf Reventlow, *The Authority of the Bible and the Rise of the Modern World*, 349.

³⁶⁷ Brad Gregory's *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized a Society* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012) is perhaps the latest example of this method.

Of course, commentators on Mansel have not grown weary in highlighting the irony of his orthodoxy and the heritage of his ideas, most notably extended by Herbert Spencer and the Victorian agnostics. Lightman has made this argument most recently, but he, at least, expressed some reserve about the inevitability of this trajectory for Mansel's thought: Spencer, he suggests, had his own reasons of "convenience" for using an orthodox writer to advance his unorthodox ideas.³⁶⁸ Other writers, as already noted, have not been so cautious. In some sense I wish to reverse this irony by suggesting that Mansel's own theological vision provides a framework for understanding God's presence and activity in the world that cannot permit historical accounts of the Church to be entirely reduced to the succession of ideas, the repetition of epistemological or philosophical crises inclined toward an already known end. In other words, his own theology has the capacity to ease or upend the negative verdict that has clung to his reputation since the controversy that surrounded his lectures. I show how this might be so in the following pages.³⁶⁹

4.3 The Humanity of Reason

Mansel's theological and philosophical ideas were intricately bound up with his desire to preserve what he considered to be the basic aspects of the Christian life: prayer, worship, and a personal and corporate relationship with Jesus Christ. In this respect, the

³⁶⁸ Bernard Lightman, *Origins of Agnosticism*, 84.

³⁶⁹ Mansel noted Spencer's *First Principles* and made the following comment: "Because a certain person deduces certain consequences from a certain book, therefore his deduction must needs be legitimate: and of course if two person deduce contradictory consequences from the same book, therefore both deductions are legitimate. According to this canon, every heresy which has ever claimed the authority of the Bible must needs be found in the Bible...I have not read Mr. Spencer's book on First Principles, which I believe is only printed for his own subscribers; but from what I know of it indirectly, and from what I know directly of the author's other writings, I believe his teaching to be the contradictory, not the complement of mine...The acknowledgment, that that which is absolute and infinite is beyond the boundaries of positive thought, and is known only as a negation, may, like any other proposition, lead to very different conclusions, according the premise with which it is combined in reasoning." *A Second Letter to Goldwin Smith*, 53–55.

entire mode of his thought is determinedly personal, and he viewed everything through this lens, whether philosophy, theology or science. In a letter written to Pusey he argues against the deterministic conclusions of scientific study and concludes that such engagement need not exclude personal agency, whether human or divine: “If not, may science continue indefinitely without in any way interfering with the duty of prayer? And has not the progress of the majority of science been of this kind?”³⁷⁰ Whether convincing or not, he regarded prayer as an activity entirely in accordance with human nature, and in fact this is what humans were created for. This is what led him into his studies of what was then called “psychology,” the study of human nature.³⁷¹ If unbelief was a transcending of human limitations, then the Christian faith was the confirmation and fulfilment of what it meant to be human.

To this end, Mansel actually believed that his account of consciousness was an account of what people are really like, not how they ought to be. This attention to particularities and facts was essential for any description of humanity and the world:

Every existence which we can perceive is definite and particular, limited and related; and every existence of which we can think is definite and particular, limited and related likewise. It must therefore needs be that a science which starts from the assumption of Being in the abstract (which is not a conception, but an equivocal term, capable of relation to many distinct conceptions), and attempts, by pure deduction and division, to reason down to the concrete existences which alone are objects of positive

³⁷⁰ Henry Mansel, “Letter to Pusey: 1866.”

³⁷¹ In John Maynard Keynes *Essays on Biography* he quotes this unpublished note by the English Economist Alfred Marshall: “About the year 1867 (while mainly occupied with teaching Mathematics at Cambridge), Mansel’s Bampton Lectures came into my hands and caused me to think that man’s own possibilities were the most important subject for his study. So I gave myself for a time to the study of Metaphysics; but soon passed to what seemed to be the more progressive study of Psychology. Its fascinating inquiries into the possibilities of the higher and more rapid development of human faculties brought me into touch with the question: how far do the conditions of life of the British (and other) working classes generally suffice for fullness of life?” John Maynard Keynes, *Essays in Biography*, new edition with three additional essays, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1951), 138. The comment is elusive to some degree, but Marshall’s contribution to economics, to some degree, concurs with this observation: namely, the study of human behavior.

thought, must end by delivering, not differences of things, but distinctions of words.³⁷²

The notion of an “abstract self” or “abstract world” carried a whole host of dangers that constantly threatened the particular character of created life and, as a result, threatened the very character of God.³⁷³ But unlike Butler in this case, Mansel’s conception of the world and God was radically self-referential. So while he was critical of cosmological ontologies, he stated that “The consciousness of Personality is thus an Ontology in the highest sense of the term, and cannot be regarded as the representation of any ulterior reality.”³⁷⁴ For example, people are only aware of causality in the world so far as they are conscious of their own freedom to act and exert influence; likewise, they are conscious of substance in their own resistance to force: “Resistance to the locomotive energy is the only mode of consciousness which directly tells us of the existence of an external world.”³⁷⁵

John Milbank has criticized both Butler and Mansel as extending Kant’s ban on ontology and exhausting the “supposed ‘bounds’ of our finitude” that constrain God’s activity in the world to these overly defined finite categories.³⁷⁶ To some degree Milbank is right, at least concerning Mansel. While Mansel claims that he is simply defining humanity by the facts and not abstractions, it could easily be pointed out that even these facts can become abstractions that place constraints on experience and, for that matter, God. Yet curiously his understanding of God’s activity in the world is not quite what Milbank fears. In part this is because Mansel’s account of the human person, despite the

³⁷² Henry Mansel, *Metaphysics*, 284.

³⁷³ Henry Mansel, *Metaphysics*, 292.

³⁷⁴ Henry Mansel, *Metaphysics*, 3 67.

³⁷⁵ Henry Mansel, *Metaphysics*, 346.

³⁷⁶ John Milbank, *The Word Made Strange*, 32.

risk of over-definition and even arbitrariness, is still largely a negative account that holds the individual open to a wide range of theological and experiential possibilities. This is in essence the purpose of Mansel's psychology.

Mansel's ontological understanding of personality is exhaustive in the sense that Milbank implies that it reaches into the realms of human thought, morality and religion, but there is a sense in which this is misleading. As an ontological account, Mansel's point is that personality and relation are the inescapable foundations of human life; he pushes this as far as to say that an individual's occupation of space, the resistance to force, observed in consciousness is a basic presentation that cannot be analyzed further.³⁷⁷ In this regard Mansel is almost Cartesian.³⁷⁸ The self is a presented fact, but as a fact it is in no way fully understood. By virtue of its self-presentation it is a mystery of creation that cannot be completely grasped. And far from building upon this foundation a certain mode of reasoning, Mansel places human reasoning within the wide-ranging context within which a person lives in the world and encounters others. Reasoning, then, is not purely a function of thought but includes the influence of the affections, the will and the instinctive needs and desires of individual people.³⁷⁹

³⁷⁷ "This self-personality, like all other simple and immediate presentations, is indefinable; but it is so, because it is superior to definition. It can be analysed into no simpler elements, for it is itself the simplest of all: it can be made no clearer by description or comparison, for it is revealed to us in all the clearness of an original intuition." Henry Mansel, *Prolegomena*, 129.

³⁷⁸ "The Cartesian cogito, ergo sum, is so far from being, as its opponents have maintained, an illogical reasoning from a premise to its conclusion, that its only fault consists in assuming the appearance of a reasoning at all. My consciousness does not prove my existence, because it is my existence. Descartes does not intend, as Reid imagined, to reason from the existence of thought to the existence of a mind or subject of thought: he intends to state wherein personal existence consists; and he rightly places it in consciousness." Henry Mansel, *Metaphysics or the Philosophy of Consciousness*, 356.

³⁷⁹ This claim is one of the more striking parallels between Mansel's conception of reason and religious faith and that of J. H. Newman: "After all man is not a reasoning animal; he is a seeing, feeling, contemplating, acting animal. He is influenced by what is direct and precise...life is not long enough for a religion of inferences...Resolve to believe nothing and you must prove your proofs and analyze your elements, sinking farther and farther, and finding in the lowest depth a lower deep, till you come to the

Philosophies or theologies that reach for a “higher” view of God, not encumbered by notions of personality, Mansel argues, actually destroy these aspects of humanity that Mansel desired to retain as central:

Fools, to dream that man can escape from himself, that human reason can draw aught but a human portrait of God! They do but substitute a marred and mutilated humanity for one exalted and entire: they add nothing to their conception of God as He is, but only take away a part of their conception of man. Sympathy, and love, and fatherly kindness, and forgiving mercy, have evaporated in the crucible of their philosophy; and what is the *caput mortuum* that remains, but only the sterner features of humanity exhibited in repulsive nakedness? The God who listens to prayer, we are told, appears in the likeness of human mutability. Be it so. What is the God who does not listen, but the likeness of human obstinacy?...Man is still the residue that is left; deprived indeed of all that is amiable in humanity, but, in the darker features which remain, but still man. Man in his purposes; man in his inflexibility.³⁸⁰

Mansel’s point is that human conceptions of God are bound to anthropomorphism of some kind, but descriptions that seek to rise above this inevitably leave out those aspects of human life that are essential to his whole portrait of humanity.

For this reason it is puzzling how some critics have read Mansel as a conservative who was predictably and uncreatively bent on proving the existence of God. R. V. Sampson’s comments in this manner:

[Mansel] is content to list baldly and without argument some fifteen reasons why the claims to authenticity of the Christian revelation are utterly convincing and to conclude that the entire content of Revelation, whatever the intellectual difficulties attaching to any particular element thereof, must be accepted uncritically as the Word.³⁸¹

broad bosom of skepticism.” *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (Toronto: Longmans, Green and Co, 1947), 72.

³⁸⁰ Henry Mansel, *The Limits of Religious Thought*, 12, 13.

³⁸¹ R. V. Sampson, “The Limits of Religious Thought: The Theological Controversy,” in *1859: Entering an Age of Crisis*, eds. Philip Appleman, William Madden and Michael Wolff, 63–80 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1961), 68.

Gordon Lewis Phillips has argued that Mansel's initial popularity was probably due to the fact that he was read in just this way.³⁸² But a theory that was "utterly convincing" was not at all what Mansel had in mind; rather, he very much followed Butler by exploring the probabilities of faith within a complex and largely unknown world.

Belief, for Mansel, cannot be based solely upon thought and comprehension:

Belief in a God, once given, becomes the nucleus round which subsequent experiences cluster and accumulate; and evidences which would be obscure or ambiguous, if addressed to the reason only, become clear and convincing, when interpreted by the light of the religious consciousness.³⁸³

In some sense, by "religious consciousness" Mansel is referring to the whole human person: "If man is not a creature composed solely of intellect, or solely of feeling, or solely of will, why should any one element of his nature be excluded from participating in the pervading consciousness of Him in whom we live, and move, and have our being?"³⁸⁴ So Mansel argues that religious reflection, or, simply speaking, theology, is not the primary manner in which we encounter God. Rather, such reflection requires experience. Speaking somewhat abstractly, he suggests that an innate sense of dependence and moral obligation are the basic elements of religious experience, which receive their particular character in Christianity.³⁸⁵ But on their own, divorced from any context, Mansel suggests, these two aspects of religious consciousness are prior to thought, and yet like all natural theology, they are essentially negative in their rendering; that is, these basic desires might resolve themselves into any system of religion that seeks to meet these needs. A sense of dependence, he argues in an adjustment of

³⁸²Gordon Lewis Phillips, *Seeing and Believing* (London: Dacre Press, 1953), 60.

³⁸³ Henry Mansel, *The Limits*, 75.

³⁸⁴ Henry Mansel, *The Limits*, 76.

³⁸⁵ Henry Mansel, *The Limits*, 77.

Schleiermacher,³⁸⁶ tells us little about God, but it does create an opening that will be filled, in one manner or another.³⁸⁷

Granted, it is hard to follow Mansel here unless one thinks of a person in one context or another; given Mansel's commitment to particularity and phenomenal accounts of knowledge, at times he speaks with little sense of context or concrete reality. What person exactly has this consciousness? Might it be different according the traditions in which someone is raised? Notwithstanding this tendency, Mansel's overall point is still reaching for a broader account of religious knowledge that incorporates a wider scope of human experience within a personalist ontology.

It is true that Mansel leaves the question about appearance and reality relatively open. He basically asserts that consciousness of ourselves is that only assurance of reality, the only real thing that is verifiable. Yet consciousness implies an infinite set of relations between things and persons in the world. On one hand, Mansel is uncomfortable with Kant's *Ding an sich* because it implies an invitation to press beyond what is seen. On the other hand, Mansel affirms the notion that appearances do not show forth reality in any kind of conclusive or exhaustive manner. To this extent he is content to live in the world as it seems, and he quotes Butler's comments on freedom and necessity as a way of affirming Butler's more basic commitment: "In religion, in morals, in our daily business,

³⁸⁶ Mansel does not lean as heavily on the sense of dependence as does Friedrich Schleiermacher, but they use the term in a similar manner: "Now this is just what is principally meant by the formula which says that to feel oneself absolutely dependent and to be conscious of being in relation with God are one and the same thing; and the reason is that absolute dependence is the fundamental relation which must include all others in itself... In this sense it can indeed be said that God is given to us in feeling in an original way." Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, ed. and trans. H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart (London: T&T Clark, 1999) (originally published as *Der christliche Glaube. Nach den Grundsätzen der evangelischen Kirche im Zusammenhange dargestellt* [Berlin, 1830]), 17. Dependence for both authors is a fundamental reality of being human, but for Mansel, this dependence is not the absolute field of experience; he would most likely describe personality in these terms, a concept with similar though different theological implications.

³⁸⁷ Henry Mansel, *Limits of Religious Thought*, 78.

in the care of our lives, in the exercise of our senses, the rules which guide our practice cannot be reduced to principles which satisfy our reason.”³⁸⁸ It is the whole conscious person who must be satisfied with the reasons for belief, because it is with God—“in whom we live and move and have our being”—that Christian belief is concerned. Again, it is much in the spirit of Butler that Mansel makes his appeal to the evidences of religion:

That if no one faculty of the human mind is competent to convey a direct knowledge of the Absolute and the Infinite, no one faculty is entitled to claim pre-eminence over the rest, as furnishing especially the criterion of the truth or falsehood of a supposed Revelation. There are presumptions to be drawn from the internal character of the doctrines which the revelation contains: there are presumptions to be drawn from the facts connected with its first promulgation: there are presumptions to be drawn from its subsequent history and the effects which it has produced among mankind. But the true evidence for or against the religion, is not to be found in any one of these taken singly and exclusively; but in the resultant of all, fairly examined and compared together; the apparently conflicting evidences being balanced against each other, and the apparently concurring evidences estimated by their united efficacy.³⁸⁹

Maybe in the end Mansel is quite close to Abraham’s canonical criteria, if it can be granted that an epistemic norm need not be as narrowly conceived as Abraham indicates. In any case, Mansel’s argument, which has been overlooked by so many critics, is that Christianity appeals to the whole person, and human reason must in some sense account for this. In contrast to the notion that Mansel “enfeebles” reason, it could easily be argued that he rounds it out or extends it beyond the confines of pure argument and demonstration, which is not to say that he was irrational but that rationality must take

³⁸⁸ Henry Mansel, *Limits of Religious Thought*, 96.

³⁸⁹ Henry Mansel, *Limits of Religious Thought*, 164.

account of these considerations. Mansel writes, “It is to the whole man that Christianity appeals: it is as a whole and in relation to the whole man that it must be judged.”³⁹⁰

Mansel’s view is not unlike Michael Polyani’s notion of a tacit cognition that forms and drives our explicit knowledge, which underlines the “unavoidable act of personal participation in our explicit knowledge of things: an act of which we can be aware merely in an unreflecting manner.”³⁹¹ Mansel is operating with different terms, but at least in this case, the personal character of knowledge for both figures is inevitable, though not necessarily restrictive. For Polyani the circularity of personal knowledge is held open if “pursued with unwavering universal intent.”³⁹² Mansel is less concerned on this score, though the theological or created status of personality contains the promise that the human being is fitted for life in the world and relationship with God.

The personal aspect of knowledge for Mansel, and perhaps for Polyani, implies a degree of skepticism or at least a limitation of human knowing. The limited scope of one point of view, the uncertainties of relationships with other free, personal beings and ultimately with God, the creator of that personality, implies that human ignorance is unavoidable. In this respect, Mansel followed Butler to the letter:

It is reasonable to believe that, in matters of belief as well as of practice, God has not thought fit to annihilate the will of man; but has permitted speculative difficulties to exist as the trial and the discipline of sharp and subtle intellects, as He has permitted moral temptations to form the trial and the discipline of strong and eager passions. Our passions are not annihilated when we resist the temptation to sin: why should we expect that our doubts must be annihilated if we are to resist the temptation to unbelief?³⁹³

³⁹⁰ Henry Mansel, *Limits of Religious Thought*, 186.

³⁹¹ Michael Polyani, *The Study of Man* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958).

³⁹² Michael Polyani, *The Study of Man*, 26.

³⁹³ Henry Mansel, *Limits of Religious Thought*, 178.

I have argued that Mansel's understanding of human reason and unbelief were connected, and despite claims otherwise, Mansel believed that the speculative and humanistic philosophies of his day were ultimately destructive of human personality. It is worth noting that roughly a century later, Henri De Lubac would say almost exactly the same thing, albeit from a different philosophical perspective:

What has actually become of the lofty ambitions of this humanism, not only in fact that in the very way of thought of its initiates? What has become of man as conceived by this atheist humanism? A being that can still hardly be called a being—a thing which has no content, a cell completely merged in a mass which is in process of becoming: social and historical man of whom all that remains is pure abstraction, apart from the social relations and the position in time by which he is defined...in reality there is no longer any man because there is no longer anything greater than man.³⁹⁴

Whether or not this remains the destiny of humanism in our society is debatable, but De Lubac and Mansel are in strong agreement, even if many theologians of Mansel's time could not perceive it. It is true that the "human" and perhaps "spiritual" aspect of Mansel's thought remains hidden beneath the surface. In part this is because he spent his energy elaborating the context in which Christian knowledge and experience takes place without in fact detailing exactly how this must look. As a result, his view of reasoning in theology calls to mind the observation of Stephen Sykes in the *Identity of Christianity* that theologians in the West have been led "into an uncritical adoption of the role of vanguard in the Christian Community. This self-portrayal implies that it is the intellectual realm which leads the way; the bias of the image is inherently towards discovery and novelty."³⁹⁵ Sykes argues that the "Christian community at worship" is such a place

³⁹⁴Henri De Lubac, *Drama of Atheistic Humanism*, trans. Edith M. Riley (London: Sheed & Ward, 1949), 31.

³⁹⁵Stephen Sykes, *The Identity of Christianity: Theologians and the Essence of Christianity from Schleiermacher to Barth* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 6, 7.

where the theologian is not the sole bearer of theological truth but one voice among the worshipping community.³⁹⁶

In certain respects Sykes' image is an appropriate representation of Mansel's theology. By eschewing progress in theology—"The lapse of time, as all history bears witness, is at least as fruitful in corruption as in enlightenment"³⁹⁷—Mansel was not denigrating reason, or even progress in knowledge as such.³⁹⁸ Growth or development in theology relates to our practical duties and the application and interpretation of Scripture in this respect. The task of theology then is to describe the context in which this can take place and, of course, to defend this context against threatening alterations. Words like "practical" and "regulative" can easily be misunderstood, as if theology is constrained in Mansel's terms to a strictly pedestrian field. This is how Mansel was read by figures like Maurice and Mozley: Speculative knowledge is spiritual or higher knowledge, while practical knowledge relates merely to duties and actions. In strictly epistemological terms this is true, at least in the manner by which Mansel sets up the dichotomy; even the Incarnation does not overcome the distinction between practical or regulative and speculative knowledge. But in no way is the regulative sphere empty of God's presence or the presence of the Spirit; the regulative function of Scripture is not once removed

³⁹⁶ Stephen Sykes, *The Identity of Christianity*, 7.

³⁹⁷ Henry Mansel, *Limits of Religious Thought*, 175.

³⁹⁸ In note xvii in Lecture VIII, Mansel writes, "I do not mean by these remarks to deny the possibility of any progress whatever in Christian Theology, such, for instance, as may result from the better interpretation of Holy Writ, or the refutation of unauthorized inferences therefrom." He then quotes Butler from the *Analogy*: "As it is owned the whole scheme of Scripture is not yet understood." These comments come on the heels of Mansel's characteristic denouncement of progress in theology: "We can test the progress of knowledge, only by comparing its successive representations with the objects which they profess to represent: and as the object in this case is inaccessible to human faculties, we have no criterion by which to distinguish between progress and mere fluctuation. The so-called progress of theology is in truth only an advance in those conceptions of man's moral and religious duties which form the basis of natural religion;—and advance which is regulative and not speculative; which is primarily and properly a knowledge, not of God's nature, but of man's obligations... a closer study of the laws of the finite." *Limits of Religious Thought*, 179.

from the spiritual reality of God, but instead it is inhabited with God's presence. So both practical and regulative, as I argue concerning Mansel's understanding of reason, refer to the whole scope of human life, action and experience; more particularly they refer to the range of Christian experience expressed through prayer, worship and mission, or the life of the Church in the Spirit. All of this is apparent in Mansel's writings, even though his emphasis on the authority of Scripture has been taken as arbitrary and severe, imposed on an "enfeebled" human reason, now buckled at the knees. Scripture was authoritative for Mansel in a way that was uncompromising, but it functioned for him as a map of the full range of human experience. In Mansel's eyes, the Scriptures exhibited a far broader and more human context to live within in their entire witness to God's presence in creation, that is, broader in relation to the philosophies and theologies of "unbelief" that sought to pry Christian orthodoxy apart in order to encompass a changing world.

4.4 The Incarnation and the Presence of God

Mansel's accounts of human reason, the Scriptures and knowledge of God all seemed to angle toward the Incarnation, even though the term itself appears in his writings infrequently. W.R. Matthews raises this absence and notes that "in accordance with his own principles, the doctrine of the Incarnation must be a regulative idea and not the absolute truth...The fact and the Person of Christ cannot, one would suppose, be regulative ideas."³⁹⁹ Matthews' point is well taken: there is something slightly awkward if not misleading about describing the revelation of Christ as regulatively true. As to the theological bearings of the regulative truth, F. W. Dockrill makes a similar critique:

Scripture certainly contains passages which say that our knowledge of God is imperfect and, perhaps, symbolic, but unlike Mansel's theory of

³⁹⁹ W.R. Matthews, *The Religious Philosophy of Dean Mansel* (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), 20.

regulative truth it does not provide information about the nature of this imperfection nor explain how we should understand the adequacy of religious symbols which conceivably might be true only for man.⁴⁰⁰

Mansel was well aware that his lengthy appeals to Scripture and the Fathers were based upon a kinship in spirit, as it were, not in technical detail. Nevertheless, he saw in his theory of regulative truth not a new discovery but a modern and revised method for retaining a traditional orthodoxy. Still, if Mansel is going to be defended in light of this theory, it has to be shown that his ideas can be coherently integrated on the very point that Matthews raises: the Incarnation of Christ.

In one sense, the distinction between speculative and regulative truth is misleading. For Mansel, all knowledge is regulated by the individual consciousness, so in effect the highest knowledge attainable in any sphere is regulative. Even basic observations concerning causality stem from the internal consciousness of freedom and action. All observable facts—the facts of revelation as well—are governed by these laws:

As mere facts, they are so far from being inconceivable, that they embody the very laws of conception itself, and are experienced as true: but though we are able, nay, compelled, to conceive them as *facts*, we find it impossible to conceive them as *ultimate facts*. They are made known to us as *relations*... The conception of any such relation as a fact thus involves a further inquiry concerning its existence as a consequence; and to this inquiry no satisfactory answer can be given.⁴⁰¹

Facts cannot be isolated and explained exhaustively, but they exist in a seemingly endless set of relations that help to define and individuate particular facts without revealing their essence.

Mansel's central point then is quite simple: The Son of God came into the world—a world created through Him—and took on the form and limitations of a human

⁴⁰⁰ F. W. Dockrill, "The Doctrine of Regulative Truth and Mansel's Intentions," in *Journal of Theological Studies* 20 (1974): 77–88.

⁴⁰¹ Henry Mansel, *Limits of Religious Thought*, 99, 100.

being, a form that indicated His divine nature but did not disclose it to human eyes. Like all facts, Jesus was observed in a particular context of relations; but as a “revelational fact,” to use Matthews’ term, the reference of Jesus’ factual life, His divinity, was disclosed in human or finite terms, though grasped, humanly, by faith and not sight. What one sees in Jesus, to use Mansel’s terms, is not necessarily a radical disjunction within the order of reality or an opening toward a new manner of spiritual knowledge but instead the fulfillment and summation of God’s dealings with His people, the fullest statement of God’s presence, disposition and desire for His creatures. The primitive conception of God as a person is fulfilled, gradually in the history of Scripture, in the person of Christ.

It is possible that Mansel could give a coherent reply to Matthews’ insightful question about the place of the Incarnation in his theology, though it not clear that this reply is satisfactory to some. Again Milbank criticizes Mansel, along with Butler, with regard to the actual content of revelation in Christ:

Given the positivity, and at the same time the derivational vagueness, of the principles of natural law in this tradition, it become easy to understand revelation as a supplementary legal system of essential practical injunctions regarding both morality and worship...The new facts and ordinances belonging to revelation give us no more knowledge than does natural law about the content of the infinite. Mansel was consequently anti-mystical and clearly stressed that the positive critical determination of the ‘limits of religion’ and positive finite knowledge of revelation was opposed to any *via negativa*.⁴⁰²

In a certain sense Milbank’s comment is accurate, though a phrase like the “content of the Infinite” obscures the matter somewhat. For example, when Mansel uses terms like “accommodation” or “condescension,” he could just as easily be speaking of grace or divine action; the “content of the Infinite” could be taken to be God’s will or disposition, in which case Milbank’s criticism misses the mark. Though it could also mean something

⁴⁰² John Milbank, *The Word Made Strange*, 19.

more, God's very being, for instance, or God's self-knowledge, this is something Mansel would clearly have opposed. He would have opposed this as an augmentation of the limits of human thought but not as the gift of salvation: the gift of God's own being to humanity belonged to the practical sphere, the whole of human life—forgiveness, redemption and salvation. Once more this distinction is easily lost if “practical” is taken to simply imply a dry, barren, statutory observance of a moral code. Much more, “practical” refers to the field of created existence that God enters, inhabits and works within; it in no way excludes the spiritual activity of God, but it assumes it.

To make this point more fully, it is helpful to look at Mansel's understanding of scriptural history. In his “Essay on Miracles” Mansel accounts for God's activity in the world in a manner that is analogous to human action. The world was created to be receptive to the actions of free and personal agents:

We have evidence, also, of an *elasticity*, so to speak, in the constitution of nature, which permits the influence of human power on the phenomena of the world to be exercised or suspended at will without effecting the stability of the whole. We have thus a precedent of a higher will on a grander scale, provided for by a similar elasticity of the matter subject to its influence.⁴⁰³

God's activity in the world does not contradict or interrupt His creation, but rather, the created world was made with this form of agency in mind. God's action as a personal agent is regulatively true—it is not clear, after all, how God's infinite and absolute nature can be reconciled with His activity as a person, but His activity is not the less truthful because of this difficulty.⁴⁰⁴

⁴⁰³ Henry Mansel, “Essay on Miracles,” in *Aids to Faith: A Series of Theological Essays, By several writers, being a reply to “Essays and Reviews,”* ed. William Thomson (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1862), 28.

⁴⁰⁴ In a curious letter to Pusey, Mansel excitedly relays his recent hunch based upon the poem *The Botanic Garden* by Erasmus Darwin: “I have just lighted on a remarkable passage in Darwin's *Botanic Garden* (ref on back of letter) in which the author (the grandfather, I believe, of the recent Darwin) suggests the

So for Mansel, the Incarnation—the life and work of Jesus—was the fullest statement of God’s relationship to His people and, at the same time, the greatest obstacle for belief:

The doctrine of a personal Christ, very God and very man, has indeed been the great stumbling block in the way of those so called philosophical theologians who, in their contempt for the historical and temporal, would throw aside the vivid revelation of a living and acting God, to take refuge in the empty abstraction of an impersonal idea.⁴⁰⁵

The assumption of flesh, the living of a human life, was the goal of God’s providential presence in the world from the beginning, a God who constantly accommodates and adjusts Himself to the human situation to carry out His purposes. The coming of Christ was the goal of all human history embodied in the scriptural account:

The purpose of God, pre-ordained before the foundation of the world, foretold with the earliest entrance of sin and shame in the announcement of the promised seed, taken up from time to time during four thousand years by a long succession of prophets announcing him that should come, that great central theme of the world’s history to which all past generations had looked forward, to which the coming generations should look back, was now completed. The Scriptures were fulfilled that thus it must be.⁴⁰⁶

The entire account of Scripture leading up to Christ bears witness to this accommodating, gracious character of Christ’s incarnate life because of God’s providential plan and because it is consistent with God’s character, His desire to reach out and engage His people. It is the character of God’s revealing, Mansel writes, to reveal in terms that are close and comprehensible to human beings in any place and any age:

possibility of man being able to force and to change the direction of the winds by chemical interference. I do not venture to speculate on the scientific value of the conjecture but it is worth looking at, as a proof, coming from a scientific authority of the last century, that the results of science may be supposed to lead, not to necessity but to contingency, in the recurrence of material phenomena—at least as regards those phenomena with which the physical welfare of mankind is most immediately connected.” “Letter to E. B. Pusey.”

⁴⁰⁵ Henry Mansel, *Limits of Religious Thought*, 110.

⁴⁰⁶ Henry Mansel, “It is Finished,” 427.

We behold, as it were, the successive kindling of light after light as the beacon fires speed on their message of good tidings along the generations of mankind from the first to the second Adam, we behold their rays flashing out in various forms, with various degrees of brightness and frequency, changing with the changing features of the regions Which they traverse. At one time, we mark the light glowing as it were in a faint but prolonged line, as it passes over the wide extent of some barren and level plain; at another we see it flashing quickly and frequently from peak to peak of a mountain range; at another it is glancing over the surface of the sea, reflected back in broken and fitful gleams from the shifting waters; and again it is hurrying over some thickly peopled district, taking form after form as it transmits its message horn one spot to another among the habitations of men. That one prediction of the promised seed which should bruise the head of the serpent, gleams faintly as the sole ray of promise over two thousand barren years of early history. Then follow in quick succession the blessings announced and renewed.⁴⁰⁷

Mansel loved this image of revelation as a light that shines over diverse and varied surfaces, and it is an image that Butler employed in his defence against deist objections to the universality of Christian revelation.⁴⁰⁸ In this same sermon, Mansel traces the passage of this light through the Old Testament: “the canon of Old Testament scripture closes with a series of inspired announcements of the future deliverer, varying in shape, in clearness, in colour, and feeling, but adding one to another in accumulating light as the day of redemption draweth nigh.”⁴⁰⁹ These “accumulating” images build a picture of Christ, not just as a means of prediction but as a shaping or forming of Christ’s activity in the world. The coming of Christ is a new thing, but it is also the revelation of what has always been true of God’s character as it is revealed in Israel’s history.

⁴⁰⁷ Henry Mansel, “It is Finished,” 427.

⁴⁰⁸ “If we put the case, that for the present, it was intended, revelation should be no more than a small light, in the midst of a world greatly overspread, notwithstanding it, with ignorance and darkness: that certain glimmerings of this light should extend, and be directed, to remote distances, in such a manner as that those who really partook of it, should not discern from whence it originally came: that some in a nearer situation to it, should have its light obscured, and, in different ways and degrees, intercepted: and that others should be placed within its clearer influence, and be much more enlivened, cheered and directed by it; but yet that even to these it should be no more than a light shining in a dark place: all this would be perfectly uniform and of a piece with the conduct of providence, in the distribution of its other blessings.” Joseph Butler, “The Analogy of Religion,” 26.

⁴⁰⁹ Henry Mansel, “It Is Finished,” 427.

For this reason Mansel is able to say,

In reading the history of the Lord's sufferings and death, we read the history not of one person only but of the whole human race whom He represents, whose nature, whose penalty He took upon himself, and suffered once for all, "the just for the unjust,"—we read the history of man's death to sin, of his redemption to righteousness and God's favour, and it is up to that momentous turning point in man's history that the whole series of the earlier scriptures is designed to lead us by the hand. The promise of man's redemption was coeval with his fall, and the whole intervening history as it is told in Scripture is a narrative of the steps by which the world was prepared for the fulfillment of that promise.⁴¹⁰

It is not clear how all of human history could be represented in one person, at least metaphysically speaking; Mansel offers no account here of a spiritual or imperceptible union between Christ and the Church. What is represented in Christ is the accumulation of historic or empirical moments in which God has acted, moved and worked in the world, a vast and endless array of experiences that are ordered in the Scriptures. Mansel says exactly what Milbank suggests he does:

It [the gospel] not only publishes with authority the duties of natural religion, but it republishes them with moral sanctions and motives of a new kind. It not only enjoins distinct precepts in the consequence of the truth which it makes known to us, but it places the old precepts, which natural reason has dictated to mankind, in a direct relation to those newly revealed truths, which are grafted into them, and which derive fresh life and force from them.⁴¹¹

In this case natural religion, along with, though distinct from, the history of Israel, is fulfilled in Christ; in Christ, the continuity of God's providential ordering of the world is most fully visible, and this providential history or precedent is deepened, expanded and set within a new set of relations, to use Butler's phrase.

⁴¹⁰ Henry Mansel, "It Is Finished," 427.

⁴¹¹ Henry Mansel, *Higher Vocation*, 437.

Mansel insisted that the history of redemption in Scripture was a series of facts that culminated in the fact of Christ's life; however, as facts these were still open to strictly naturalistic interpretations:

Whether it was by natural or by supernatural means, it cannot be denied that he to whom the natural and supernatural are alike subject has permitted the course of events in the world to bear a witness to Christ, such as have never been borne to any other person who has appeared upon earth in the likeness of man. It cannot be denied that the prophetic writings contain descriptions which, account for the correspondence as we may, do, as a fact, agree with the person and history of Jesus of Nazareth, as they agree with no other man, or body of men; that the rites and ceremonies of the Jewish religion have a meaning as typical of Him, which no other interpretation can give to them; that the temple and its services were brought to an end after His appearance on earth, as if expressly to exclude the claims of any future messiah; that his dominion has been spread over the civilized world to such an extent, that by such means, as no other ruler, temporal or spiritual, can claim; that superstitions have given way before his name which no other adversary had been able to shake; that doctrines have been established by his teaching which in the hands of other teachers were but plausible and transitory conjectures. However, these things may be accounted for, they are sufficient at least to mark him as the central figure of the world's history, looked forward to by all preceding generations, looked backward to by all following.⁴¹²

Of course, such facts could and have been debated or denied, but the point Mansel wishes to make is that the world is arranged and ordered providentially in a manner that witnesses to the life of Jesus and refers to Him in some ultimate manner. Even when Christ is resisted, He is historically indicated by the "unwilling testimony of those who have striven against him."⁴¹³

Historically speaking, "God has so ordered the course of the world's history, that it bears a witness to Jesus Christ such as it bears to no other person who has ever appeared on earth,"⁴¹⁴ and yet it is only through faith that this ordering can be understood

⁴¹² Henry Mansel, *The Witness of the Church*, 9.

⁴¹³ Henry Mansel, *The Witness of the Church*, 16.

⁴¹⁴ Henry Mansel, *The Witness of the Church*, 16.

as God's; that is, the ordered history of the world and the testimony about this ordering are visible indicators that exist within the regulative sphere of knowledge. The Spirit of God is hidden within visible realities, within the actions of people and events, and most powerfully in Jesus. But such hiddenness does not imply a barrier, as some have understood the speculative and regulative distinction—most notably Maurice; regulative truth belongs primarily to the realm of perception. Mansel never suggested otherwise and on the contrary held a vision of the world that was animated and suffused with the spiritual presence of God

wherein God Himself doth immediately and directly, though invisibly, act upon His creatures; a kingdom through which, so long as the world lasts, the unseen influence of God the Holy Spirit dwells in and interpenetrates the visible world, moulding and leavening it for the second coming of the Lord of Heaven.⁴¹⁵

The history of the world has been shaped to witness to Christ; even in the midst of unbelief or loss of faith, the visible world is being molded for the coming of Christ. This aspect of the Incarnation Mansel referred to as a “deep mystery...when Almighty power condescends to cooperate with the free will of Man” because God's purposes become “liable to be hindered and thwarted by the unworthiness of the human instruments.”⁴¹⁶ The deliberations of theologians, the “succession of ideas,” are aspects of the Spirit's providential ordering of the world that both frustrate and further God's purposes. The condescension of Christ to humanity, for Mansel, requires this form of contingency that exhibits the frailty of human nature. But it is precisely within the full scope of created life that the world is being molded to witness to Christ, that is, within the range of humanity's resistance, incapacity and yet enduring desire to perceive God in the world.

⁴¹⁵ Henry Mansel, *Witness to the Church*, 11.

⁴¹⁶ Henry Mansel and Sidney Gedge, “Revelation: iii,” 9.

4.5 Mansel's Theology of Scripture

The main focus of the second chapter was to show how Mansel's skeptical epistemology was intended to clear a space where the whole range of scriptural claims could be considered truthful in some sense. Many of his contemporaries considered this appeal to the authority of Scripture to be fideistic in the highest degree. Henry Sidgwick, though charitable in his reply to Mansel's lectures, nevertheless remarked that "he talks of Revelation as if the Bible had dropped from the skies ready translated into English, he ignores all historical criticism utterly."⁴¹⁷ These were severe words directed at a man who was proficient in Greek, Hebrew and Latin and whose commentary on the Gospel of Matthew, written at the end of his life, is notable for its thorough and intense textual and historical engagement, if little else.⁴¹⁸ In a certain way, Mansel's dry and plodding commentary on Matthew was a fitting project to complete his career; he died before completing the final two chapters. As in his Bampton Lectures, in the commentary Mansel inhabited a language and style that seemed foreign to the vital and personally engaging gospel that he was so concerned to preserve. Yet the painstaking collation of texts, the attention to words and prophecies, the patient consideration of contradictions and seeming errors, was not undertaken to guarantee the historic truth of every reference but to patch together and mend the narrative coherence of Scripture that was being pulled apart by biblical critics.

To this end, I would argue that Mansel's understanding of the character and inspiration of Scripture fits coherently with the theological account previously provided

⁴¹⁷ Henry Sidgwick, "To H. G. Dakyns from Douglas, Isles of Man, June 9, 1862," in A. Sidgwick and E. M. Sidgwick, *Henry Sidgwick, A Memoir* (London: MacMillan, 1906).

⁴¹⁸ Henry Mansel, "A Commentary on Matthew," in *The Holy Bible, According to the Authorized Version (A. D. 1611), with an Explanatory and Critical Commentary and a Revision of the Translation by Bishops and Other Clergy of the Anglican Church*, ed. F. C. Cook (New York: Scribner, Armstrong, 1873).

concerning God's presence in the world through Christ, which is to say that Scripture itself resembles the providential pattern of God's activity in creation even as it discloses this pattern. What this means exactly will require some explanation.

On one hand, Mansel is clear that the humanly accommodated language of Scripture is an assemblage of facts that cannot be accommodated further. They are immovable and permanent in their witness to Christ:

The theory of an adaptation of divine truths to human faculties entirely changes its significance, as soon as we attempt to give a further adaptation to the adapted symbol itself;—to modify into a still lower truth that which is itself a modification of a higher. The instant we undertake to say that this or that speculative or practical interpretation is the only real meaning of that which Scripture represents to us under a different image, we abandon at once the supposition of an accommodation to the necessary limits of human thought, and virtually admit that the ulterior significance of the representation falls as much within those limits as the representation itself. Thus interpreted, the principle no longer offers the slightest safeguard against Rationalism;—nay, it becomes identified with the fundamental vice of rationalism itself;—that of explaining away what we are unable to comprehend.⁴¹⁹

The permanence of the words and symbols of Scripture are guaranteed through the original intention of the Spirit speaking in one historical context or another. This, of course, admits a wide degree of variance in the character of Scripture and its witness, but contrary to the trends of his own age, Mansel did not believe that the historical context needed to be sifted for its permanent meaning. On the contrary, every particular instance in the Bible becomes part of a vast network of referents to God's activity and engagement with the world. These referents cannot be dissolved by an "ulterior significance" but stand solidly as irreducible moments in the providential history of the world.

In this manner, regulative truths refer to descriptions of divine activity that have been accommodated to human conceptions; they are represented in concrete intuitions

⁴¹⁹ Henry Mansel, *Limits of Religious Thought*, 183.

that are capable of conception in human consciousness, but as representations they do not disclose the full measure of their significance. They reveal the actions, intentions or disposition of God in a particular moment, and they relate these moments to others throughout the narrative of Scripture. However, these regulative referents, stable and permanent as they are, carry implications that are not always immediately perceivable. For instance, Mansel speaks about the expansive character of scriptural words: “In the general tenor of the narrative, and to some extent even in its minuter details as well, a breadth, an expansiveness, a capacity of meeting new facts as they arise, which merely human imaginations and traditions wholly fail to exhibit.”⁴²⁰ Obvious examples of this are Old Testament practices and events such as the Sabbath, the Day of Atonement and the Passover and their faint though increasingly clear figuration of Christ.⁴²¹ In a sermon on the Holy Spirit, Mansel traces numerous examples that are less obvious, though still striking: quoting Hosea, he writes, “‘When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt,’ is yet, by the use of the significant words ‘a child’ and ‘my son’ made to bear a further meaning in reference to an event corresponding by way of antitype in the life of the infant savior.”⁴²²

Mansel applies this textual expansiveness, perhaps more precariously, to the natural world as well. He admits that scriptural language is couched in contemporary language that dates most notably with regard to the sciences. Yet he writes that in the

fact of an expansiveness in the text of Scripture, whereby it is enabled in natural things to adapt itself to new discoveries of science, as we have seen that in spiritual things it adapts itself to new revelations of religious

⁴²⁰ Henry Mansel, *The Spirit a Divine Person*, 9.

⁴²¹ Henry Mansel, *The Spirit a Divine Person*, 4–5.

⁴²² Henry Mansel, *The Spirit a Divine Person*, 6. Mansel’s commentary on chapter 24 of Matthew’s Gospel, as an isolated example, contains a variety of examples of this method. The whole of chapter 24 is taken as a prophecy in the immediate context of the first century, and yet it is expanded into the age of the Church (135–147).

truth...there are parts of the language of Scripture which, when interpreted only by contemporaneous knowledge, seem dark and unintelligible, or even altogether erroneous, but which acquire meaning and consistency, and even scientific accuracy, when viewed by the light of a later advancement in knowledge.⁴²³

Historically, Mansel claims, this is the case: “Older sciences have had their day of supposed antagonism to Scripture, and Scripture to them, which now move quietly along with it side by side, neither harming nor fearing the other.”⁴²⁴ Writing in the immediate years following the publication of and controversy around Darwin’s *Origin of Species*, Mansel concludes, “The time may come, may even now be not far off, when the difficulties of our own day may meet with a similar fate, and, like all such difficulties when once fairly overcome, may but add to the strength of the fortress they were designed to overthrow.”⁴²⁵

It is interesting to note that in the same year Mansel wrote his sermon on Holy Spirit, where he first uses “expansion” as a hermeneutical term, John Hannah’s 1863 Bampton Lectures engaged a nearly identical theme, and in some cases he used the same word.⁴²⁶ Hannah is one of few instances of a fellow High Churchman who built upon Mansel’s theory of regulative truth.⁴²⁷ In his Bampton Lectures Hannah extends Mansel’s

⁴²³ Henry Mansel, *The Spirit a Divine Person*, 8.

⁴²⁴ Henry Mansel, *The Spirit a Divine Person*, 8.

⁴²⁵ Henry Mansel, *The Spirit a Divine Person*, 10. Again, Newman’s consideration of Darwin’s work triggered an almost identical reply. In speaking of the Genesis account and Darwin’s account of human origins, Newman writes in *The Grammar of Assent*, “the two cannot stand together; one or other of them is untrue. But whatever means I might be led to take, for making, if possible the antagonism tolerable, I conceive I should never give up my certitude in that truth which on sufficient grounds I determined to come from heaven. If I so believed, I should not pretend to argue, or to defend myself to others; but I should be patient; I should look for better days; but I should still believe” (195).

⁴²⁶ In a footnote Hannah acknowledges this coincidence: “I am happy to find that the argument of this discourse is supported by an excellent sermon of Mr. Mansel’s, which I had not seen when my own was preached: *The Spirit a Divine Person*, to be worshipped and glorified; one of the Oxford Lenten Sermons for 1863.” John Hannah, *The Relation between the Divine and Human Elements in Holy Scripture: Eight Lectures Preached Before the University of Oxford in the Year MDCCCLXIII, on the Foundation of the Late Rev. John Bampton, M.A., Canon of Salisbury* (London: J. Murray, 1863), 320.

⁴²⁷ John Hannah, *The Relation*, 300, 301.

arguments about the accommodation of Scripture to human capacities into a fuller statement about the antinomies of scriptural language and its double or typological sense.

For example, Hannah writes concerning the seeming contradictions of the Bible,

the method of Scripture rests upon the principle that the most direct way of grappling with such difficulties is to state each alternative, in its own proper place and connection, unreservedly, simply, and emphatically; leaving the task of reconciliation, which surpasses the powers of human intellect, to be either attempted by the higher faculties of the enlightened spirit, or postponed in all the confidence of faith.⁴²⁸

For Hannah, as for Mansel, God can only be indicated and described in human language, which inevitably presents speculative difficulties. Much like Mansel, but with a little more clarity, Hannah argues that God is most accurately and capably revealed in antinomous language that presents sides and angles of the truth that cannot be reduced or smoothed over.⁴²⁹ And yet Hannah insists that Scripture represents a unity that can be articulated through the double sense, or expansive sense—the literal and spiritual or prophetic—of scriptural language that is given and drawn out through the Spirit:

If revelation be a condescension from the higher to the lower, if it be the transfusion of knowledge from a wider to a narrower sphere, the truths thus entrusted to the expressive power of an inferior language must embody a life and expansiveness which only need the fit occasion to burst forth.⁴³⁰

Hannah, perhaps, provides a more robust pneumatological account of the Scriptures' role and functioning in the Church, but his reasoning clearly extends from Mansel's basic epistemological position toward revelatory language.⁴³¹ The Scriptures, for Mansel as with Hannah, like the elasticity and receptivity of the created order, are open and receptive to the continued lively and dynamic presence of God and the

⁴²⁸ John Hannah, *The Relation*, 188.

⁴²⁹ John Hannah, *The Relation*, 84–98.

⁴³⁰ John Hannah, *The Relation*, 108.

⁴³¹ See Hannah's fourth lecture in the Bampton series for an extensive application of the double sense of Scripture.

successive moments of His creatures. Or, put in another way, to use George Lindbeck's phrase, the Scriptures are able "to absorb the universe"⁴³²; the world can be placed within the narrative of Scripture that witnesses in various manners to Christ, who "represents" every human life. The Scriptures, then, depict a catalogue of God's activities that, gathered together, render a portrait of Christ. Mansel was well aware that not every page of the Bible could be consistently integrated into this picture, but this difficulty was a result of our ignorance, not the incoherence of God: "Necessary alike during this our state of trial, it may be that both conceptions alike are but shadows of some higher truth, in which their apparent oppositions are merged in one harmonious whole."⁴³³ This broad portrait of Christ, Mansel argued, was more encompassing of human experience than any streamlined philosophy of religion could possibly create:

That mysterious, yet unquestionable presence of Will...that perpetual struggle of good with evil:—those warnings and prompting of a Spirit, striving with our spirit, commanding, yet not compelling; acting upon us, yet leaving us free to act for ourselves:—that twofold consciousness of infirmity and strength in the hour of temptation...that overwhelming conviction of sin in the sight of one higher and holier than we:—that irresistible impulse to Prayer, which bids us pour out our sorrows and make our wants known to One who hears and will answer us:—that indefinable yet inextinguishable consciousness of a direct intercourse and communion of man with God, of God's influence upon man, yea, and (with reverence be it spoken) of man's influence upon God:—these are facts of experience, to the full as real and as certain as the laws of planetary motions and chemical affinities;—facts which philosophy is

⁴³² George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1984), 117. I do not wish to simply cast Mansel as a proto Postliberal in Lindbeck's manner; however, the similarities are obvious, despite largely dissimilar methods of philosophical and theological reasoning. The following statement by Lindbeck, though, could have been pulled from the Bampton Lectures: "The primary focus is not on God's being in itself, for that is not what the text is about, but on how life is to be lived and reality construed in the light of God's character as an agent as this is depicted in the stories of Israel and of Jesus." George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 121.

⁴³³ Henry Mansel, *The Limits of Religious Thought*, 136.

bound to take into account, or to stand convicted as shallow and one sided.⁴³⁴

These seemingly scattered notions and experiences, Mansel believed, are represented in Scripture and oriented into a framework that is capable of incorporating the full range of human experience. The framework itself is derived from the narrative of the Bible, from the literal accounts of the Old and New Testaments; but the double or typological sense of scriptural words and referents creates a unity across the narrative that does not discard the literal elements but focuses them around the person of Jesus Christ. In the same way, the double or typological sense of Scripture presses the history of the world into the images and language of Scripture; or, as Hannah puts it, the signs and events of Scripture “appear and reappear, though less conspicuously, in the leading incidents of every age.”⁴³⁵

It would be difficult, I believe, to argue that Mansel’s philosophy begets a narrow or constricted worldview, though the phrase itself will be determined by one’s own presuppositions. Mansel believed that Scripture speaks of the heavenly realms so to speak, but it does so from below, from within the mediated forms of scriptural language. And furthermore, any attempt to begin from above, from the infinite or the absolute nature of God, will only constrain God within frameworks that cannot possibly describe or contain Him. Revelation speaks “in partial fragments and by broken lights, to be made known more completely hereafter in a new dispensation.”⁴³⁶ Yet these “broken lights” or divine means adapted to human capacities are sufficient to indicate the shapes of the

⁴³⁴ Henry Mansel, *The Limits of Religious Thought*, 134.

⁴³⁵ John Hannah, *The Relation*, 125.

⁴³⁶ Henry Mansel, *The Witness of the Church*, 8.

spiritual referents, though they can in no way exhaust them. For example, in his sermon *It Is Finished* Mansel writes,

His love, His humility, His patience under suffering, His resignation to the will of God, His prayer for His enemies...these are features of Christ's human nature, in which we may strive humbly to imitate by God's grace the example which He has given us. But there remains also that in which his death and suffering are unlike all that has ever been suffered by man, that He was lifted up that "whosoever believeth in him should not perish"; He gave as a ransom for many that life which He had power to lay down, and power to take again; He was "made sin for us, who knew no sin"; He redeemed us from the curse of the law, "being made a curse for us"; He "bore our sins ill by his own body on the tree," and "by his own blood he entered into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us."⁴³⁷

Christ's life in this sense reveals in his human nature a pattern of living or holiness, but it also refers to a larger spiritual context, which is described in Scriptures but impossible to fully comprehend. The historic and visible life of Christ indicates this larger reality, as does all of Scripture, but in a manner that struggles at the boundaries of language and human conception.

On this score, Mansel was critical of Butler for understating the theological or spiritual character of evil. In a Lenten sermon in 1866, Mansel writes,

Our thoughts may be sometimes tempted to dwell on the history of the transgression of our first parents from this human point of view exclusively. We picture to ourselves the apparent lightness of the one positive precept which they were bidden to keep, the apparent weakness of the temptation by which they were induced to transgress. Simple indeed, and plain, and unadorned, and unaided by one word of philosophic theory or explanation, is that unpretending narrative of facts in which is recounted the temptation under which the first Adam fell as simple, as plain, as unpretending, as that other narrative of that other temptation over which the second Adam triumphed. Yet both alike have one feature in common: the simple tale may be enhanced to what height the imagination may reach, by the thought of the presence of that subtle malignant spirit,

⁴³⁷ Henry Mansel, *It Is Finished*, 429.

bringing every power of evil to bear secretly and invisibly in aid of those suggestions and proffers whose outward expression alone we see.⁴³⁸

In this case the simplicity of the words are true in their “outward expression,” and that expression is not diminished or cast off, even as the words refer to the unknown nature of that “malignant spirit.” The words themselves frame human conceptions of these incomprehensible realities, but the full extent of the reality extends beyond these words without escaping the circumference of the expression’s plain meaning. Or in other words, the plain, “unpretending” narrative describes God’s engagement—and that of all spiritual beings—with the visible world, and while this narrative is not an exhaustive account of God in Himself, it provides indications and outlines that the Christian, in faith, believes will prove to be consistent with God’s own being.

For Mansel, a comprehensive theological vision of God and reality is framed from below, though this framework is given by the Spirit. What this means is that the narrative arc of Scripture—a fragmentary, accommodated, though sufficient, witness to God’s character—refers at every step beyond itself to a greater reality that encompasses the world. In human terms, this greater reality—the Triune God and all manner of spiritual creatures—cannot be encompassed in any kind of broader arc, because it would require the mind to reach into the character of the Infinite or the Absolute. But the limited and human expressions of Scripture provide an authorized, inspired account of God’s relation to His creation that does not fully disclose His nature but certainly reveals the pattern of His actions and, for that reason, His character.

Milbank is probably right that Mansel would have been anti-mystical in some sense; at least, he was leery of certain forms of language that attended the mystical

⁴³⁸ Henry Mansel, “The Conflict and Defeat in Eden,” 28.

tradition.⁴³⁹ But there is a mystical aspect to Mansel's theology that comes out in his view of Scripture. Mansel, speaking of the revelatory nature of Scripture, writes,

The luminary by whose influence the ebb and flow of man's moral being is regulated, moves around and along with man's little world, in a regular and bounded orbit: one side, and one side only, looks downwards upon its earthly centre; the other, which we see not, is ever turned upwards to the all surrounding infinite.⁴⁴⁰

This image describes well the place of scriptural language in Mansel's theology: The Scriptures are humanly composed, and they speak within the capacities and limitations of human thinking, and yet they maintain an independence from their various authors and their intentions. They exist almost as an independent field of language, inspired and held open by the Spirit, active and capable of adaptation without losing their given shape. As in the image of the luminary, they track along with the world and with human history, expanding to make room for the unfolding of time within the strictures of a time-bound narrative. The depth of scriptural language does not depart from its literal or historical reference but extends the reference to shape and illumine evolving circumstances. In this manner, it is clear for Mansel that Scripture has a formative power that is derived from the Spirit, who gathers the world and moves it toward the person of Christ.

⁴³⁹ This inclination comes out forcefully, though indirectly, in his essay on spiritualism. Consider the following sarcastic remarks concerning one spiritualist leader: "Mr. Howitt, on the other hand, who regards all spiritual manifestations, ghosts included, as the results of one and the same universal principle, agrees with Stilling and Swedenborg in holding that 'the animated spirit, the divine spark in man, is inseparably united with an ethereal or luminous body.' Hence arises a question—Is this ethereal or luminous body visible or invisible to mortal eyes? If visible, what is the need of incarnating hands out of vital atmospheres; and why are hands alone, and not whole human figures, visible at Mr. Home's séances? If invisible, how comes it that the old-fashioned ghost managed to make himself seen from head to foot; and not himself only, but likewise the ghost of a dress, which, with a due regard to modesty, he used to put on?" (272). While the spiritualism here has little to do with traditional mysticism, it is the general threat to the particular personality of God that Mansel ultimately bases his critique upon (287). Henry Mansel, "Modern Spiritualism," in *Letter, Lectures and Reviews, Including the Phrontisterion, or, Oxford in the 19th Century* (London: John Murray, 1873), 255–292.

⁴⁴⁰ Henry Mansel, *The Limits of Religious Thought*, 160.

However one might describe the mystical aspect of Scripture for Mansel, it is at least true that it is not a mysticism of ascent. While Scripture refers to a spiritual world beyond the visible, the emphasis of Mansel's theology is that the visible is penetrated and infused with the Spirit of God, embodied most fully in the person of Christ. In some sense then, the language of Scripture represents a surface that cannot be broken or penetrated; on the contrary, it is a surface that is being molded and formed from within. It is in this manner that Maurice's confused objections were perhaps not that far off the mark, and likewise, it is here that Mansel can be contrasted most sharply with Coleridge. In the second chapter I argued that Coleridge's maxim "The Bible contains the religion revealed by God" placed the center of Christian living within an interior experience of spiritual communion, which, to some extent, forced the Scriptures to answer to a criterion of interior resonance with a higher spiritual realm.⁴⁴¹ The aspects of Scripture that fail to strike any chord of resonance with the central experience of spiritual communion can be safely left in the shadows. This logic is more clearly perceived in the well-known distinction of Coleridge's disciple Benjamin Jowett: "Scripture has an inner life or soul; it has also an outward body or form. That form is language, which imperfectly expresses our common notions, much more those higher which religion teaches us."⁴⁴² The truth of Scripture is buried beneath historical, theological and ecclesial accretions that obscure and conceal the inner character of revelation; language and grammar are shells of meaning that need to be peeled back to get at the kernel.⁴⁴³

⁴⁴¹ See the section on Coleridge in Chapter 2

⁴⁴² Benjamin Jowett, "On the Interpretation of Scripture," in *Essays and Reviews: The 1860 Text and Its Reading*, ed. Victor Shea and William Whitla (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000), 511.

⁴⁴³ Jowett, "On the Interpretation of Scripture," 481, 498, 516.

Whereas for Mansel, the outward form of words, the particular structure of the narratives, are immovable references that speak accurately about God's action in the world. They refer to a broader spiritual reality, but they do not invite the reader to discard the husk for the kernel: Scripture, in this sense, is all husk; it is the reality in which God works and the medium in which humanity encounters God and comes to know Him.⁴⁴⁴ All Scripture is oriented toward Christ—the patriarchs, the history of Israel, the blessings and curses, violence and exile—and these distinct and diverse materials work together through the Holy Spirit to orient human beings and the world they live in toward Christ. To be sure, the Scriptures depict God in a manner that is at times difficult to comprehend, and even more, the character of God's actions can disorient human notions of reason and morality. Though this is not always the case, such difficulties are part of the Church's moral probation, and even more to the point, these difficulties are the chosen means by which the Spirit reveals God in the world.

The preceding statements represent the strength of Mansel's understanding of Scripture, but the weakness of this view is that he seemed to stop short of providing an account of the Spirit's work in illuminating the reader of Scripture. Of course one can find comments that indicate otherwise. In his sermon on the Spirit Mansel straightforwardly states, "In the revelation of God the Holy Ghost we learn to know His

⁴⁴⁴ John Hannah makes this point particularly well: "The earlier moral lessons, for instance, will no longer be thought to be the mere vehicles of an unrelenting sternness, fitted for the world's childhood, but unworthy of its maturity. We shall no longer look on that old Jewish zeal, which bore fruit in hatred for evil as well as love for good, as though it could yield no precedent for Christian conduct, no pattern meet for Christian men. The same is true of every portion of that ancient record. To the devout and enlightened Christian intelligence, the words of those elder Scriptures can never become like the narrow cottage which is abandoned to decay and desolation when its inmates have left it for an ampler home. Still less are they like the dead husk which may be cast away when the fruit has been secured, or like the dead body which may be buried when the spirit has departed. Rather they are still and forever alive with the abiding presence of the indwelling Spirit." John Hannah, *The Relation between the Divine and Human Elements in Holy Scripture*, 118.

blessed work in supplying the helplessness and strengthening the weakness of our fallen nature.”⁴⁴⁵ Likewise, his views on the typological and expansive character of Scripture seem to invite some kind of spiritual or illuminating approach to exegesis, only he remains relatively silent in this regard. J. B. Mozley perceived this and questioned Mansel on this point: “We should like to know how it is that the innocent and the Saintly have such deep intuitive insight into abstract theological dogmas, such keen perception of false doctrine, in cases where philosophic minds of inferior degrees of holiness are utterly at fault.”⁴⁴⁶ One might guess that Mansel would have likened holiness in Mozley’s sense to humble submission to the created limitations of humanity and God’s revelation within these limitations. Such a disposition, Mansel would undoubtedly suggest, is created and nurtured by the Spirit working within the individual; in other words, illumination is a moral or practical reality, not a speculative vista that only a few can approach. Nevertheless, as with Scripture in general, any knowledge imparted through the Spirit’s illumination would be expressed in human terms and capable of conception within the constraints of human consciousness.

In some sense, then, I argue that Mansel’s thought is open to this aspect of the Spirit’s vocation, even if it does not present itself in any clear or forceful manner. Mansel’s reactions to German idealism and its English followers surely inclined him to diminish any account of an exceptional or additional faculty that allowed for deeper insight into the spiritual realm that surpassed the written structure and form of the words, whether this be Coleridge’s version of practical reason or Schelling’s “intuition.” Scripture was often deliberately “obscure” or “indefinite,” but this allowed the text to

⁴⁴⁵ Henry Mansel, *The Spirit a Divine Person*, 18.

⁴⁴⁶ J. B. Mozley, “Mansel’s Bampton Lectures,” 376.

expand around and embrace a changing world; it showed the depth and character of God's activity in the world, without giving new information about the nature of God's essence.⁴⁴⁷ Again, it seems that John Hannah is helpful in clarifying Mansel's theological reticence: for Hannah the Spirit moves in the "ripened judgment" of "those who can look most deeply into the mind of Christ, and can trace most clearly the relations existing between one truth and another, and the respective proportions of the different principles of faith."⁴⁴⁸ Proportion and relation are highly apt terms to describe Mansel's approach to a method of interpretation that moves laterally within a range of revealed language that discloses the actions and purposes of God in language accommodated to human capacities.

4.6 Conclusion

If Mansel's approach to Scripture has certain affinities with more contemporary postliberal themes, Lindbeck's criteria of theological legacies might give occasion to pause:

The ultimate test in this as in other areas is performance. If a postliberal approach in its actual employment proves to be conceptually powerful and practically useful to the relevant communities, it will in time become standard. It was thus that the theological outlooks of Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, and Schleiermacher established themselves.⁴⁴⁹

While a quote like this may feel like yet one more dismissal of Mansel's brief flash of a theological career, it derives, in part, from a similar assumption. "Antifoundationalism," Lindbeck writes, "is not to be equated with irrationalism. The issue is not whether there are universal norms of reasonableness, but whether these can be formulated in some

⁴⁴⁷ Henry Mansel, "St. Matthew's Gospel," 136.

⁴⁴⁸ John Hannah, *The Relation*, 134.

⁴⁴⁹ George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 134.

neutral, framework-independent language.”⁴⁵⁰ Lindbeck’s concern, to this end, is much like Mansel’s: “Reasonableness in religion and theology, as in other domains, has something of that aesthetic character, that quality of unformalizeable skill, which we usually associate with the artist or the linguistically competent.”⁴⁵¹ Now, Mansel would not have spoken in such terms—antifoundationalism, for example—but the idea that the full theological picture could not be formulated in rationally binding concepts was one that he endorsed, even if his psychological account of the human person still feels like a 19th century totalizing theory.

The remarkable thing about Lindbeck’s comments on performance is that, even in 1982, he did not think that the Western Church was in a position to fully embrace a form of his own position: “The intratextual intelligibility that postliberalism emphasizes may not fit the needs of religions such as Christianity when they are in the awkwardly intermediate stage of having once been culturally established but are not yet clearly disestablished.”⁴⁵² Clearly Mansel’s England was already sliding somewhere along this track, which is part of the reason that his ideas failed to gain any considerable traction. He himself could not have known where the ideas he was contending against were about to lead, but he had a vivid sense that an orthodox, scripturally-governed Christianity was being increasingly shadowed by rival and distinct frameworks. In the lectures he writes, “This semi-rationalism, which admits the authority of Revelation up to a certain point and no further, rests on a far less reasonable basis than the firm belief which accepts the whole, or the complete unbelief which accepts nothing.”⁴⁵³ His point here is that the

⁴⁵⁰ George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 130.

⁴⁵¹ George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 130.

⁴⁵² George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 134.

⁴⁵³ Henry Mansel, *The Limits of Religious Thought*, 175.

Christian faith has an internal logic that cannot, without damage, be merged into or accommodated to other frameworks. While this was taken to be a severe and narrow interpretation of the Christian faith, what many of his critics failed to see was how the scriptural world was open to incredibly diverse experiences of the faith, in different places, times and people.

To say that Mansel was ahead of his time would perhaps be too final a judgment or needlessly congratulatory. It is the argument here that Mansel's theological vision had a firm grasp on the intellectual and spiritual climate of the era, but in a manner that was obscure or threatening to his contemporaries. Philosophers and theologians alike were not pleased to see themselves or the Church at large in the position that he advocated, and yet if Lindbeck's and others' arguments have any merit, it is a position that has become increasingly relevant to Christian theological discourse. It is less clear, however, that the particular theory of regulative truth holds promise for contemporary theological writing. In part this is due to simple historical discontinuities. Lindbeck himself suggests that Augustine, Aquinas, Calvin and Luther had diverse methods and manners of making similar claims: all of reality was to be conceived and integrated into the scriptural account of revelation.⁴⁵⁴ In this respect, Mansel's aims were scarcely distinguishable from these great figures in the history of Christian thought, and the theory of regulative truth was what allowed him to pursue this course. It was the most effective way, in his mind, of situating the claims of Scripture within the intellectual climate of his time, without surrendering the power of the Bible, in its full measure, to shape and form the lives and thoughts of Christians. It is possible that Mansel's apologetic impulse endangered his ideas to some extent, as he sought to make the faith intelligible in an unsettling and

⁴⁵⁴ George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 131, 135.

confusing context. Maybe the irony still holds, that in an effort to allow the Scriptures to identify and describe God he actually rendered God more obscure.

It is difficult to deny that the theory of regulative truth cannot quite shake the specter that what the Bible says about God is only true in some sort of qualified, if not diminished, sense. For example, when Mansel speaks about God as a person, there is a lingering uncertainty as to what this means. On one hand, God reveals Himself as a person in a regulative mode in accordance with the strictures of human consciousness. On the other hand, God's personality is not quite what it seems in light of His infinite and absolute nature, as incomprehensible as these terms may be. In light of this, it is interesting to contrast the personalism of Mansel with that of Vladimir Lossky, a more contemporary figure. Lossky, like Mansel, places personality at the center of his theology, but it is rooted firmly in the Eastern theological tradition. Lossky's theological notion of the human person is derived from the personal and Trinitarian nature of God. Personhood in God, Lossky writes, "is irreducible to the *ousia*, is no longer a conceptual expression but a sign which is introduced into the domain of the non-generalized, pointing out the radically personal character of the God of Christian revelation."⁴⁵⁵

Lossky extends this irreducibility to human personhood as well, claiming that the human person cannot be reduced or isolated within his or her nature:

Under these conditions, it will be impossible for us to form a concept of the human person, and we will have to content ourselves with saying: "person" signifies the irreducibility of man to his nature—"irreducibility" and not 'something irreducible' or 'something which makes man irreducible to his nature' precisely because it cannot be a question here of 'something' distinct from 'another nature' but of someone who is distinct from his own nature, of someone who goes beyond his nature while still containing it, who makes it exist as human nature by this overstepping and

⁴⁵⁵ Vladimir Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God* (New York: St. Vladimir's Press, 1974), 113.

yet does not exist in himself beyond the nature which he ‘enhypostasizes’ and which he constantly exceeds.⁴⁵⁶

Unlike Mansel, personhood for Lossky is a non-conceptual reality expressed, ultimately, in terms of relation; within God, the persons of the Trinity must surpass conceptual boundaries of their personality, which is only defined as an encounter with the other persons. So there is a profoundly apophatic aspect to his notion of the personality of God:

He is a personal absolute who enters into relationships with human persons... This God reveals himself as transcendent to every image which could make known his nature, but he does not refuse personal relationship, living intercourse with men, with a people: He speaks to them and they reply, in a series of concrete situations which unfold as sacred history.⁴⁵⁷

This last image is striking for its similarity with Mansel’s vision, especially his emphasis on the personal engagement of God. Likewise, Lossky’s agnosticism or apophaticism notably resembles Mansel’s view: God’s nature is unknowable, but He is represented “in a series of concrete situations” known through the Scriptures or, in this case, experience. The clear difference, however, is the theological origin of personality. For Lossky, it is encountered in God’s nature, though it defies conceptual grasp. Mansel, on the contrary, begins with an account of the human person that Lossky might very well regard as a prisoner to substantial accounts of humanity, though, as I argued, Mansel’s account of human personality is largely negative. In this respect it is not experientially constraining, though Lossky might still find this definition of personality to be overly reductive. On this score, Mansel’s anthropology might have been enriched by a version of Lossky’s theological account of personality. Mansel, in the end, was open to something like Lossky’s argument, though he remained understated about it. Part of the discussion on analogy in chapter three highlighted the manner of resemblance between

⁴⁵⁶ Vladimir Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God*, 120.

⁴⁵⁷ Vladimir Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God*, 129.

the regulative images of Scripture and God's own nature. Yet for Mansel, human conceptions of God begin with these images and Christians, in faith, and hope that they will be confirmed in the end.

This is perhaps the point of difference between Lossky and Mansel, despite obvious similarities. Rowan Williams' comments on Lossky help draw the distinction out:

Lossky's 'personalism' requires an appreciation of the fundamental importance for him of apophasis, regarded as the expression of the foundation of all theology in the "self-revelation of God in silence," the meeting of human and divine persons in a direct confrontation that does not require the mediation of any image or concept.⁴⁵⁸

On the other hand, Mansel's personalism is an account of the human person, which is designed to make space for the multitude of scriptural images which describe this confrontation. Or put another way, no description of this confrontation is possible without the myriad images displayed in Scripture. This is probably true to some extent for Lossky, but the controlling image for Lossky is the inner dynamics of the Trinity; how this image shapes or controls scriptural interpretation would be a good indicator of its performative value. Of course, it is strange to speak this way, because Trinitarian concepts are themselves scripturally rooted. Williams' point is perhaps that Lossky's account of personality represents an inner circle around his concept of God, which stands closer to the center than the conventional images employed in Scripture.

In part, this contrast is instructive in showing the character of Mansel's apophaticism, if it can be called that. Despite the weaknesses of the theory of regulative truth, I argue that it holds more promise for articulating a scriptural worldview than, in this instance, Lossky's view.

⁴⁵⁸ Rowan Williams, *Wrestling With Angels* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2007), 18.

For Mansel, Scripture speaks at times in conflicting statements and antinomous images that cannot be conceptually resolved; but it is the character of human knowledge of God that it must be conveyed through “broken lights” and partial statements, because a full orbed or speculative understanding of God is simply impossible. As a necessary result of this conviction, Christians cannot afford to discard the images of Scripture—Scripture cannot be streamlined so as to leave aside even the most jagged and difficult portions—because there is no fuller account of God’s activity in the world than Scripture itself that could justify such a selection.

In the next chapter I pursue this conceptual contrast more fully in the particular context of English idealism. Indeed, the theme of theological and philosophical comprehensiveness would become the great concern of late 19th century England: how could emerging and diverse forms of knowledge be united in a single comprehensible scheme? What Mansel offered was a scripturally comprehensive vision of reality, though such a vision fit uncomfortably within clear theoretical boundaries. Even more, it rendered a picture of Victorian England that cut across the grain of the era’s more prevailing sense of its moment in history, which is not to say that Mansel’s understanding of his own times was the only option available for those who wished to see their world through a scriptural lens. Mansel’s understanding of the rise of unbelief drew on the assumption that the Bible is capable of expanding around and describing the world in which we live, but the nature of the Bible is such that the character of these descriptions may not be obvious. The main argument here is that Mansel’s theory of regulative truth provides a context in which these descriptions might take place and flourish. However, this is not how Mansel’s ideas would come to be known amongst Victorian theologians

and philosophers. The subject of the next chapter will explore the way in which Mansel was misread and the theological reasons which made this misreading possible.

Chapter Five: Mansel Among the Idealists

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I argued that Mansel's rather limited theological vision contains the outlines of a larger, scripturally-oriented worldview that fits coherently with his philosophical position regarding the limits of religious thought. While many regarded Mansel's theology as a narrow and confined interpretation of reality that circumscribed human reason within an unnecessarily limited scope, I argued that Mansel's intention was otherwise. In particular, his articulation of the language of Scripture—its expansive and typical capacity to describe the world and its designed intention to refer all of reality to the person of Jesus Christ—provided the rudiments of a worldview that allowed the full breadth of Scripture to speak truthfully and coherently about the actions and character of God revealed under human signs. The difficulties of these signs, the antinomies that arise from their canonical juxtaposition, form a larger fabric of language that, Mansel would suggest, is best capable of describing the transcendent character of God in human language.

This depiction of Mansel's thought, of course, was not how he would be known in the decades that followed the publication of his lectures. Bernard Lightman's *The Origins of Agnosticism* has already provided a thoroughly descriptive account of Mansel's influence on Spencer and English agnosticism, so it is the intention of this chapter to focus on the manner in which Mansel's ideas impinged upon the philosophical idealism that would soon exert great influence in England. In some sense the irony of Mansel's relation to English idealism is more theologically complex and suggestive than the case of the English agnostics. While Spencer's developmental philosophy had the effect of

eroding traditional theological beliefs, it did not contain an ostensible theological aspect that might have made it attractive to Anglican writers.⁴⁵⁹

Both T. H. Green and F. H. Bradley would use Mansel's epistemology as a foil for their progressive metaphysics of knowledge and history, and yet the Anglican theologians who made their home in this context would eventually draw on certain elements of Mansel's thought to resist the generalizing pressures of idealism that threatened to erode the distinctiveness of Christian belief. In other words, I argue in this chapter that aspects of Mansel's epistemological skepticism remained operative in Anglican theology throughout the remainder of the 19th century and into the 20th century, even if the fuller implications of his theology were not fully understood or acknowledged. It was not until the period following the First World War, when Mansel had long been forgotten in theological publications, that Anglican theologians began to wrestle seriously with the incongruity between the scriptural account of God and the various claims of idealistic metaphysics.

English idealism was a particular school of philosophy that is best known by its leading figures T. H. Green and F. H. Bradley and their particular versions of Hegelian metaphysics. While Green started writing in the 1850s, it was not until the 1870s, following Mansel's death in 1871, that idealism as such became a widely heralded movement at Oxford and beyond. Though it certainly represented something new in character and form, it stood within the 19th century romantic tradition of Anglican

⁴⁵⁹ While Spencer did make wide use of Mansel's arguments, he is clear about the limitations they imply for his own purposes. In some sense, Spencer argues that Mansel's skepticism is dishonest in not recognizing the further incognizability of even revealed claims (92). For Spencer, the unknowable is real in some sense, and history gradually reveals its full extent: "Through all its successive phases the disappearance of those positive dogmas by which the mystery was made unmysterious, has formed the essential change delineated in religious history. And so Religion has ever been approximating toward that complete recognition of this mystery which is its goal." Herbert Spencer, *First Principles*, 91.

theology represented by Coleridge, the Cambridge apostles and Benjamin Jowett.⁴⁶⁰ Coleridge's resistance to traditional atonement theology and Jowett's dislike for "schemes of salvation" were part of a larger spiritual concern to render Christian beliefs within a philosophical system that coordinated the infinite and the finite in a manner that overcame the materialist and empiricist tendency in the Anglican tradition.⁴⁶¹ But while the thinkers in this tradition were united by a consistent concern, it would be difficult to suggest that the writings of Coleridge, Carlyle or Thomas Arnold represented a specific school of thought identified by a certain style of philosophical rigor. Yet it was just this appearance that gave the English idealists a certain prestige in 1880s and 90s. In the words of W. J. Mander, English idealism shared a similar goal as its predecessors but promised to deliver something more:

It was from this culture that Idealism rose, and directly to it that it spoke, for it was a crisis that exposed utterly the impotence of existing philosophies of religion...the common-sense tradition of Hamilton and Mansel proved itself epistemically too weak to offer up anything more than the emptiness of Herbert Spencer's 'unknowable' or of Matthew Arnold's 'eternal not ourselves that makes for righteousness.' By contrast, Idealism offered a path by which unassailable philosophical enquiry might contribute to the secure rebuilding of what had been lost. Not always explicit or orthodox...Idealism thus answered a pressing need of the age, seeming to many to offer a rational re-interpretation of religion which, at the same time as shedding itself of blind faith, was able to avoid agnosticism or atheism, and thereby hold on to the things of deeper value and significance in traditional belief.⁴⁶²

Of course, the phrase "shedding itself of blind faith" is theologically loaded, much like the "deeper value" of traditional belief. This chapter will be concerned with exploring the manner in which philosophers like Green and Bradley were taken up by more orthodox theologians for the purpose of addressing the demands of the age. It is unquestionably

⁴⁶⁰ Timothy Gouldstone, *The Rise and Decline of Anglican Idealism in the Nineteenth Century*, 10.

⁴⁶¹ Timothy Gouldstone, *The Rise and Decline of Anglican Idealism in the Nineteenth Century*, 18.

⁴⁶² W. J. Mander, *British Idealism: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 138.

true that the *Lux Mundi* writers were deeply influenced by Green especially, but as Michael Ramsay has insisted, this influence can be overstated.⁴⁶³ Given the nature of Green's and Bradley's own religious beliefs, this had to be the case. In Timothy Gouldstone's words, this struggle of situating orthodox faith within an idealistic framework was what united figures as diverse as Coleridge, Green and Scott Holland:

Coleridge's mind reflected the tension between Christianity and pantheism, between philosophical inferences and orthodox Christian theism, and in this it bears a strong resemblance to later idealist philosophers who felt acutely the tension between their idealistic and holistic vision of the cosmos and the particularities that are a necessary part of orthodox Christian revelation.⁴⁶⁴

My purpose in this chapter is to illustrate and analyze the manner in which orthodox theologians drew on ideas and distinctions that Mansel had already put in place, just before idealism formalized into a forceful movement in Anglicanism.

5.2 Mansel on Hegel

In his *Second Letter to Goldwin Smith*, Mansel defends his philosophical or theological reserve by quoting the famous words of Ridley: "I am so fearful that I dare not speak farther, yea, almost none otherwise than the text doth lead me by the hand."⁴⁶⁵ In support of his own position he offers Smith this rather simple reply: "I confess I can give no better than that it appears to me most agreeable to the language of Scripture...I give this reason only as the one which is most satisfactory to myself: I can hardly expect it to be satisfactory to you."⁴⁶⁶ Of course, to Mansel's critics this might have seemed like pious pleading, but the statement expresses his basic belief that human beings approach God by the light of Scripture in a world that otherwise conceals Him. Though Mansel

⁴⁶³ Michael Ramsay, *From Gore to Temple: The Development of Anglican Theology Between Lux Mundi and the Second World War 1889–1939* (London: Longmans, 1960), 10.

⁴⁶⁴ Timothy Gouldstone, *The Rise and Decline of Anglican Idealism in the Nineteenth Century*, 38.

⁴⁶⁵ Henry Mansel, *Second Letter to Goldwin Smith*, 28.

⁴⁶⁶ Henry Mansel, *Second Letter to Goldwin Smith*, 28.

may not have agreed with the full implications of Hume's maxim that "nature is always too strong for principle,"⁴⁶⁷ something like this notion formed the basis of Mansel's criticism of Hegel, except for Mansel it might be rephrased that the human mind is not strong enough for such a principle that unites all things under a theological or logical conception; because all human conceptions are limited or relative to human understanding, no comprehensive vision of God's relation to the world is possible aside from what has been given from God. Furthermore, any attempt to widen the scope of God's providence or relation to creation beyond scriptural language inevitably distorts the manner in which people were created to interact with the Triune God.

I argued in chapter three that Mansel inherited his criticism of German idealism from William Hamilton and his *Philosophy of the Conditioned*. No other author is cited more frequently in Mansel's Bampton Lectures than Hegel, and Schelling is a close second. While Mansel regarded Hegelian idealism as only one prong of modern unbelief, it was one that increasingly overwhelmed his writing. To Goldwin Smith he writes, "Against the Pantheists, I have insisted strongly on the personality of God: against the Socinians and their disciples, I have maintained that personality, as we conceive it, is but a faint and imperfect reflection of the reality."⁴⁶⁸ The lectures would become memorable or notorious for the latter emphasis, but in the last decade of Mansel's life it was really the former that emerged as the greater concern. Historically this is understandable, given the relatively sudden escalation of interest in Hegel that began, in earnest, in the middle of the 1860s.

⁴⁶⁷ David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding: A Critical Edition*, ed. Tom Beauchamp (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 150.

⁴⁶⁸ Henry Mansel, *A Second Letter to Goldwin Smith*, 20.

Mansel's emphasis on the personality of God became a way of holding on to the biblical depiction of God's relation to His people, and even more, personality was a limiting term for the particular character of God in the Scriptures. To this end he would have affirmed Charles Taylor's assessment of Hegel's particular theological beliefs:

The central tenets of this philosophy, that the only locus of God's life as spirit is man, and that this spiritual life is nothing but the unfolding of conceptual necessity, together rule out the kind of radical God to which faith relates. In Hegel's system, God cannot give to man—neither in creation, nor in revelation, nor is salvation through sending his Son.⁴⁶⁹

Taylor's point, perhaps, is that the ability of God to relate and give of Himself in the world is taken over, in Hegel's terms, by a "conceptual necessity" or process. Strangely, it is the relatability or porousness of the self that made Hegel's ideas attractive to idealists like Bradley and, to some degree, to contemporary theologians like Rowan Williams. For instance, Williams regards Hegel's account of consciousness to be in fact highly conducive to the Divine and human encounter: "No perceived reality is stable and self-contained for thinking...Thinking passes through this process as action that realizes itself in 'emptying' itself: and its continuity is secured in and by its challenging or denying of itself."⁴⁷⁰ So Williams, not unlike Lossky, invests Hegel's account of the "dialectical process which consciousness executes on itself"⁴⁷¹ with a moral quality that describes the basic character of Christian living. The process of the object becoming internal to the subject and vice versa represents for Williams an "ecstatic" or "kenotic" epistemology

⁴⁶⁹ Charles Taylor, *Hegel* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 493.

⁴⁷⁰ Rowan Williams, *Wrestling With Angels*, 37.

⁴⁷¹ G. W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, ed. J. B. Baille (New York: Dover Publications, 2003), 51.

that is fundamental for Christian theology: thinking in this sense becomes an act of love, “the self’s being-in-the-other,”⁴⁷² which is rooted in the Trinitarian God.

It is probably the case that Mansel could not have imagined the application of Hegel in these theological terms. While Williams claims that Hegel remains rooted, in some sense, within the scriptural narrative,⁴⁷³ Mansel could only see in Hegel’s philosophy a form of logic that would eventually dissolve particular scriptural and doctrinal claims. And Mansel’s fear stemmed from the very aspect of Hegel that has made him attractive to theologians like Williams and philosophers like Green and Bradley. Mansel writes in his essay on metaphysics,

In consciousness, two identical thoughts are undistinguishable from each other; and as consciousness is only possible as a cognition of differences, it follows that a system of identical determinations of consciousness is tantamount to the annihilation of all consciousness. The possibility of consciousness, therefore, implies the coexistence of opposites; but, for the very reason that there is coexistence, there is not identity. Any special modification of consciousness is discerned to be that which it is by being distinguished from that which it is not; and in this manner consciousness is only possible on the condition of a relation, not merely between subject and object, but between a plurality of objects opposed to each other.⁴⁷⁴

For Mansel the stability of the conscious self and the reality that it engages with was a central aspect of human personality. The subject/object dualism was a created reality that must be accounted for but not overcome.⁴⁷⁵ Thus Mansel writes of Hegel’s basic epistemology,

But, in order that these opposite objects should be regarded as identical, or rather as constituent elements of one and the same reality, it is necessary that the notion or thing in itself should be represented, not as a single object of consciousness, but as an unperceived substratum, which underlies the relation between the two opposed objects, and out of which

⁴⁷² Rowan Williams, *Wrestling With Angels*, 48.

⁴⁷³ Rowan Williams, *Wrestling With Angels*, 48.

⁴⁷⁴ Henry Mansel, *Metaphysics*, 313.

⁴⁷⁵ Henry Mansel, *Metaphysics*, 306.

they mutually spring as distinct sides of one and the same reality. Being is thus no longer identical with thought.⁴⁷⁶

For Mansel the essence of reality is personal, and he feared that in Hegel's philosophy personality was simply a phenomenal representation that was superseded in the process of thought:

Thought in the system of Hegel is represented as an impersonal, absolute, indeterminate, universal, unconscious substance, determining itself in opposed and yet identical modifications, becoming all things, constituting the essence of all things, and attaining to consciousness only in man. Consciousness is thus the accident, not the essence, of thought.⁴⁷⁷

The idea that a reality remained accessible outside of the constraints of human consciousness marked the deepest theological concern for Mansel. In relation to God, he argued that Hegel's "Objective Absolutism regards personality itself as a phenomenal manifestation of some higher reality, which alone is truly existent, and to which it gives the name, but not the nature, of God."⁴⁷⁸ In more contemporary terms, Mansel worried that in Hegel's thought there was a "God behind the God of theism," to use Tillich's phrase.

Yet Mansel did not seem concerned with the manner in which his criticism of Hegel mirrored his own distinction between what can be known of God and God's actual nature. His comment to Goldwin Smith at least highlights the fact that he was conscious of the degree in which his theological emphases shifted with respect to the ideas he was engaging. But if he was in fact speaking out of both sides of his mouth, his basic position remained undisturbed. The personality of God is on one hand presented to humanity in Scripture under the only terms that the human mind can permit; on the other hand, God's

⁴⁷⁶ Henry Mansel, *Metaphysics*, 313.

⁴⁷⁷ Henry Mansel, *Metaphysics*, 312.

⁴⁷⁸ Henry Mansel, *Metaphysics*, 322.

presented personality is not a phase in human comprehension but the final and truthful image, even if only partially grasped in faith. This basic understanding of personality was Mansel's primary method in resisting what he considered Hegel's attempt to "rethink the great thought of creation."⁴⁷⁹ Mansel may have been wrong that Hegel's logic must always lead to atheism or pantheism⁴⁸⁰—at least it was not at all clear to him how Christian theologians could situate orthodox theology within aspects of Hegel's philosophy. But the remainder of this chapter will explore the extent to which Mansel's skeptical, personalist epistemology would resurface among Anglican theologians who were trying to build their ideas upon the renewed hope for a unified, comprehensive theological vision that English idealism seemed to promise.

5.3 British Idealism: Green and Bradley

Timothy Gouldstone writes that "Mansel had clearly seen the challenge confronting Christian apologetics in the 1850s," and yet his lectures were not able "to stem the tide of renewed interest in philosophical developments from the continent."⁴⁸¹ But it was not simply continental philosophy that concerned Mansel but the particular form of philosophy that threatened the particular character of Christian doctrine. In his well-known poem *The Phrontisterion*, Mansel sarcastically writes,

The Voice of Yore,
Which the breezed bore
Wailing aloud from Paxo's shore,
Is changed to a gladder and livelier strain,
For great God Pan is alive again,
He lives and he reigns once more.
With deep intuitions and mystic rite
We worship the Absolute-Infinite
The Universe-Ego, the Plenary void,

⁴⁷⁹ Henry Mansel, *Metaphysics*, 314.

⁴⁸⁰ Henry Mansel, *Metaphysics*, 322.

⁴⁸¹ Timothy Gouldstone, *The Rise and Decline of Anglican Idealism in the Nineteenth Century*, 24, 25.

The Subject-Object identified,
 The great Nothing-Something, the Being-Thought,
 That mouldeth the mass of chaotic Nought,
 Whose beginnings unended and end unbegun,
 Is the One that is All and the All that is One.⁴⁸²

But if many of the peculiarities of Hegel's philosophy were lost on English minds, figures like Green and Bradley were able to adapt continental philosophy in order to meet a growing need in England. In Gouldstone's words, English idealism became "a broad term for a philosophical movement that defines ultimate reality as mental or 'spiritual' rather than physical; the mind and spiritual values are more fundamental than material ones."⁴⁸³ Under the pressures of scientific materialism, and reacting to the party-driven theological controversies of the era, Green and Bradley attempted to construct a system of religious thought that was capable of unifying the rapidly fragmenting character of English intellectual life by expanding and reordering the traditional Christian concept of God. In order to do this they relied upon a structure of religious faith and the limits of knowledge that resembled Mansel's theory but in essence replaced the Scriptures with the eternal consciousness of God or, in Bradley's case, the Absolute.⁴⁸⁴

5.3.1 *T. H. Green*

Much like Coleridge and other early English readers of German idealism, Green was perhaps primarily a Kantian, though a Kantian who read an opening into Kant's

⁴⁸² Henry Mansel, "The Phrontisterion, or Oxford in the 19th Century," 403.

⁴⁸³ Timothy Gouldstone, *The Rise and Decline of Anglican Idealism in the Nineteenth Century*, 25.

⁴⁸⁴ Richard Rorty regards the idealism of Hegel and the later idealists as the end, in some measure, of a philosophical commitment to common reasoning and verification. He writes, "Hegel had also shown that there can be a kind of rationality without argumentation, a rationality which works outside the bounds of what Kuhn calls a 'disciplinary matrix,' in an ecstasy of spiritual freedom." Richard Rorty, "Nineteenth-century Idealism and Twentieth-Century Textualism," in *The Monist* 64, no. 2 (April 1, 1981): 155–173. To some extent this is true of Green and Bradley, though neither author conceals the fact that their notions of the absolute rely, in some measure, on some kind of religious or philosophical faith.

epistemology that allowed for a degree of knowledge about the Absolute.⁴⁸⁵ The problem with Kant, Green writes, is that “We have asserted the unity of the world of our experience only to transfer that world to a larger chaos.”⁴⁸⁶ The chaos refers to the unknown world of things-in-themselves that lies outside the cognitive field of rational apperception, in Kant’s terms. It was along these lines that Green, in his 1874–75 lectures on logic, criticized Mansel as a formal logician whose rigid epistemic limits upon human understanding prohibited any process in the act of knowing.

Yet, Green argues, Mansel goes beyond Kant in denying that there can be any conception without an intuition, a sensible reference:

Mansel holds (what is quite different from Kant’s view) that there can be no conception without intuition; that, attributes being represented by verbal signs, we may and do reason by means of these signs, without at each step referring the attribute signified to an object of intuition, but that in so doing we reason without distinctly conceiving what we are reasoning about, and that if at any stage in the process, for fear of being misled by mere words, we ask ourselves what it is that we mean, we can only answer by an act of conception which involves reference of attributes to an object of intuition.⁴⁸⁷

Mansel argued this point in order to show that there can be no proper human conception of the Infinite or the Absolute—the conceptions cannot possibly refer to any known intuition. But Green insists that this represents a contradiction in terms: intuitions only acquire attributes through the process of conception, “yet all the while the content of the conception is supposed to be attributes found in, and abstracted from, objects of

⁴⁸⁵ T. H. Green, *Prolegomena to Ethics*, ed. A. C. Bradley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1883), 40.

⁴⁸⁶ T. H. Green, *Prolegomena to Ethics*, 42.

⁴⁸⁷ T. H. Green, “Lectures on Logic,” *Works of Thomas Hill Green: II. Philosophical Works*, ed., R. L. Nettleship, 3 vols. (London: Longmans, Green, 1886), 173. According to Green, Kant held “that there could be, but that such mere conception or thought did not amount to knowledge. Hence, according to him, though you could think such objects as a cosmos (the totality of conditions), freedom (*causa sui*), God (the self-conscious subject of the physical and moral worlds), and though you might be sure that there were such objects (which he held to be the case at least with regard to freedom), you could not know them, because from the nature of the case they were not presentable as intuitions, i.e. as distinct in space or time” (173).

intuition.”⁴⁸⁸ Furthermore, Green argues that not all objects of conception are situated within visible reality, and for this reason, Mansel’s theory is ill equipped to deal with moral and spiritual realities:

When the conceived relations do not purport to be relations between separate things in the physical world, e.g. the relation between man and man, between subject and object, between motives and will, between man and God, or God and the world, there is a tendency to intuitionalize the conception arising from the fact (a) that it is hard...to think without expressing thought in language, and (b) that our language is primarily appropriate to the physical world...and that only by a constantly shifting process of metaphor is it made to do other duty. This tendency (which is the ultimate source of dogma) leads us into paradoxes and contradictions, out of which we are apt to find an escape in mysticism. The true way of escape is to recognize the tendency itself as altogether misleading. Is not the true notion of faith, that it is the apprehension of objects which we conceive but cannot present in intuition, an apprehension of which the proper expression is not language but moral action?⁴⁸⁹

Green clearly recognized the theological intent in Mansel’s logic, and his appeal to morality—not unlike Kant’s—was an effort to suggest that there can be conceptions without concrete references. The moral imperative, in this case, is such a conception.

But even more for Green, the problem with Mansel’s epistemology was that it rendered knowledge as a fixed quantity and as a process with a determined end. This concern echoes the more theological criticisms of Mozley and others discussed in chapter three: namely, that it was difficult to imagine what role the illumination of the Holy Spirit played in theological apprehension. The language of Scripture was fixed and immovable, and Christian truths were presented as accommodated realities impenetrable to human insight. Except Green extends this concern to knowledge as whole:

The great mistake lies in regarding a conception as a fixed quantity, a bundle of attributes. In truth a conception, as the thought of an object under relations, is from its very nature in constant expansion. Hence the

⁴⁸⁸ T. H. Green, “Lectures on Logic,” 169.

⁴⁸⁹ T. H. Green, “Lectures on Logic,” 175.

impossibility of really defining a conceived object, unless the relations which determine it from their primariness admit of being isolated. The ordinary definition of an object is available only for rhetorical purposes, as expressing what for the time certain disputants, or those to whom a man is speaking, agree to understand by a name.⁴⁹⁰

This characterization of Mansel's mistake provides, in effect, the opening for Green's metaphysics, which essentially underpins the provisional nature of all thought and experience. As Mander expresses it, "Thought leads always beyond itself."⁴⁹¹ Like Mansel, Green argues that all reality is conceived in relations, but related objects are related not simply to a particular consciousness but to all of reality. This reality is constantly moving and morphing into new forms, and while the possible relations cannot be exhausted, they are held together by an eternal consciousness.⁴⁹²

While Green does not speak in the definite theological terms that Hegel uses with respect to the phenomenology of Spirit in history, Green still describes individuals as vehicles for a higher process:

in the growth of our experience, in the process of our learning to know the world, an animal organism, which has its history in time, gradually becomes the vehicle of an eternally complete consciousness. What we call our mental history is not a history of this consciousness, which in itself can have no history, but a history of the process by which the animal organism becomes its vehicle.⁴⁹³

But the eternal consciousness remains, in large part, a moral postulate that cannot be verified or entirely conceived. In this way, Green's metaphysics mirrors Mansel's notion of faith and the regulative truth of Scripture, only the object of faith has expanded beyond the traditional bounds of Christian theology. It is founded on the moral intuition that the

⁴⁹⁰ T. H. Green, "Lectures on Logic," 190.

⁴⁹¹ W. J. Mander, *British Idealism*, 278.

⁴⁹² T. H. Green, *Prolegomena to Ethics*, 40.

⁴⁹³ T. H. Green, *Prolegomena to Ethics*, 71.

mere possibility of moral development implies a completed state, and such a state is nearly synonymous with God Himself. So Green writes,

It is the consciousness of possibilities in ourselves, unrealised but constantly in the process of realisation, that alone enables us to read the idea of development into what we observe of natural life, and to conceive that there must be such a thing as a plan of the world...the appearance of positive inconsistency between much that we observe and any scheme of universal development, can weaken the authority of the idea, which does not rest on the evidence of observation but expresses an inward demand for the recognition of a unity in the world answering to the unity of ourselves a demand involved in that self-consciousness which, as we have seen, alone enables us to observe facts as such.⁴⁹⁴

Just as Mansel regards causation as a deduction from the character of human consciousness, Green is able to describe the pattern of history—both natural and supernatural—according to the secure inward knowledge of consciousness, though in this case it is a moral knowledge that becomes the measure and the basis on this knowledge, and, Green suggests, in essence, it is by faith that human beings are assured that what is personally true is in fact objectively true.

In these terms God becomes an analogical extension of human moral possibilities. To be sure, God is more than any individual person; God represents an outcome that is impossible to comprehend:

This consideration may suggest the true notion of the spiritual relation in which we stand to God; that He is not merely a Being who has made us, in the sense that we exist as an object of the divine consciousness in the same way in which we must suppose the system of nature to exist, but that He is a Being in whom we exist; with whom we are in principle one; with whom the human spirit is identical, in the sense that He is all which the human spirit is capable of knowing.⁴⁹⁵

But Green insists that any knowledge of this end in God remains impossible, as the end “is not itself a series in time” but a state that must be “comprehended eternally in the

⁴⁹⁴ T. H. Green, *Prolegomena to Ethics*, 196.

⁴⁹⁵ T. H. Green, *Prolegomena to Ethics*, 198.

eternal mind.”⁴⁹⁶ Statements like these are certainly cryptic, but the whole of Green’s metaphysics contains an obvious advantage over Mansel’s in that it provides a place for continual movement and progress in knowledge and experience without relinquishing a holistic conception of reality. Mansel, as I argued in chapter four, tried to present Scriptures as this holistic reality, the context in which God encounters human history, but the stress of his work remained upon the distinctions and divisions of knowledge and the inevitable limitations of human thought. Green attempts to lift these limitations and render all of life as immersion in the Spirit, so to speak, though without necessarily attending to the particularities or personality of God in Scripture. But what seemed to Green and his followers like a widening of the philosophical lens in the end retained a structure not unlike Mansel’s. Though all of reality is related to and exists in the eternal mind, the realization of this goal remains hidden in human history; it is grasped in faith. In other words, Green’s epistemology remains skeptical to some degree even amidst its apparent ambitions.

5.3.2 *Dogma and Scripture*

It could be argued that Green’s metaphysics provided a structure for a style of thinking that was already prevalent in Victorian England. Aside from offering the possibility of mitigating growing concerns over science and the shifting intellectual of the 19th century, Green offered a philosophical account of why theological dogmas need only serve a penultimate role in religion and morality. To some extent this was the effect of Locke’s *The Reasonableness of Christianity*—a book written in the aftermath of the English Civil War. Clearly the Latitudinarian tradition had a foot in both camps—idealism and empiricism—even while the theological stakes in the classic conflict

⁴⁹⁶ T. H. Green, *Prolegomena to Ethics*, 199.

remained often unclear.⁴⁹⁷ Matthew Arnold's comment in *St. Paul and Protestantism*, for example, is particularly telling:

If they [heretics] separated on points of dogma they were wrong also, because while neither they nor the Church had the means of determining such points adequately, the true instinct lay in those who, instead of separating for such points, conceded them as the Church settled them, and found their bond of union, where it in truth really was, not in notions about the co-eternity of the Son, but in Christ's injunction, Follow me!⁴⁹⁸

What exactly Arnold means with this statement is another matter, but it expresses, at least partially, a sentiment that is common to both Mansel and Green: God's nature cannot be fixed in human language, and the essence of Christian faith is practical or moral. However, they differed widely on the context in which these claims are made. For Green in particular, the traditional doctrines of the Christian faith that inform the reading of Scripture are not capable of delivering the "bond of unity" that Arnold describes. Even more, a comprehensive theological vision of the world that stops short at doctrinal definitions inevitably arrests the progressive movement of the Spirit in humanity.

With that being said, Green's engagement with Scripture seems hardly facile or underhanded. This, in large measure, is what made his ideas plausible and even persuasive to a generation of young Anglican clergyman. Gouldstone writes,

Precisely because of this tendency, it could be a more potent dissolvent of the Anglican cosmos than more naturalistic movements; it could appear as

⁴⁹⁷ Maria Dimova suggests that Green's idealism places him somewhere in between these two schools in a manner that is quite particular to his era in England. "Continental philosophy has inherited one important insight from German Idealism: the discovery that experience is formed through the meanings invested in it by human consciousness. This insight is essentially missing in British empiricist thought. British moral and political thought as represented by Mill's liberalism and utilitarianism, undertakes an inquiry into the human personality. A similar reorientation took place much later on the Continent. This breakthrough, against the background of the dominant objectivistic and universalistic spirit of German Idealism, was performed by the school of twentieth-century existentialism. Being influenced by German philosophical thought, and having inherited the spirit of Mill's liberalism, by the end of the nineteenth century, Green had developed philosophical approaches as mature as those of twentieth-century phenomenology." "T. H. Green as a Phenomenologist: Linking British Idealism and Continental Phenomenology," in *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* 3, no. 1 (1998): 77–88, 87.

⁴⁹⁸ Matthew Arnold, *St. Paul and Protestantism* (London: Smith, Elder & Co, 1906), 111.

a spiritual sheep in philosophical wolf's clothing when it came to a reassessment of the place of Christian dogma and doctrine.⁴⁹⁹

A particular potent example of this can be found in Green's lectures on Romans and Galatians. Green provides a skillful account of the Pauline themes of law and gospel, death and life. When considering the conversion of Paul, Green writes,

The subjection of the Son of God to the death in which he found himself was his own deliverance from it, as showing that God was not the giver of an external law which could not be obeyed, but a God who communicated himself to man under conditions which had seemed to separate from him. Thus the death wrought by the law, wrought by it, though spiritual in itself, owing to the relation in which it stood to our carnal nature, through the participation of Christ in it becomes death unto the law.⁵⁰⁰

Green's philosophy is not threatened by the traditional language of salvation in Paul's writing; in fact, he is able to enter into it with conviction and without suspicion of authorship or sources. Even on the issue of the atonement he accepts, at first glance, the obvious reading of Paul's statements in Romans: "We being dead under the curse of the law, the Son of God, in order to save us from the consciousness of being apart from God, had in some way to put himself in that condition too; to put himself under the curse of the law and thus die too."⁵⁰¹

The theology of the atonement in the 19th century was the source of continual controversy. Certainly for Mansel the atonement was a cipher for determining the logic that underpinned any particular theological vision, and in particular, atonement theologies, he believed, quickly revealed an author's attitude toward the Scriptures and

⁴⁹⁹ Timothy Gouldstone, *The Rise and Decline of Anglican Idealism in the Nineteenth Century*, 52.

⁵⁰⁰ T. H. Green, "Lectures on the New Testament. Extract From the Lectures on the Epistle to the Galatians" in *Works of T. H. Green*, ed. R. L. Nettleship, 3 vols. (London: Longmans Green, 1885–8), 188.

⁵⁰¹ T. H. Green, "Lectures on the Epistle to the Romans," in *Works of T. H. Green*, ed. R. L. Nettleship, 3 vols. (London: Longmans Green, 1885–8), 193.

the Old Testament in particular.⁵⁰² Green, in this case, does not dispute the sacrificial elements of Paul's understanding of Christ's work on the cross, but he rather places this work within a larger context of the Spirit:

Thus, though he did think of the death of Christ as a death in which the penalty of sin was paid, his essential thought of it was as of a death unto sin, in which we ideally partake, while at the same time, by the new consciousness of God's mind towards us which it gives, it enables us gradually to actualise this ideal death unto sin as a new spiritual walk; and his thought of the death of Christ as a payment of the penalty passes into the latter thought, which is what really gives his doctrine its great moral value.⁵⁰³

It was not so much that Paul was wrong or needed adjustment; Green does not deny that Christ's death meant what it meant to Paul but only that his death would eventually mean something else. Within the contours of a philosophy where meaning is always slipping beyond the attributes of an object, Green is free to at once affirm the language of Scripture, attend to its shape and force, and all the while move beyond it.

So in Green's view, Christ becomes the emblematic type of his epistemological system wherein the paradox of life and death are worked out.⁵⁰⁴ To cling to a solid identity, to regard something as fixed by its attributes, represents a clinging to life that leads to death; whereas the dissolution of identity leads to life in the Spirit:

In like manner the Christ of dogma is an object of intuition become abstract, but not ideal. He is presented to the spirit, not as its own true form objectified, but as wholly external to it. The confinement of his earthly reality, though the attributes assigned to him involve its entire negation, still clings to him. He does not yet fill all things with the fullness of the idea.⁵⁰⁵

⁵⁰² See the section on Maurice and Mansel in chapter 2 of this document. Mansel did not adhere to any particular atonement theory, though he insisted that the Old Testament, the ceremonial and moral law in particular, must be allowed to inform Christ's own work on the cross.

⁵⁰³ T. H. Green, "Lectures on the Epistle to the Romans," 199.

⁵⁰⁴ T. H. Green, "Lectures on the Epistle to the Romans," 195.

⁵⁰⁵ T. H. Green, "Essay on Christian Dogma" in *Works of T. H. Green*, ed. R. L. Nettleship, 3 vols. (London: Longmans Green, 1885–8), 177.

Green is speaking here of the Chalcedonian definitions of Christ that, in his words, leave Jesus as a wholly external reality, deprived of His universality by the encumbrance of attributes.⁵⁰⁶ As a result, the coming of the Spirit and ascension of Christ's earthly represent less the glorification of Christ, his particular life and action, and more the diffusion of Christ's God consciousness into the world:

That evolution of dogma, which, as we have seen, emptied the intuition of Jesus of its content, constitutes a gradual determination of the idea of God as an object to himself. This idea becomes more concrete as the intuition becomes more abstract. God has died and been buried, and risen again, and realised himself in all the particularities of a moral life.⁵⁰⁷

As the intuition of Jesus expands beyond His historical person it becomes more capable of embracing a widening range of experience that is characterized by the drive toward self-fulfillment realized in God.⁵⁰⁸

In theological terms, Green's skepticism becomes more severe than Mansel's, largely because the language of revelation is not available to him in any enduring manner. Scripture is not the context in which humanity encounters and knows God throughout history, but it is an instance of the evolution of consciousness—a crucially informing instance—that is elevated within the dynamics of the Spirit.

The only course which does not land us in contradictions is to admit that we have no reason to suppose, or rather that we cannot suppose, though we may talk of doing so, any personality but that with which our individual experience makes us acquainted, and of which the attributes are as incompatible with an absolute being as are those which experience of nature reveals to us. We may amuse ourselves with guesses about a great personal demon, as about a single primitive force; but God, if he is to be

⁵⁰⁶ T. H. Green, "Essay on Christian Dogma," 175.

⁵⁰⁷ T. H. Green, "Essay on Christian Dogma," 184.

⁵⁰⁸ Maria Dimova argues, as others have, that this aspect of Green's thought, shorn of the theological element, secures him a place in the genealogy of British liberalism: "According to Green, the pursuit of the moral ideal is the pursuit of self-fulfillment. In this sense the moral ideal is not an abstract concept which is the same for all—quite the reverse, everybody should be able to find the right object of her, or his own self-realisation. By developing this view Green made a major contribution to British liberalism." Maria Dimova, "T. H. Green as a Phenomenologist," 84.

God, can neither be such a demon nor such a force. Either there is no God, or God is the unknown.⁵⁰⁹

Green's reason for making this claim is startlingly close to Mansel's own understanding, but without any form of analogical reasoning, Green has no way of bridging the contradictions that arise from the correspondence between the personality of God and humanity. God is simply the sum of human aspiration made concrete throughout experience but ultimately not fully realizable. In a developmental metaphysics, a definitive God who can be identified as one across a range of scriptural references becomes untenable. And Green himself acknowledges this by suggesting that the inevitable progress of the God consciousness in history is toward ineffability:

We may be passing through a period of transition from one mode of expressing them [the reality of God and moral duty] to another, or perhaps to an admission of their final ineffableness...Faith in God and duty will survive much doubt and difficulty and distress, and perhaps attain to some nobler mode of itself under their influence.⁵¹⁰

Though much has been made of Mansel's influence on Spencer's agnosticism, it should be noted that Spencer and Green shared this vision of history, wherein human conceptions gradually ascend to an increasingly unknowable, indeterminate understanding of God.⁵¹¹

Ultimately Green rejects the authority of credal statements and the text of Scripture to identify God and God's relation to the world.⁵¹² At least in part, this is

⁵⁰⁹ T. H. Green, "Fragment of an Address on Romans x. 8 'The Word in Nigh Thee, '" in *Works of T. H. Green*, ed. R. L. Nettleship, 3 vols. (London: Longmans Green, 1885–8), 228.

⁵¹⁰ T. H. Green, "Faith," in *Works of T. H. Green*, ed. R. L. Nettleship, 3 vols. (London: Longmans Green, 1885–8), 276.

⁵¹¹ See the Chapter one. Spencer and Green, of course, had very different philosophical influences, but the result of their respective skepticisms, while not obvious to Victorian theologians, had a highly similar effect on the status of Christian doctrines and scriptural claims: particular claims about God's activity in the world eventually dissolve into temporal or historical moments in a greater process toward incomprehensibility.

⁵¹² T. H. Green, "Faith," 262.

because Green could not conceive of how the scriptural narrative was still capable of describing the world in which he lived, much less the future that he imagined approaching. Mansel's use of the expansive character of scriptural terms and the typological unity of the Old and New Testaments was an attempt to allow Scripture to form the context in which the truth concerning morality, history and God are understood and encountered. Where Green saw the ossification and idolatry of propositional orthodoxy as a force that kills the Spirit, Mansel argued that the Spirit brings life to the Scriptures and is working in the world in such a way that in the end, they will not be surpassed but fulfilled.

5.3.3 *The Metaphysics of F.H. Bradley*

While it is possible that Green had more influence among Anglican theologians in the final decades of the 19th century, Bradley is considered to have stated the idealist case in England in the most clear and extensive terms. Green's scriptural engagement and theological terminology made him more amenable to theological writers, but Bradley's system of metaphysics has the appearance of philosophical independence and originality. And it was in Bradley, according to R. G. Collingwood, that Mansel was more thoroughly and energetically repudiated within the halls of Oxford. Collingwood writes,

My suggestion is that Bradley's *Appearance* is in the first instance a polemic against Mansel. It is from Mansel that Bradley borrows the antithesis of *Appearance* and *Reality*; it is against the project of dividing the one from the other that his book is directed, and that project is the task assigned by Mansel to metaphysics in his famous *Encyclopaedia Britannica* article, which everyone was reading when Bradley was young.⁵¹³

⁵¹³ R. G. Collingwood, "The Metaphysics of Bradley," 236. Collingwood's claim is supported by W. J. Mander in his recent study of British idealism. See *British Idealism*, 116, note 118.

According to Collingwood, Bradley's positive objections to Mansel are that all of reality must be consistent with itself and that appearances must belong in some way to reality.⁵¹⁴

In order to argue this, in the early portions of *Appearance and Reality* Bradley moves through various attempts to establish the nature of reality—primary and secondary qualities, space and time, substance, etc.—to show that the related character of reality renders every affirmation many-sided. But his criticism of Mansel comes to a point in his understanding of the self: “But we have heard somewhere a rumour that the self was to bring order into chaos...Self has turned out to mean so many things, to mean them so ambiguously, and to be so wavering in its applications, that we do not feel encouraged.”⁵¹⁵ The rumor could be referring as much to Kant as to Mansel, but the point for Bradley is that reality cannot be limited to the self, because the self is simply an appearance among others. Bradley writes of the self:

In its given content it has relations which do not terminate within that content; and its existence therefore is not exhausted by itself, as we ever can have it. If I may use the metaphor, it has always edges which are ragged in such a way as to imply another existence from which it has been torn, and without which it really does not exist.⁵¹⁶

As with Green, no one thing can be defined in any determinate manner, because it exists within a state of infinite relations that qualify it. So Bradley's task is to then describe the nature of a reality that can encompass the endless variety of relations that characterize the world.

Bradley's term for this all-encompassing reality is “the Absolute,” which is not a being of some kind that defies conception, the type that Mansel was bent on criticizing.

⁵¹⁴ R. G. Collingwood, “The Metaphysics of Bradley,” 239.

⁵¹⁵ F. H. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality: A Metaphysical Essay* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930), 87.

⁵¹⁶ F. H. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, 156.

Rather, the Absolute becomes almost synonymous with reality itself as a concept that unites every aspect of life:

Everything, which appears, is somehow real in such a way as to be self-consistent. The character of the real is to possess everything phenomenal in a harmonious form...The bewildering mass of phenomena and diversity must hence somehow be at unity and self-consistent; for it cannot be elsewhere than in reality, and reality excludes discord.⁵¹⁷

The pressing need for the unity of experience is what drives Bradley to this conclusion: “The Absolute is one system, and its contents are nothing but sentient experience. It will hence be a single and all inclusive experience, which embraces every partial diversity in concord...and harmonize all the facts.”⁵¹⁸ Because every single thing is related to everything else, there must be something that embraces the whole system of relations.

The Absolute for Bradley, in a similar way to Hegel, must include all of reality, even discord, evil and error, though in a manner that is qualified by the related character of truth. Bradley writes,

Error is truth, it is partial truth, that is false only because partial and left incomplete. The Absolute has without subtraction all those qualities, and it has every arrangement which we seem to confer upon it by our mere mistake.⁵¹⁹

Logically or experientially this inclusion is demanded by the Absolute if reality is not to be considered discordant or inconsistent with itself, but how this is so, Bradley admits, is impossible to perceive: “We cannot understand how in the Absolute a rich harmony embraces every special discord. But...we may be sure that this result is reached; and we can even gain an imperfect view of the effective principle.”⁵²⁰ This last statement indicates the fideistic aspect of Bradley’s philosophy that is demanded by the features of

⁵¹⁷ F. H. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, 123.

⁵¹⁸ F. H. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, 123.

⁵¹⁹ F. H. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, 169.

⁵²⁰ F. H. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, 170.

his philosophical vision, or what Stephen Carr calls his “religious faith.”⁵²¹ The unity or inclusion of all things within the Absolute remains a postulate of all experience—intellectual, moral and emotional—but it recedes beyond human apprehension; it must exist, even though it cannot be grasped.⁵²²

5.3.4 Bradley and Religious Faith

In philosophical terms Bradley did not go much beyond what Green had already laid out in his *Prolegomena*, but unlike Green he did not feel the need to engage Christian doctrines or the Scriptures in any significant manner. He was not necessarily hostile to traditional faith; however, when put in Mansel’s terms, Bradley was more inclined to speak his mind clearly. Though it doesn’t mention Mansel by name, if Collingwood is right, it is hard to imagine who else might have been the target of this judgment:

Present your doctrine in a form which will bear criticism, and which will enable me to understand this confused mass of facts which I encounter on all sides. Do this, and I will follow you, and I will worship the source of such a true revelation. But I will not accept nonsense for reality, though it be vouched for by miracle, or proceeds from the mouth of a psychological monster.⁵²³

While Bradley had a place for certain Christian doctrines,⁵²⁴ in general the whole thrust of his philosophy is that creedal or scriptural Christianity represents a one-sided view of reality that cannot possibly unite or embrace the fragmentary and expansive character of the experienced world:

Religion seems to have included and reduced to harmony every aspect of life. It appears to be a whole which has embraced, and which pervades,

⁵²¹ Stephen Carr writes, “Bradley’s philosophy is fideistic to this extent then, that it requires a faith in certain notions of truth and goodness as a presupposition of its metaphysical project. These notions are integrated, by Bradley, into a form of religious life.” “F. H. Bradley and Religious Faith,” *Religious Studies* 28, no. 3 (Sept. 1992): 258.

⁵²² F. H. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, 200.

⁵²³ F. H. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, 98.

⁵²⁴ F. H. Bradley, “On God and the Absolute,” in *Essays on Truth and Reality* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1914), 437.

every detail. But in the end we are forced to admit that contradiction remains. For, if the whole is still good, it is not harmonious; and, if it has gone beyond goodness, it has carried us also beyond religion.⁵²⁵

Whereas Mansel argued that the Scriptures mirror the difficult and insoluble contradictions of the world, even while referring to God's providential presence in history, Bradley regarded these difficulties as intolerable inconsistencies.

His argument is aimed at the whole scriptural account of God's character in history, which he seems happy to summarize in the phrase of God's personality, though toward the end of his life he expressed some hesitation in this regard:

I shall assume here, rightly or wrongly, that a personal God is not the ultimate truth about the Universe, and that the ultimate truth would be included and superceded by something higher than personality...The religious consciousness must represent to itself the Good will in its relation with mine. It must express both our difference and our unity. And must not, it will be asked, that representation take the form of a personal God? I answer that to insist here on this must to myself seems untenable, but on the other hand I am fully prepared to accept 'may.'⁵²⁶

But if Bradley expressed some doubt, it was not because he was tempted by more scriptural accounting of reality; it is more likely that he had been influenced by the personalist trajectory within idealism itself.⁵²⁷ It remained the case that Bradley fundamentally did not believe that Christian orthodoxy was broad enough to account for the diversity of experience or phenomena, though he allowed that, for practical purposes, perhaps certain religious beliefs were unavoidable. As in all of life, people must "select arbitrarily those ideas which seem best to suit the occasion,"⁵²⁸ however they might distort the whole. But if unavoidable for practical purposes, metaphysically speaking the

⁵²⁵ F. H. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, 391.

⁵²⁶ F. H. Bradley, "On God and the Absolute," 432.

⁵²⁷ W. J. Mander, *British Idealism*, 400.

⁵²⁸ F. H. Bradley, "On God and the Absolute," 443.

personality of God, for Bradley, cannot help but distort the truth: “If in short for religion you need a personal God, you must accept also a creed which is not consistent.”⁵²⁹ Because in the end, “The Universe is a living whole which, apart from violence and partial death, refuses to divide itself into well-defined objects and clean cut distinctions.”⁵³⁰

It seems Bradley could tolerate Christian doctrines and their practical use, but he could not accept the metaphysical grounding, or lack thereof, in which Mansel tried to situate them. Of course, what Bradley really wanted was a new religion: “We need a creed to recognize and justify in due proportion all human interests, and at the same time to supply the intellect with that to which it can hold with confidence.”⁵³¹ While Bradley tried to move beyond the project of dividing and distinguishing the world for which Mansel was noted, in a certain sense he only replaced one kind of faith with another. According to Collingwood, Bradley’s real accomplishment is that he affirmed that the world of appearances is in fact real⁵³² but that reality is still received in faith in the Absolute, a reality that is at best only partially perceived, though demanded by his metaphysics. The popular perception that traditional Christian notions of God were too constrictive or limiting found a profound expression in Bradley’s metaphysics, though, for all his efforts in establishing the Absolute as the foundation of reality, his philosophy is really another form of immanentism that denies the supernatural character of religion. Collingwood makes this very point: “*Appearance and Reality*, instead of the last word of

⁵²⁹ F. H. Bradley, “On God and the Absolute,” 437.

⁵³⁰ F. H. Bradley, “On God and the Absolute,” 443.

⁵³¹ F. H. Bradley, “On God and the Absolute,” 446.

⁵³² R. G. Collingwood, “The Metaphysics of F. H. Bradley,” 251. While Bradley was severely criticized by Russell and Moore, Collingwood suggests that the turn to realism in philosophy had its roots in Bradley’s affirmation that all that we perceive is in some way real.

a decaying idealism, is the manifesto of a new Realism.”⁵³³ Mansel’s epistemology, despite its weaknesses, still preserved two orders of knowing that corresponded to created reality and the supernatural, in some manner. Bradley retains the structure of the known and unknown, but he encloses all of reality within the realm of appearance, even though appearance is somehow real. There is a similarity here perhaps with Berkeley, who blurred distinctions between ideas such as force and theological notions like grace, but Berkeley’s idealism rooted terms like “grace” in a theological context that ensured their scriptural or doctrinal meaning. For Bradley, the context of the Absolute does the opposite: it ensures that such theological terms will be dissolved in the perpetual shifting and sliding of meaning within the world of appearance. This had to be true for Bradley because of his fundamental conviction that Christian orthodoxy could no longer offer an adequate account of the world. In particular, the Christian God could no longer satisfy the definitional demands of a deity in the modern world. This was the challenge that the *Lux Mundi* theologians were faced with, and the demands that this pressure placed on their theology will be the subject of the following sections.

5.4 Lux Mundi

The relationship of idealists like Green and Bradley to the *Lux Mundi* theologians is not straightforward: whatever influence idealism had on the Oxford churchmen was marked by ambivalence, at times hesitance, and the necessary constraints of Christian orthodoxy. The *Lux Mundi* writers were deeply concerned with traditional Christian witness and the integrity of the Scriptures, so it was not without serious alteration that idealism was able inform their theology. Nevertheless, the concern of Green and Bradley to articulate a holistic or comprehensive vision of reality—whether

⁵³³ R. G. Collingwood, “The Metaphysics of F. H. Bradley,” 246.

tethered to the Absolute or the eternal consciousness—deeply informed the incarnational theology of *Lux Mundi*. It is this aspect of incarnational theology that has since been perpetually controversial. In the words of Michael Ramsay,

When the Incarnation becomes the center of theological system and exposition, the result may be a deep and rich orthodoxy standing firmly upon a biblical basis, yet with a tendency for other biblical themes to recede. There is no doubt this happened in the first years of the twentieth century. Again, the art of presenting the orthodox faith in close relation to a civilization dominated by the ideas of moral and social progress can unwittingly cause the Christian teacher to blind his eye to the perspectives of grace, judgment, wrath, mercy which the Bible presents.⁵³⁴

If this “tendency” had become clear by the beginning of the twentieth century, it was less obvious what the outcome of the *Lux Mundi* vision would be. In part, I argue, this was because the theologians in this volume, in an effort to resist the full outcomes of idealism, made use of arguments that closely resembled Mansel’s concerning the nature of religious knowledge and the character of Scripture. However, if the biblical themes of “grace, judgment, wrath [and] mercy” did at times recede behind the generalizing concept of the incarnation, it was because the theologians of the incarnation shared a hostility with Green and Bradley for the so-called “narrow” or dualistic theology of Mansel or the tradition he represented. In other words, the struggle for a comprehensive Christian theology of reality that takes place in the pages of *Lux Mundi* plays on imprecise or inconsistent notions of human knowledge and scriptural language. This imprecision stemmed from a conflict of interest between satisfying the comprehensive needs of idealism and maintaining the internal coherence of the scriptural account of God’s relation to the world.

⁵³⁴ Michael Ramsay, *From Gore to Temple*, 129.

5.4.1. *History and the Knowledge of God*

Like Mansel, the theologians of *Lux Mundi* were anxious to illustrate that the world they lived in could still be described and encompassed in the traditional terms of the Christian faith. For Mansel this required a certain form of skepticism, which would appear in various guises within the pages of *Lux Mundi*, even while it was enhanced and altered by the skepticism of Green and Bradley. While these Oxford theologians could speak about the limitations of human thought and the accommodated language of Scripture, the metaphysics of progress, adapted into a theology of the incarnation, created difficulties for scriptural interpretation. In part, this was because the moral and historical difficulties of Scripture became relativized in the process of historical development. What this means will become clearer in the following section.

5.4.1.1. *Brooke Foss Westcott*

This conflict was especially apparent in the writings of Brooke Foss Westcott, not a contributor to *Lux Mundi* but a figure who is referenced frequently within its pages.⁵³⁵ In the words of S. C. Carpenter, *Lux Mundi* was the book “Westcott and his friends planned to write after *Essays and Reviews*.”⁵³⁶ While Westcott’s influences were wide-ranging—continental idealism, Platonism, German biblical criticism, to name a few—it is interesting to note that when speaking about the knowledge of God, Westcott used language that was identical to Mansel’s.⁵³⁷ Yet he made adjustments that altered the implications of Mansel’s ideas. For example, in the *Gospel of the Resurrection*, Westcott writes,

⁵³⁵ E. S. Talbot refers directly to Westcott for his historical schematic that describes the Greek and Jewish aspects of Christ’s fulfillment in history (157). Further, both Gore and Lyttleton refer to Westcott for their arguments concerning the narrowing of theology in traditional renderings of the atonement (304, 333). Both of these themes are integral to the overall scope of the volume.

⁵³⁶ S. C. Carpenter, *Church and People 1789–1889* (London: SPCK, 1933), 536.

⁵³⁷ The relationship between the two men is unknown, but Westcott’s close friend J. B. Lightfoot edited Mansel’s posthumously published lectures on the Gnostic heresies.

We speak of God as Infinite and Personal. The epithets involve a contradiction, and yet they are both necessary. In fact the only approximately adequate conception which we can form of a Divine Being is under the form of a contradiction.⁵³⁸

Even Westcott's definition of personality is indistinguishable from Mansel's—the action of the will and the idea of resistance to external realities.⁵³⁹ Likewise, Westcott insists, much like for Mansel, that conception requires a sensible intuition, and yet the world constantly presses against the negative and suggestive limit of perceptible experience.⁵⁴⁰

However, despite the similarities between the two men, Westcott's appeal to progress in history subtly altered Mansel's understanding of scriptural language as a permanent accommodated witness to God's character.⁵⁴¹ The incarnation in particular was a way for Westcott to maintain Mansel's epistemological distinction between speculative and regulative knowledge of God and yet move beyond it through the immanent presence of Christ in history. In other words, development becomes a bridge between the two realms, though a bridge that never quite reaches the other side:

The Truth itself is infinite, and it is simply because the powers of man are imperfect and finite that any development is necessary. He can only realize

⁵³⁸ Brooke Foss Westcott, *The Gospel of the Resurrection: Thoughts on Its Relation to Reason and History* (London: Macmillan, 1884), 21.

⁵³⁹ “Indeed, the clearest conception which we can form of a person is the special limitation of a self-moving power. The power must be self-moving because a person is necessarily endowed with a will which is a spring of motion. It must be limited, because, as far as our experience reaches, a will can only make itself felt in and through an organism with which it is connected.” Brooke Foss Westcott, *Gospel of the Resurrection*, 143.

⁵⁴⁰ It should also be noted that Westcott's defense of miracles uses the same language that Mansel used in his 1862 essay on miracles: “But on the other hand it is distinctly laid down that in the case of a miracle a new force is introduced, or rather, as the source of all force is one, that the force which usually acts freely in a particular way now acts freely in another. That is, to continue to use popular language, the law is not suspended, but its natural results are controlled. The law produces its full effect, but a new power supervenes, and the final result represents the combined effect of the two forces.” *Gospel of the Resurrection*, 40.

⁵⁴¹ Graham A. Patrick argues that Westcott's historic optimism or belief in progress was attributable in some respects to F. D. Maurice. Though Westcott expressed some concern about Maurice, he certainly read Maurice, and even more, close friends such as Hort were open admirers. There is not much evidence that Westcott had read Green or considered Hegel deeply, yet ideas of progress were certainly part of the intellectual fabric of the era. Graham Patrick, *The Miner's Bishop: Brooke Foss Westcott* (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 2007), 107.

step by step, and by successive efforts, what is indeed from the beginning. According to the position in which he finds himself, he takes now this, now that fragment of the whole, because it meets his wants. Every embodiment of the Truth must be wrought out in this way. And the nearest approximation which we can form to the complete truth is by the combination of the partial realizations of it which history records.⁵⁴²

This development of knowledge is made possible through Christ's incarnate presence in history, and the incarnation becomes, in this sense, an epistemological category: "By the Incarnation it gives permanent reality to human knowledge; by the Resurrection it gives permanent reality to human life."⁵⁴³ Truth, in the absolute sense, becomes partially realizable in history because of the affirmation of humanity in general in the incarnation.

Westcott measure these developments in history in two ways. The first is reminiscent of Hegel:

The slow unfolding of life enables us to discern new meaning in His presence. In His humanity is included whatever belongs to the consummation of the individual and of the race, not only in one stage but in all stages of progress, not only in regard to some endowments but in regard to the whole inheritance of our nature enlarged by the most vigorous use while the world lasts.⁵⁴⁴

The "vigor" and "consummation" of human nature represent the best of humanity, elevated and sustained in Christ's assumption of flesh and guaranteed a place in the history of humanity's development toward God. The second criterion is, perhaps, the more obvious: "The providence of God is at every stage interpreted by His Word. The spirit of the Resurrection tries and transfigures each transitory embodiment of Truth."⁵⁴⁵

Scripture, then, functions as a criterion for the measurement and assessment of the broader scope of human development.

⁵⁴² Brooke Foss Westcott, *The Gospel of the Resurrection*, 239.

⁵⁴³ Brooke Foss Westcott, "Christianity as the Absolute Religion" in *Essays in the History of Religious Thought in the West* (London: Macmillan, 1891), 348.

⁵⁴⁴ Brooke Foss Westcott, "Christianity as the Absolute Religion," 353.

⁵⁴⁵ Brooke Foss Westcott, *Gospel of the Resurrection*, 241.

Westcott's understanding of the incarnation and the knowledge of God comes nearer to the negative consequences that critics worried were the outcome of Mansel's lectures: regulative truths cannot refer to God in any direct manner. While Westcott uses different language, his emphasis upon the constantly expanding implications of the incarnation force him to place qualifications on historical knowledge, because any truth claimed in time must be penultimate in the overall scheme of progress. Mansel tried to accommodate historical change within the expansive nature of scriptural language, whereas Westcott makes use of the incarnation, a perhaps more flexible and dexterous category. For example, Westcott writes in *Christus Consummator* that the real unbelief of the Hebrew people was that they failed to attune themselves to the march of history: "The Hebrews were, as we have seen, in danger of apostasy because they failed to go forward. And that we may be shielded from the like peril, the words which were spoken to them are spoken also to us."⁵⁴⁶ The failure to move forward is a failure to recognize the character of God's activity in the world.

Furthermore, Westcott regarded the incarnation as a theological equivalent to the Copernican revolution; the incarnation was a pivot from which all knowledge could now be arranged and illuminated.⁵⁴⁷ It is in this light that Westcott's ambivalence to traditional Christian claims comes through:

It may be that in our day of trial we shall fail to apprehend the new messages of widening wisdom; that we shall cling blindly to fixed traditional forms of opinion which do not correspond with the requirements of our spiritual position; that we shall seek to confine within

⁵⁴⁶ Brooke Foss Westcott, *Christus Consummator: Some Aspects of the Work and Person of Christ in Relation to Modern Thought* (London: Macmillan, 1890), 13.

⁵⁴⁷ Brooke Foss Westcott, *Christus Consummator*, 109.

artificial limits, through timorous distrust, that which is a powerful of infinite growth.⁵⁴⁸

The demands of the age and the belief in a “widening wisdom” that they provoke place “traditional forms” within some kind of limbo. Though Westcott was unwilling to deny the permanence of creedal claims or scriptural language, it is primarily the concept of the incarnation that is capable of “infinite growth.” Even Spencer’s naturalism was collectible in the expanding universe of the incarnation.⁵⁴⁹

It is in this sense that Westcott was torn between two skepticisms: though he affirmed Mansel’s version of the limitations of human thinking, he did so, in part, to make room for the continual adjustment of knowledge that history affords. While his writings often wavered between the two forms of skepticism, the overall picture that emerges in Westcott is not unlike the vision of Green or of Bradley, with Christian terms substituted for the more vague and remote terms of English idealism. Westcott’s goal was to cast the Christian vision wide enough to include everything—most pertinently, the rapid intellectual and social changes of his own era. However, it could be argued that the incarnation, in Westcott’s rendering, stands loosely at times from the subtle and complicated features of the scriptural narrative. This will become clearer in figures like Talbot and Illingworth, who relied on Westcott for their providential scheme of development.

5.4.1.2 *Development and Personality*

Much like Westcott, J.R. Illingworth, in his essay on development in *Lux Mundi*, regards the incarnation as a discovery that provides a comprehensive theological vision of all reality in the face of a narrow doctrinal tradition. Illingworth writes,

⁵⁴⁸ Brooke Foss Westcott, *Christus Consummator*, 142.

⁵⁴⁹ Brooke Foss Westcott, *Christus Consummator*, 134.

the religion of the Incarnation was narrowed into the religion of the Atonement. Men's views of the faith dwindled and became subjective and self-regarding, while the gulf was daily widened between things sacred and things secular; among which latter, art and science, and the whole political and social order, gradually came to be classed.⁵⁵⁰

Illingworth's point is not that science, art and politics are to be merely included within the incarnate reality, but that the incarnation is the sum and goal of these cultural movements:

The man of science, as such, can discover the uniformities of His action in external nature. The moral philosopher will further see that these actions make for righteousness and that there is a moral law. But it is only to the spiritual yearning of our whole personality that He reveals Himself as a person.⁵⁵¹

In some way this statement is a typical instance of an idealist philosophy that tries to put science in its places without discarding its methods and discoveries: science is a piece of a larger whole.⁵⁵² Illingworth's method for doing this involves the whole complex of language that is at the heart of Mansel's theology—personality, anthropomorphism, analogy—and in the case of science, he seems happy to have these terms carry the meaning that Mansel intended.

However, the turn to personality in English idealism came not through Mansel but through Hermann Lotze, a post-Kantian logician from Germany who was widely read in England.⁵⁵³ For Lotze, personality becomes a state that is perfected only in God:

When treating of 'Omnipresence' allusion was made to the truth, that God, who is the truly Existent in all Things and comprises them all as mere modifications of his Being, stands in need of no mediation through

⁵⁵⁰ J. R. Illingworth, "The Incarnation in Relation to Development," in *Lux Mundi: A Series of Studies in the Religion of the Incarnation*, 5th ed., ed. Charles Gore (London: John Murray, 1890), 183.

⁵⁵¹ J. R. Illingworth, "The Incarnation in Relation to Development," 198.

⁵⁵² Richard Rorty, "Nineteenth-Century Idealism and Twentieth-Century Textualism," 141.

⁵⁵³ W. J. Mander, *British Idealism*, 402.

transmitted effects, in order to be acquainted with the individual elements of the world and the states belonging to them.⁵⁵⁴

Because this unmediated state is not true of finite beings, “Perfect personality is compatible only with the conception of an Infinite Being; for finite beings only an approximation to this is attainable.”⁵⁵⁵ In his book *Personality, Human and Divine*, Illingworth draws on Mansel’s argument about the basic and irreducible reality of human personality,⁵⁵⁶ but he extends the notion of personality as a necessary description of the being of God:

Whereas the Christian doctrine, however mysterious, moves in the direction, at least, of conceivability, for the simple reason that it is the very thing towards which our own personality points. Our own personality is triune; but it is a potential, unrealized triunity, which is incomplete in itself, and must go beyond itself for completion, as, for example, in the family.⁵⁵⁷

Human personality has a triune character that has emerged throughout history in concert with development or revelation of God’s own personality.

In contrast then to Green and Bradley, Illingworth follows Lotze in affirming the personality of the Absolute: “it is certainly foolish to prefer to assign the Supreme Principle of the world to an unconscious blind substratum, the conception of which is for us, strictly speaking, something completely dark and inscrutable.”⁵⁵⁸ While for Green the process of the world moves toward the ineffability of God, Illingworth argues that the

⁵⁵⁴ Hermann Lotze, *Outlines of the Philosophy of Religion; Dictated Portions of the Lectures of Hermann Lotze*, ed. George Trumball Ladd (Boston: Ginn, Heath & Co, 1895), 67.

⁵⁵⁵ Hermann Lotze, *Outlines of the Philosophy of Religion*, 69.

⁵⁵⁶ J. R. Illingworth, *Personality, Human and Divine* (London: Macmillan, 1904), 27, 244, 245.

⁵⁵⁷ J. R. Illingworth, *Personality, Human and Divine*, 74.

⁵⁵⁸ Hermann Lotze, *Outlines of the Philosophy of Religion*, 149.

world is moving toward the perfect expression of personality, affirmed in Christ and drawn into the very life of God.⁵⁵⁹

So while Illingworth, much like Mansel, affirms the personality of God as a corrective to early idealist notions of God's ineffability or impersonal nature, he transfers the idea of personhood into yet another concept that requires history to become gradually concrete.⁵⁶⁰ A reviewer for the *Church Quarterly* noted, in Manselian fashion, "The mystery and incompleteness of our personality in the view of our intellects is the characteristic which fits it to be the channel of our access to God and of his access to us."⁵⁶¹ Personality for Mansel was a negative outline of how human beings encounter the world, an inscrutable mystery that cannot be accounted for but which God encounters and enters into. Furthermore, this encounter cannot be conceptualized outside the full range of Scripture. Yet, for Illingworth, characteristic of so much incarnational theology, history becomes about one essential thing: the converging realization of divine and human personality in time. The history of the Jews and the Greeks alike is about the desire for and partial attainment of these concepts.

5.4.2 Scripture and Development

Both Westcott and Illingworth employed aspects of Mansel's thought in order to situate their orthodox convictions within an idealistic framework, or in Westcott's case, a

⁵⁵⁹ Illingworth writes, "The belief in the Incarnation, while it intensified and emphasized the notion of divine personality, necessitated a further intellectual analysis of what that notion meant, and issued in the doctrine of the Trinity in Unity." *Personality, Human and Divine*, 66.

⁵⁶⁰ Mander suggests that Personalism was a way of retaining the idealist structure of metaphysics while making space for traditional forms of piety. With respect to Clement Webb, Mander writes, "he nevertheless argues strongly for a 'personal God.' This restricts our metaphysics in more than one direction; extreme immanence and extreme transcendence alike he argues would destroy personal relations (such as prayer or worship) between human and divine, because on neither scheme is there scope for reciprocation from God to us. Only theism can really grasp the personality of God." *British Idealism*, 408.

⁵⁶¹ Anon., "Illingworth's Bampton Lectures," *The Church Quarterly Review* (April 1895), 203.

blend of idealism and Platonism.⁵⁶² To this end, both writers were emphatically traditional in their defense of orthodox scriptural claims. However, there was a tendency with many writers of the period to blame rigid and outdated doctrines for the emerging diffidence toward Christianity while attempting to lift the Scriptures into a more tolerable historical scheme. It was not that the *Lux Mundi* theologians believed that the Old Testament, for example, contained difficulties that could be brushed aside, but within a progressive metaphysics it was possible to isolate certain scriptural realities within the past. But this isolation was carried out only piecemeal and when necessary. In this respect, the *Lux Mundi* writers, much like Westcott, wavered between two forms of epistemological skepticism, and as a result, their attitudes toward the Bible present, at times, a confusing picture.

5.4.2.1. *The Old Testament*

E. S. Talbot's essay on "Preparation for Christ in History" is a direct extension of Westcott's providential scheme: the history of the Greeks and Jews coalesce in preparation for the Person of Christ.⁵⁶³ This patristic notion became more than just a providential appeal to Christ's universality, but even more, this two-fold preparation acted as a conceptual dialectic that is fulfilled in Christ. Again, according to Talbot, it is historical process that provides a comprehensive vision of all reality:

It may seem...that stricter canons of interpretation forbid for us that unbounded use of the happy expedient of allegory which could make everything in the Old Testament speak of Christ. But even if this were so...is there no countervailing gain to reckon? Have we any reason to hope that our time may be suffered to do...something for the interpretation of

⁵⁶² Graham Patrick, *The Miner's Bishop*, 6.

⁵⁶³ Talbot agrees with Westcott that these two histories could not produce a revelation but they both served to prepare the way ("Preparation for Christ in History," 135). It should also be noted that this particular scheme of preparation for the Incarnation has clear roots, certainly for Westcott, in Maurice's *The Kingdom of Christ*.

the witness of history to Christ which has not been done before, and which is even an advance upon what has been done? Let us consider for a moment...what it is which specially engrosses the interest and admiration of all of us in the different branches of modern study and enquiry. It is the beauty of process.⁵⁶⁴

Here Talbot at least states what is implicit throughout *Lux Mundi*: if any continuity can be established between the Old Testament and Christ, it is more likely to be found in the process of development than in a textual coherence that is established by typology or allegory. Though, to be sure, Talbot cannot discard these traditional methods entirely, at least in the obvious cases of prophecy.

But the main force of Israel's preparation for Christ lies in its essential idea of personal communion with God.⁵⁶⁵ This is much like Mansel, only in Mansel's case, personal communion with God receives its shape and form from the character of Scripture, whereas for Talbot once the ideal is reached it is unclear what happens to the history that prepared it. For example, Talbot writes,

even the very instruments which He was using in the present, the Anointed King, the chosen Royal House, the Prophet-Servant of God, the holy hill of Zion, were charged with a meaning of which the significance was only in the future to become clear. Thus, in this free, deep, spiritual—let us say it—inspired manner, the predictions of prophecy emerge and gather shape.⁵⁶⁶

On one hand, Talbot's description of the biblical images recalls Mansel's notion of scriptural expansion, the gathering of meaning under certain types and symbols. But they remain in part "present instruments," and instruments that are bound up with only one of the great preparations for Christ:

The two preparations pursue their course unconscious of one another, almost exclusive of one another. Greek wisdom and Roman power have no

⁵⁶⁴ E. S. Talbot, "Preparation for Christ in History," 135.

⁵⁶⁵ E. S. Talbot, "Preparation for Christ in History," 165.

⁵⁶⁶ E. S. Talbot, "Preparation for Christ in History," 165.

dream of coming to receive from the narrow national cult of humbled and subject Israel. And Israel, even taught by the great prophets, could hardly find a place in her vision of the future for any destiny of the nations of the world.⁵⁶⁷

The shortcomings of each preparation are augmented by the other. The features of the “narrow national cult” of Israel lack the universal aspect that Greek and Roman wisdom could supply the incarnate reality of Christ. The Old Testament is almost a stream that feeds into the coming of Christ—a critical stream, but not the primary narrative itself.

The implications of this view perhaps become clearer in Scott Holland. Holland’s essay on faith, like Illingworth’s and the others, establishes communion with God as the central controlling concept of Christian faith. Faith is about the gradual grasping of humanity’s inherent “sonship,” which is “germinal” and constantly seeking its fulfillment in God.⁵⁶⁸ All of life is an expression of this impulse toward unity with God: “New knowledge, new experience, far from expunging the elements of faith, make ever fresh demands upon it; they constitute perpetual appeals to it to enlarge its trust, to expand its original audacity.”⁵⁶⁹ Again, the versatile or expansive category in Christian theology is faith itself and its widening range of apprehension. Faith, for Holland, almost has a story of its own:

For our faith in Christ becomes the measure and standard of our faith in the Bible. We believe in it as the record of our growing intimacy with God. Faith is, still, a spiritual cohesion of person with person, of the living soul with a living God. No details that intervene confuse this primitive relation. Only, that cohesion was not reached at one leap. It is ancient: it has traversed many incidents and trials: it has learned much: it has undergone patient apprenticeship: it has been bonded by the memory of multitudinous vicissitudes.⁵⁷⁰

⁵⁶⁷ E. S. Talbot, “Preparation for Christ in History,” 174.

⁵⁶⁸ Scott Holland, “Faith,” 17.

⁵⁶⁹ Scott Holland, “Faith,” 24.

⁵⁷⁰ Scott Holland, “Faith,” 43.

Though Holland considered himself a Butlerian, this aspect of his thought is far closer to Coleridge.⁵⁷¹ Though it is not untrue that spiritual “cohesion” is at the heart of the scriptural narrative, Scripture’s ability to identify the character of God’s activity with respect to this union becomes washed out in a conceptual generalization.

For this reason, Holland’s appeal to Butler is a little curious. In some respect, he transforms Butler into Bradley:

Butler thus reaches his characteristic conclusion, that every possible act of knowledge reveals itself as being but partial and incomplete. He defies you to know even this world that lies within our human experience, without knowing something of the world that lies beyond it. For every atom that exists demands the entire Universe to explain it.⁵⁷²

Knowledge is always many-sided and requires the whole to explain the part. But in the case of revelation, human ignorance of the whole scheme of salvation, for Butler, is precisely why human reason is unable to sort through the record of Scripture and discard the unpleasant or discordant aspects. Yet, this is exactly where Holland cannot follow Butler:

While...asserting the supreme authority of Conscience in moral judgements, he manages to withdraw from the range of its verdict all the particular incidents in the Old Testament that offend, by refusing it the right to pronounce until it knows the ultimate and determining issue. And this it cannot know, without knowing the whole of things in Revelation. Such an argument, so pressed, cannot carry conviction.⁵⁷³

Yet this aspect of Butler was decisive for Mansel: while reason is fit to judge the contents of revelation, the main function of reason is to establish its own limits. For both Butler and Mansel, it is not that the Old Testament presents immoral facts about God that must

⁵⁷¹ See the section on Coleridge in Chapter two.

⁵⁷² Scott Holland, “The Optimism of Butler’s Analogy” (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1908), 23.

⁵⁷³ Scott Holland, “The Optimism of Butler’s Analogy,” 24.

be swallowed whole, but rather, these facts cannot be wholly judged upon the limited information that humans hold.

Holland's contention with Butler is an appropriate example of the *Lux Mundi* approach. The theologians of the incarnation were eager to affirm the history of salvation but unsure of how to render details of God's relationship with Israel. Holland can speak of the "multitudinous vicissitudes" of faith's history, but this does not quite capture the structure of God's covenanted relationship with Israel and the complications of blessings and curses, promises, election, judgment and mercy. Though he speaks of "offensive" moments, in the case of the Old Testament, it is not at all clear where these moments begin and end. The theological skepticism of Mansel, and that of Butler, allowed these features to stand out clearly and not become lost in a historical process that always leads beyond itself. But it is not just Mansel's high tolerance for offensive truths that separated him from writers like Holland; these respective attitudes toward the Old Testament obviously played a critical role in determining Anglican Christology.

5.4.3. *Christ and the Atonement*

The argument that I have pursued thus far is that the *Lux Mundi* theologians, like Westcott before them, labored to place Christian orthodoxy within an idealistic framework that adhered to a progressive metaphysics of knowledge and history. However, where the pressures of idealism placed the Christian faith in certain difficulties, they resorted to categories used by Mansel: personality, the limitations of thought and the accommodated character of scriptural language. But this appeal to Mansel, or to ideas represented by Mansel, was done in an *ad hoc* fashion that often confused two different forms of epistemological skepticism. To some degree, this confusion might have been harmless; by and large, these theologians were not prepared to compromise orthodox

claims in the face of cultural criticisms. If there is a danger in the *Lux Mundi* method though, it comes precisely at the point where they imagined themselves to be the strongest. The theology of the incarnation was intended to be a way of absorbing a changing world into a theologically comprehensive vision, a vision that was becoming increasingly incredible. Whether in the marginalization of the Old Testament as an account of God's character or the incessant attacks upon the language of the atonement, the *Lux Mundi* writers actually made it more difficult to perceive how the God of the Bible was related to the modern world.

5.4.3.1. Gore and the Incarnation

Of all the *Lux Mundi* writers, Gore was perhaps the most sensitive to the difficulties of their position. While he endorsed the same historical scheme of providence as did Talbot and Illingworth,⁵⁷⁴ he was eager to show that the Old Testament functioned as Christian Scripture and not just as a preparatory religion. For example, in his *Lux Mundi* essay he writes that while Christ is the "test and measure" of the Old Testament's inspiration, the strange and difficult portions of the Old Testament have a secure place in the gradual spiritual education of mankind:

Thus to believe...in the inspiration of the Old Testament forces us to recognise a real element of the Divine education in the imprecatory Psalms. They are not the utterances of selfish spite: they are the claim which righteous Israel makes upon God that He should vindicate Himself, and let their eyes see how righteousness turns again unto judgment. The claim is made in a form which belongs to an early stage of spiritual education; to a time when this life was regarded as the scene in which God must finally vindicate Himself, and when the large powers and possibilities of the Divine compassion were very imperfectly recognised. But behind these limitations, which characterize the greater part of the Old

⁵⁷⁴ See Gore's essay on inspiration in the *Lux Mundi* (346) as well as his Bampton lectures on the incarnation (169).

Testament, the claim of these Psalms still remains a necessary part of the claim of the Christian soul.⁵⁷⁵

The limitations that Gore speaks of are quite simply the datedness of the Old Testament and its historical position prior to the incarnation. Though Gore tries to make a place for the imprecatory psalms in this case, they can only function as revelatory moments in a scheme that has moved on. In other words, what they say about God is entirely unclear.

Christopher Seitz makes this very point concerning Gore's writing on Scripture:

The problem is that the writers of the New Testament did not inquire into the religion of the Old Testament, any more than "our Lord" did. This did not have to do with kenotic accommodation or some other condescension to human categories. It had to do with the actual character of God as revealed by the Scriptures, according to which Jesus' life, death and raising were calibrated and acknowledged as fulfilled.⁵⁷⁶

Gore, like Mansel, uses the category of accommodation, but in the case of the Old Testament, Gore regards the accommodation or condescension of God's character to be directed at a people of inferior moral development. Even more, the claim of the imperfection of the Old Testament and the finality of the New, though not in itself unusual, makes it difficult for Gore to understand how the Old Testament could speak about God and how this knowledge could be clarified or integrated with the revelation of Christ.⁵⁷⁷

While Gore has become well-known for attempting to protect the New Testament from certain forms of criticism,⁵⁷⁸ his particular doctrine of kenosis in relation to Christ's self-knowledge represents an exception. Just as the language of the Old Testament was

⁵⁷⁵ Charles Gore, "The Holy Spirit and Inspiration," in *Lux Mundi*, 350.

⁵⁷⁶ Christopher Seitz, *Figured Out: Typology and Providence in Christian Scripture* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 55.

⁵⁷⁷ Charles Gore, "The Holy Spirit and Inspiration," 329.

⁵⁷⁸ Paul Avis, "Charles Gore and Modernism: A Half-Centenary Exercise in 'Corporate Believing,'" *Theology* 85 (1982): 269, 272.

lodged, to some extent, in a particular history, so certain aspects of Christ's language in the Bible become a symptom of the limitations of the age in which He lived:

He willed so to restrain the beams of Deity as to observe the limits of the science of His age, and He puts Himself in the same relation to its historical knowledge. Thus He does not reveal His eternity by statements as to what had happened in the past, or was to happen in the future, outside the ken of existing history. He made His Godhead gradually manifest by His attitude towards men and things about Him, by His moral and spiritual claims, by His expressed relation to His Father, not by any miraculous exemptions of Himself from the conditions of natural knowledge in its own proper province.⁵⁷⁹

Textually speaking, Gore had some warrant perhaps for this claim: "But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (Matthew 24:36, NRSV). With respect to certain scientific observations as well, Gore's claim carried a degree of plausibility. But all the same, as a principle it introduces a division within the scriptural portrait of Christ and the Old Testament references and images that are used to describe his ministry. Darwell Stone wrote in response to Gore that "the acceptance of our Lord of the main features in the ordinary Jewish belief about the Old Testament Scriptures seems to be fundamental to his teaching."⁵⁸⁰ Stone contends that even the "inspired" writings of the prophets, for Gore, represented simply an intensification of their human faculties⁵⁸¹ and only a general extent of foreknowledge that was limited by the prophet's place in the development of the world.⁵⁸² Yet surely, Stone argues, much like Mansel, "It is possible that a prophet might be led...to utter words in

⁵⁷⁹ Charles Gore, "The Holy Spirit and Inspiration," 359. Mansel, it seems, believed in the omniscience of Christ, though it only appears in a brief statement in his commentary on Matthew: "The cup of suffering and death which He was about to drink to the dregs, every feature of that suffering being already present to his omniscient vision" *The Limits of Religious Thought*, 160.

⁵⁸⁰ The article "Theology and Criticism" in *Church Quarterly Review* (April 1890) is anonymous, but Ramsay claims that it was well known that Stone was the author (*From Gore to Temple*, 8, 9).

⁵⁸¹ Charles Gore, "The Holy Spirit and Inspiration," 345.

⁵⁸² Darwell Stone, "Theology and Criticism," 215.

reference to some event near at hand which, unknown to him, were destined to have a fuller accomplishment in the life of Christ.”⁵⁸³

The effect of Gore’s theory of kenotic accommodation was that it weakened the textual coherence of Scripture’s witness to Christ across both Testaments. Furthermore, it provided a method to discard or diminish certain aspects of Christ’s identity that were drawn from the Old Testament, though Gore himself was not eager to pursue this course. In relation to Mansel, Gore’s theory of accommodation is striking, not least for the identity of the term used. But Gore, in this case, at least understood that there was a distinction in the manner of use. In his Bampton Lectures on the incarnation, Gore made the following statement concerning Mansel:

Some thirty three years ago, a great controversy was originated in this pulpit by a Bampton lecturer, who took for his subject, “The limits of religious thought.” Dean Mansel held in little esteem the pretensions of the Hegelian school in Germany to criticize by the standard of rationality the contents of divine revelation. Revelation, he held, was a fact...Unfortunately Mansel did not confine himself to reemphasizing Butler's strong protest, as valuable today as in the last century, against the easy overestimate of the powers of the human mind to judge a priori of what is probable in a divine revelation. He went further, and exposed himself to the charge of denying that we have, or can have, any real and direct knowledge of God Himself at all. “We cannot know what God is,” he seemed to say, “but only what He chooses us to believe about Himself.” Thus we cannot, for example, argue against a certain doctrine of the atonement on the ground of its injustice or hardness, because we do not know what justice or goodness in God means. Human qualities are not necessarily of the same sort as the divine. This form of Christian apology produced an indignant protest from Frederick Denison Maurice, and drew from John Stuart Mill the passionate exclamation: “I will call no being good who is not what I mean when I apply that epithet to my fellow-creatures, and if such a being can sentence me to hell for not so calling him, to hell I will go.” It was an exclamation, not easy to accommodate to the philosophy of the greatest pleasure, but it finds a response without a doubt in the Christian conscience. For if anthropomorphism as applied to God is false, if God does not exist in man's image, yet theomorphism as applied to man is true; man is made in God's image, and his qualities are,

⁵⁸³ Darwell Stone, “Theology and Criticism,” 216.

not the measure of the divine, but their counterpart and real expression. Man was made in God's image. The significance of this truth from our present point of view is, that in that original constitution of manhood lies, as the Fathers saw, the prophecy of the divine Incarnation and the grounds of its possibility. God can express Himself in His own image, He can express Himself therefore in manhood, He can show Himself as man. And conversely, in the occurrence of the Incarnation lies the supreme evidence of the real moral likeness of man to God. All along, through the Old Testament, inspired teachers with growing spirituality of conception had been expressing God in terms of manhood taking the human love of the mother for her child, or of the husband for his adulterous wife, to explain the divine love: and in the Incarnation all this finds its justification...His qualities are human qualities, love and justice, self sacrifice and desire and compassion; yet they are the qualities of none other than the very God. So akin are God and man to one another that God can really exist under conditions of manhood without ceasing to be God...Here in Christ Jesus, it is man's will, man's love, man's mind, which are the instruments of Godhead and the fullness of the Godhead which is revealing itself only, it seems, to make these qualities more intensely human.⁵⁸⁴

This is a peculiar statement for a number of reasons. First, Gore justifies his theory of accommodation because of the preexisting continuity between humanity and God, which is based upon the image. For this reason human qualities can serve as descriptors of God's character, at least in the realm of moral action. But when it comes to knowledge, whatever fitness or continuity that exists between God and humanity is clearly broken; this is, in the end, the logic of accommodation because there must be a discontinuity between the two to justify the use of the term. In other words, Christ's knowledge about the world and history cannot be fully trusted, but His actions and teaching, however construed, provide a direct indication of God's being.

Second, it seems clear that Gore misread Mansel, especially at the point where he draws Mansel into contrast with Butler. Surprisingly, Gore seems to draw the same conclusion that Mansel observed in Hume: "He thus reduces the controversy to a choice of two alternatives: either the Divine attributes are identical with the human, or they have

⁵⁸⁴ Charles Gore, *The Incarnation of the Son of God* (London: John Murray, 1891), 115.

nothing at all in common.”⁵⁸⁵ It is not that Mansel did not believe in the image of God, but he believed that the image could not be employed, on its own strength and logic, as a cipher for delimiting Christian and scriptural claims.⁵⁸⁶ This is Butler’s position as well. It is true, as Gore claims, that Butler said that human reason can function as a judge of revelation, but this conviction does not operate for Butler as Gore might have wished. On the question of the atonement, Butler vigorously upheld the vicariousness and ceremonial or sacrificial elements of Christ’s death as both scriptural and, in one sense, reasonable.⁵⁸⁷ While in the end, every person will be responsible for his or her own sin, “during the progress, and, for ought we know, even in order to the completion of this moral scheme, vicarious punishment may be fit, and absolutely necessary.”⁵⁸⁸ The point for Butler is that human ignorance of the entire scheme does not permit human beings to discard elements that are not pleasing to their reason or moral sympathies.

Finally, it is in the issue of the atonement of Christ that Gore’s method comes to fruition. If the imprecatory psalms and other difficult portions of the Old Testament belong to an age when God related to a people of inferior moral development, it is not clear how the framework of Old Testament language used in the New Testament to describe Jesus’ work on the cross can continue to inform that work. For Mansel the language of Scripture was accommodated to the permanent fallen state of humanity; and for this reason, the language retains a permanence across the spectrum of historical change. Scripture, in Mansel’s sense, is a God-given language that can adapt and expand through the power of the Spirit, but the givenness cannot be altered. But Gore’s

⁵⁸⁵ Henry Mansel, *A Second Letter to Goldwin Smith*, 32.

⁵⁸⁶ “Man has fallen from that image...man’s nature is but an imperfect likeness of God’s, and man’s moral judgments but an imperfect criterion of god’s actions” (Henry Mansel, *A Second Letter to Goldwin Smith*, 50).

⁵⁸⁷ Joseph Butler, *Analogy*, 257–260.

⁵⁸⁸ Joseph Butler, *Analogy*, 259.

skepticism applied to the scriptural language as such, and though he may have tried to protect the New Testament from the pressures of criticisms, his treatment of the Old Testament had already profoundly affected his reading of the Gospel and Epistle records.

5.4.3.2. *The Atonement*

It must be admitted that arguments for various readings of the atonement have always been made within a context of scriptural latitude. Scripture, it would seem, contains overlapping images to portray Christ's work on the cross and his resurrection. The irony of the *Lux Mundi* portrayal of the atonement, and in this case Arthur Lyttelton's, was that while the authors maligned certain narrow renderings of atonement theology—substitutionary atonement in particular—they excluded at least one set of scriptural images in order to make their case.

But of course, it was not the intention of the *Lux Mundi* writers to commit to a particular tradition of atonement theology, but rather they wished to widen the doctrine by setting it within a certain set of relations determined by their theology of the incarnation. Lyttelton, then, in his essay on the atonement, sounds much like Illingworth, Talbot, Holland and Gore:

What we call particular doctrines are in reality only various applications to various human conditions of one great uniform method of Divine government, which is the expression in human affairs of one Divine will. The theological statement of any part of this method ought to bear on its face the marks of the whole from which it is temporarily separated; for though it may be necessary to make now this, now that doctrine prominent, to isolate it and lay stress on it, this should be done in such a way that in each special truth the whole should, in a manner, be contained. We must be able to trace out in each the lines of the Divine action which is only fully displayed in the whole. Neglect of this not only makes our faith as a whole weak and incoherent, but deprives the doctrines themselves of the illumination and strength which are afforded by the discovery in them of mutual likeness and harmony. They become first unintelligible and then inconceivable, and the revelation of the character of God, which should be

perceived in every part of His dealings with men, becomes confused and dim to us. This has been especially the case with the Atonement.⁵⁸⁹

Such a statement really represents the overarching theme of the entire volume, and at the same time it makes any appeal to Butler by the *Lux Mundi* authors somewhat doubtful: for Butler, or for Mansel, there is no whole outside the Scriptures upon which individual doctrines can be assessed. Rather, Scripture presents a fragmentary outline of a scheme that is only imperfectly comprehended. However, for Lyttelton to lift the doctrine of atonement from its relative isolation requires denying aspects of the only source available for its articulation. This was Darwell Stone's point in *The Church Quarterly Review*: "However impossible it may be to frame an exact theory of the method of the Atonement, we feel it to be necessary to retain the idea of 'substitution' itself, the belief that Christ suffered in our stead."⁵⁹⁰

On one hand, Lyttelton would seem to agree with Stone's assessment that the atonement is difficult to conceive in theory and that it must be guided by the scriptural imagery:

It may well be that here we are confronted by the final mystery, and that the propitiatory virtue of Christ's death, typified by the slaying of animal victims under the law, foreshadowed by the almost universal belief in the expiation of blood, acknowledged with wondering gratitude by the human heart, depends upon the unsearchable will and hidden purposes of God.⁵⁹¹

Yet despite this affirmation of a certain theological method, Lyttelton is able to deny that "the work of Christ consisted in His endurance of our punishment in order that we might not endure it."⁵⁹² The vicariousness of the atonement lies not in Christ's bearing of

⁵⁸⁹ Arthur Lyttelton, "The Atonement," in *Lux Mundi*, 276.

⁵⁹⁰ Darwell Stone, "Theology and Criticism," 231.

⁵⁹¹ Arthur Lyttelton, "The Atonement," 292.

⁵⁹² Arthur Lyttelton, "The Atonement," 309.

humanity's sins or the penalty of these sins, but in His offering of the sacrifice that no human being could offer.⁵⁹³

Lyttelton's view may not be outside the boundaries of possible interpretations, but it does resolutely deny any substitutionary role in Christ's death. Whatever is meant in 1 Peter 2:24 (NRSV)—“He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross”—what it cannot mean is clear: Christ cannot bear a judgment on sin on behalf of others. In Lyttelton's mind, his rendering of the atonement lifted the doctrine out of its narrow confines and placed it within a larger incarnational metaphysics. Much like for Bradley or Green, if a doctrine cannot be related to the whole, then it begins to obscure and dismember the truth. In this case it seems that for Lyttelton, integrating the atonement into a larger incarnational worldview required him to obscure the doctrine's relation to the whole of Scripture and the textual setting in which Christ's work on the cross is situated within the New Testament.

The slight adjustment of details in atonement theology was a matter of immense importance for someone like Lyttelton, who believed that substitutionary theories of the atonement were responsible for the escalation of unbelief in the 19th century.⁵⁹⁴ The substitutionary model made God the Father appear wrathful and vengeful, and, according to Lyttelton, this model placed modern Christians in a situation of conflict between their consciences and certain traditional beliefs.⁵⁹⁵ Aubrey Moore placed the blame squarely on Calvin's disproportionate emphasis on the power of God: “Calvin writes in an Old

⁵⁹³ Arthur Lyttelton, “The Atonement,” 304.

⁵⁹⁴ “The doctrine of Atonement, more than any of the great truths of Christianity, has been misconceived and misrepresented, and has therefore not only been rejected itself, but has sometimes been the cause of the rejection of the whole Christian system. The truth of the vicarious sacrifice has been isolated till it has almost become untrue, and, mysterious as it undoubtedly is, it has been so stated as to be not only mysterious, but contrary to reason and even to conscience.” Arthur Lyttelton, “The Atonement,” 307.

⁵⁹⁵ Arthur Lyttelton, “The Atonement,” 307.

Testament atmosphere when he speaks of God.”⁵⁹⁶ As many others of his generation did, Moore sided emphatically with J. S. Mill’s protest against Mansel.⁵⁹⁷ Even more, he suggested that Mill “might have been a loyal member of the Church of Christ, if, when he was asking for the bread of Christ, Calvinistic teachers had not given him a stone.”⁵⁹⁸ Of course, Mansel was not a Calvinist in the least, but his name had become a symbol of a voluntaristic and irrational theology.⁵⁹⁹ But in his own eyes, Mansel was not defending a particular idea of God, but he was defending the ability of Scripture to refer credibly to God’s character, whether in the blessings and curses of Deuteronomy, the settlement of Canaan or the prophetic warnings and judgments against the nation of Israel.

As in Mansel’s conflict with Maurice, the *Lux Mundi* writers focused in upon the atonement as a symbolic instance that represented a whole host of moral objections to the Christian God. These objections, according to Green and Bradley, were related to the character of truth and the particularity of the scriptural narrative: any true account of reality must be open and transparent toward the whole, a whole that is ultimately indescribable. The *Lux Mundi* theologians employed the same method, but they filled the placeholder of the Absolute or eternal consciousness with a generalized notion of the incarnation. It was not so much that Lyttelton and others overplayed the incarnation in their essays but rather that the incarnation, as they rendered it, was not in fact flexible enough to account for the whole range of scriptural realities. Ironically, a method that

⁵⁹⁶ Aubrey Moore, “The Influence of Calvinism on Modern Unbelief,” in *Lectures and Papers on the History of the Reformation in England and on the Continent* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1890), 507.

⁵⁹⁷ Aubrey Moore, “The Influence of Calvinism on Modern Unbelief,” 517.

⁵⁹⁸ Aubrey Moore, “The Influence of Calvinism on Modern Unbelief,” 518.

⁵⁹⁹ Though J. B. Mozley was critical of Mansel’s lectures, his own study of Augustine and predestination applies Mansel’s hermeneutical style. There, Mozley argues that Augustine gives precedence to certain scriptural realities over others and does not allow conflicting statement about God’s act of election to remain in juxtaposition. J. B. Mozley, *A Treatise on the Augustinian Doctrine of Predestination* (London: John Murray, Albemarle Street, 1855), 173.

was intended as a broader approach to Christian orthodoxy in the end closed off certain scriptural possibilities. The inability of the writers to make any place for substitutionary language in the theology of the atonement is a particular and pointed example of this consequence.

5.5 Conclusion: Anglican Theology After the First World War

The conventional theories about the collapse of English idealism usually revolve around the overstated ambitions of both personal and absolute idealism. These ambitions naturally fed into the radically reduced scope of the philosophical inquiry witnessed in figures like Russell and Moore.⁶⁰⁰ Of course, this shift in thinking was followed closely by the trauma of World War I. In the words of Charles Taylor, “The sense of living in a shattered order has remained at some level as a truth of experience.”⁶⁰¹ The obviously German roots of idealistic philosophy and the deepening contrast of a progressive morality and metaphysics with the realities of trench warfare made idealism and its theological corollaries an easy target for critics. As Mander has argued, though, the affirmation of one reality was central for both Green and Bradley, among others: “if in one sense idealism rejects material reality it must immediately be added that in another it wholeheartedly embraces it.”⁶⁰² The idealists were attacked for their imprecision and speculative metaphysics, but in some way idealistic philosophy had already prepared the ground for a materialistic worldview.

If Mander’s argument is plausible, idealism’s continuity with 20th century philosophical developments further complicated the attempt by Anglican theologians to

⁶⁰⁰ F. C. Copleston, *A History of Philosophy III: Modern Philosophy, Bentham to Russell* (New York: Image Books, 1967), 283.

⁶⁰¹ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 409.

⁶⁰² W. J. Mander, *British Idealism*, 546.

express the Christian faith within an idealistic frame. This is Gouldstone's concluding point:

Anxious as these Christians were for intellectual and philosophical respectability in the face of materialist and naturalist challenges, they did not always realize that to sell their theological heritage to idealism, was to give up the authority of their historical tradition which rested on the assumption that the world's creation and preservation was the sole action of the Christian God.⁶⁰³

It was not just that philosophical trends had changed but that a new sense of the fragmentation of reality had gained traction within the wider intellectual climate:

The fears of Yeats and the secular prophets of darkness such as H. G. Wells and Joseph Conrad were fulfilled in the carnage of the trenches. Many believed this disaster was in large part a result of the growth of power of nation states influenced by a Hegelian view of history and philosophy.⁶⁰⁴

The irony is that an attempt to portray the Christian faith in a manner that was intelligible in the modern world—to harmonize the facts of experience—quickly lost its descriptive power.

While the extent to which Charles Gore altered his views toward modern biblical criticism and philosophical idealism is debated, it seems clear that few Church leaders felt the effects of the war and the resultant rise of unbelief as acutely and painfully as Gore did.⁶⁰⁵ “God has smitten,” Gore wrote in 1921 in *Belief in God*, and “There are few things in history more astonishing than the silent acquiescence of the Christian world in the radical betrayal of its ethical foundation.”⁶⁰⁶ His conclusion was that the war had “weakened the liberal faith in Progress without strengthening the faith in God. In the case of the most serious, it has left them perplexed; in the mass, it has

⁶⁰³ Timothy Gouldstone, *Anglican Idealism*, 180.

⁶⁰⁴ Timothy Gouldstone, *Anglican Idealism*, 185.

⁶⁰⁵ See Paul Avis, “Charles Gore and Modernism.”

⁶⁰⁶ Charles Gore, *Belief in God* (London: Penguin Books Limited, 1939), 29.

weakened idealism and deepened a cynical materialism.”⁶⁰⁷ There is no doubt that World War I effected a deep uncertainty in Gore’s theology.

In his late work, *The Reconstruction of Belief*, Gore insists, more than ever, on the personality of God—His distinction from the world along with His personal activity within it. Gore even approves of Mansel’s critique of the Absolute and his correlative belief in the divine personality.⁶⁰⁸ The text is full of chastened statements concerning the nature of religious knowledge. The following is a collection of statements to this effect:

The doctrine of relativity, of which we hear so much today...makes us no doubt tolerant of apparent discrepancies between our conclusions in one department of knowledge and experience and our conclusions in another.⁶⁰⁹

It may be necessary to entertain contradictory theories simultaneously, at least for a time.⁶¹⁰

It proclaims Him in unmistakable terms for a practical purpose, not, that is, with a view to the satisfaction of metaphysical enquiries.⁶¹¹

The Bible, then does not concern itself with the metaphysical question.⁶¹²

The absolute truth we cannot know. But I suggest that all this sort of language of revelation, is the only language which we can use to express the transcendent truth, and the opposite kind of language is fundamentally misleading and false.⁶¹³

In comments like these it is difficult to discern any difference between Mansel and Gore; all the central aspects of Mansel’s theology are in place: the practicality of scriptural

⁶⁰⁷ Charles Gore, *Belief in God*, 29. Gore goes on to speak in particular about the collapse of faith among young people in England: “Certainly, on the whole, it has left the youth of the country widely and deeply alienated from the Church and from organized religion” (29).

⁶⁰⁸ Charles Gore, “The Holy Spirit and the Church,” in *The Reconstruction of Belief* (London: John Murray, 1926), 853.

⁶⁰⁹ Charles Gore, *Belief in God*, 44.

⁶¹⁰ Charles Gore, *Belief in God*, 45.

⁶¹¹ Charles Gore, *Belief in God*, 58.

⁶¹² Charles Gore, *Belief in God*, 122.

⁶¹³ Charles Gore, *Belief in God*, 148.

language, the inaccessibility of the Absolute, the existence of contradictory but irreducible theological claims and the accommodation of scriptural language.

Still, Gore remained conflicted about the implications of these statements, and while he felt the need to adjust his views on progress, the overall structure remained in place: “The prophets also teach us to hold with unquenchable faith to the divine purpose of progress, through all the catastrophes and judgments which widespread apostasy from God brings with it.”⁶¹⁴ In this case, Gore at least expressed the shape of progress within the biblical context of God’s providential judgment and mercy in the face of human iniquity. So it is somewhat strange to then read Gore’s reprise of the Mill and Mansel debate: “The Bible, we may say, justifies John Stuart Mill in his famous refusal to call God righteous if his action did not respond to the ultimate demand of the human conscience.”⁶¹⁵ Mill at least rightly perceived that the purpose of Mansel’s argument was to justify the varying depictions of God’s actions in the Bible.⁶¹⁶ Gore, on the other hand, seems a little confused: World War I represented a judgment of God, and yet the Old Testament depictions of God, in Mill’s case, cannot meet the moral demands of the human conscience.⁶¹⁷

Whatever shift occurred with Gore’s theology in the years following the war was marked by some level of confusion and ambivalence. His faith in progress was diminished,⁶¹⁸ but he still struggled to grasp how the Old and New Testaments could speak coherently about the Christian God. It must be said that the effects of the war

⁶¹⁴ Charles Gore, *Belief in God*, 8.

⁶¹⁵ Charles Gore, *Belief in God*, 28.

⁶¹⁶ J. S. Mill, *An Examination of Sir William Hamilton’s Philosophy*, 104.

⁶¹⁷ Much as in the *Lux Mundi* essay, Gore still spoke about the Old Testament depictions of God’s character as imperfect and immature: “The limitations and the imperfections of the Old Testament conception of divine love, which are conspicuous in its earlier stages, are here quite obliterated. The love of God is active and universal” (*Belief in God*, 118).

⁶¹⁸ Charles Gore, *Belief in God*, 92.

moved him to begin wrestling with the idealistic metaphysics that once came quite easily, and while in theory Gore made few formal adjustments to his ideas, his understanding of God's providential activity in the world seems to have taken on a more intensely scriptural framing.

Michael Ramsay defended the *Lux Mundi* theologians, and Gore in particular. But he has also written that about the excitement of hearing Edwyn Hoskyns first lecture at Cambridge.⁶¹⁹ Hoskyns is perhaps best known for his translation of Barth's commentary on the Romans, but in the postwar years at Cambridge, he became a symbol of a shift toward a more biblically oriented theology.

Hoskyns, unlike Mansel, was a biblical scholar and not a philosopher, though he operated on assumptions that seem interchangeable with Mansel's approach to Scripture. For example, in his essay on the Synoptic Gospels in *Essays Catholic and Critical*, Hoskyns writes,

The failure of most modern scholars to formulate the contrasts correctly has led to their failure to recognize the possibility of a synthesis. The contrast is not between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith, but between the Christ humiliated and the Christ returning in glory.⁶²⁰

This attempt to theologically integrate the contrasting images of Scripture into the complex aspects of Christ's work represented a fundamental belief that the text of Scripture contains a unity that does not require an exterior framework to uphold it. In a sermon at Cambridge he comments,

we cannot go and have tea with Isaiah or with St. Paul and ask them what they meant, and perhaps indeed they could not tell us if we could do so. If

⁶¹⁹ Michael Ramsay, *From Gore to Temple*, 133.

⁶²⁰ Edwyn Hoskyns, "The Christ of the Synoptic Gospels," in *Essays Catholic and Critical, By Members of the Anglican Communion*, ed. Edward George Selwyn (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1926), 177.

we are to understand them, we can do so only by wrestling with the words they once spoke or wrote, and which have in part been preserved for us.⁶²¹

Thus, many of Hoskyns' writings on Scripture contain rich and detailed expositions of biblical words, their resonance across the Testaments, and their diverse yet coherent field of reference. He wrote sermons purely on certain words and their range of meaning: "The world," "The Neighbour," "Now-Then," "Here-There," "Tribulation-Comfort," "The Weak and the Strong," "Flesh," "Blood" and "Spirit."⁶²²

Hoskyns had a metaphysic of some kind that underpinned his scriptural approach, though it was one that functioned with little articulation. Hoskyns operated within a postwar sense of the fragmentary and disordered nature of the world: "The church is the enemy of all romanticism, if by 'romanticism' is meant a flight from the rough and tumble of things as they are into some dream world of our imaginings...The Church always has a dagger at its heart."⁶²³ These types of the statements permeate his work and reflect his view of biblical language: "So the word *cosmos* is crossed, when we use it, by the whole fragmentariness of what we see, so that the glory of God is seen, not at the point where we are strong, but at the point where we know ourselves to be weak and in need of mercy."⁶²⁴ In another sermon he writes, "Christian language is a disturbed language; the words we use are, when fashioned to declare the glory of God, bent out of the straight, deflected, and sometimes actually reversed."⁶²⁵ This sense of the disorder and brokenness of the world marks an obvious departure from idealist theology of the previous century. The distinction between the Old and New Testaments is something that

⁶²¹ Edwyn Hoskyns, "The World," in *Cambridge Sermons* (London: SPCK, 1938), 98.

⁶²² Edwyn Hoskyns, *Cambridge Sermons*, 89–150.

⁶²³ Edwyn Hoskyns, *Cambridge Sermons*, 91.

⁶²⁴ Edwyn Hoskyns, *Cambridge Sermons*, 103.

⁶²⁵ Edwyn Hoskyns, *Cambridge Sermons*, 122.

suddenly becomes less clear and increasingly complex: “Between the Old Testament and the New, between the world as we see it and the Kingdom of God as the point at which both contrasted worlds meet, they see the figure of Christ crucified and risen.”⁶²⁶ The relation of the Old Testament to the New is not strictly linear or progressive, precisely because it stands in direct relation to the revealing presence of God. As Christ himself, the words of Scripture look forward and backward in their application in a manner that makes relegating the Old Testament to a phase in the divine education far more difficult.

Though Hoskyns did not have a clear sense about the limitations of religious knowledge, at least not in the manner Mansel did, his theological method shares a strong continuity with Mansel:

Theologians have long since discovered that even this most perfect and rounded off system, even their more penetrating analysis of the Scriptures, even their most brilliant exposition of the Gospel, remain a relative human knowledge. Themselves broken upon the Truth of God, theologians are responsible to protect all newer roads of knowledge from the blasphemy for which theology has itself been punished and by which it has been so deeply scarred.⁶²⁷

The relativity of knowledge is a theme that appeared in Gore’s writings as well, and while it represents a certain shift in broader intellectual and scientific fields, in Hoskyns’ sense it operates much like Mansel’s epistemological skepticism. Maybe Christopher Herbert is correct in calling Mansel a proto-relativist.⁶²⁸ But for Hoskyns, as for Mansel, the relativity of human knowledge places the reader within a certain receptive posture toward Scripture, and even more, the idea is used to suggest that the Bible reflects the dynamics of the created world and the theological realities of death and resurrection.

⁶²⁶ Edwyn Hoskyns, *Cambridge Sermons*, 128.

⁶²⁷ Edwyn Hoskyns, *Cambridge Sermons*, 147.

⁶²⁸ See Introduction

Scriptural words are “crossed” in Hoskyns’ terms, and their plain meaning has the power to both disorient and transform the reader. In addition, the language of Scripture has an expansive sense that exhibits the salvific work of Christ on the cross. In this regard, as John Webster has put it, Scripture mortifies and vivifies the reader and the Church.⁶²⁹

This chapter presents the argument that while Mansel fell into relative dispute in the generation following his Bampton Lectures, his epistemological skepticism still proved influential in direct and indirect ways. This was especially the case as theologians struggled to describe the Christian faith within the context of British idealism without allowing the philosophy of the day to erode central Christian claims. Following the war, this proved to be even more apparent, and so the shifts in Gore’s theology alongside the emergence of a figure like Edwyn Hoskyns are referenced. The overall question concerns the compatibility of a scriptural worldview with particular expressions of philosophical metaphysics or ontology. While many critics complained that Mansel divorced faith from reason or that he isolated theological claims within a skeptical epistemology, there is a real sense in which his views, in various forms, proved increasingly reasonable to Christian writers in the generations that followed him. Hoskyns, and his early popularity, is a striking example of how the *Lux Mundi* incarnational theology was ill-equipped to cope with an event like World War I and all that it implied about the state of the world in the early 20th century. The fragmented nature of reality and the disorienting and disruptive power of Scripture mark a profound shift from the harmonizing and comprehensive aspirations of theological idealism. For Hoskyns and others, the Bible

⁶²⁹ John Webster, *Holy Scripture: A Dogmatic Sketch* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 88.

was often in conflict with human reason; it was a confrontational narrative of judgment and mercy, death and resurrection.

Of course, one can imagine that the largely unexpressed metaphysics or ontology of Hoskyns could in its own way distort or obscure certain scriptural realities. Surely the *Lux Mundi* theologians were not entirely mistaken in their search for some kind of harmony between the disparate facts, changes and experiences of God's world. In different generations the world is bound to seem harmonious and fragmented to vastly varying degrees in accordance with the experiences of people. It was Coleridge's argument that it was perfectly natural for Christians in various times and in various places to draw on different portions of the Bible for different purposes. The argument here is that Mansel's theory of regulative truth and his corresponding use of typology provide a set of rules that might permit various readings of Scripture without allowing certain portions of the Bible to damage or obscure others. If it is inevitable that some portions or themes in the Bible will strike certain individuals or people as more reasonable or more resonant with their experience, some account of the limits of human reason must be offered to ensure that the less reasonable portions are allowed to speak truthfully of God nonetheless. In the context of this chapter, this is necessary not just for the preservation of Christian orthodoxy but also to ensure that the entire Bible is available for the Church as a descriptive resource across the inevitable shifts and upheavals of history. In part, the progressive metaphysics of *Lux Mundi* was too monochromatic to adjust to a major historical change that challenged its core principle of moral and cultural progress. It is not a surprise that this worldview transitioned to equally simplified though pessimistic

cosmologies witnessed in the writings, for example, of a novelist like Thomas Hardy.⁶³⁰ Mansel's theory of accommodation and the Butlerian tradition that he imbibed represented an attempt to argue that the Bible graciously reflects and describes reality in a manner that is adjusted to the endless difficulties and complexity of the world. Paradoxically, Scripture can provide a more comprehensive account of God and the world than any rational philosophical or theological construct precisely because it is able to "absorb the world" more effectively.

It could be argued that Mansel's skepticism was simply an elaborated defense of the principle of repugnancy found in Article XX.⁶³¹ Mansel pursued this principle, albeit sparingly, in his sermons through the use of typology and the expansive sense of Scripture ordered around the figure of Jesus Christ. The progressive metaphysics of the *Lux Mundi* writers made the application of Article XX very difficult and at times impossible because their method concealed another form of skepticism, which isolated Old Testaments claims especially within a historical scheme that relativized many Old Testament narratives and types to an immature stage in the process of the world. Mansel wrote enough about the metaphysics of knowledge and the ontology of personality to imply that it was not the pursuit of these philosophical disciplines themselves that pose chronic difficulties to the reading of Scripture. Rather, metaphysical or ontological claims need to be curtailed in a sufficient manner to make space for the breadth of Scripture to speak truthfully and to form the overarching conception of what it means to live a creaturely life in God's world. Indeed, a skeptical stream is required in any philosophical

⁶³⁰ *Jude the Obscure* and *Two in a Tower* are examples of Hardy's pessimistic view of history and fate.

⁶³¹ "And yet it is not lawful for the Church to ordain any thing that is contrary to God's Word written, neither may it so expound one place of Scripture, that it be repugnant to another" (Article XX, *Book of Common Prayer: Canada 1962*).

pursuit because the antinomous and sometimes conflicting language of Scripture is the only form of human language that is capable of describing a God who cannot be grasped within purely rational constructs.

Chapter Six: Mansel in the 20th Century

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter argued that Mansel's skeptical metaphysics and corresponding theory of the regulative truth of Scripture was both explicitly and implicitly rejected by the Oxford idealist philosophers and by the *Lux Mundi* theologians whom they influenced. And yet, Mansel's strictures upon the theological capacity of human reason continued to operate, at times secretly and indirectly, in the writings of theologians like Charles Gore and Scott Holland, who struggled to position Anglican theology within a loosely derived idealistic metaphysics. In this respect, what appeared to be a generational verdict on the character of Mansel's thought was highly misleading: both Mansel's particular understanding of Scripture and the limitations of religious thought have maintained an enduring presence in 19th and 20th century Anglican theology, even in the midst of their ostensible repudiation.

In this chapter, I trace the course of Mansel's reception in 20th century Anglican theology with the goal of illuminating the changing context in which his ideas have moved. If Mansel's reputation as a defender of Anglican orthodoxy was fatally imperiled by the association of his ideas with those of Herbert Spencer, his 20th century interpreters, in certain respects, have done little more to clear his name. This is especially true in the case Don Cupitt, one of Mansel's most thoughtful and attentive readers. Cupitt's religious non-realism, most famously published in his book *Taking Leave of God* (1980), bears strong Manselian themes that can be traced back clearly to his early articles on Mansel published in the late 1960s. In this respect, Cupitt is one of the few Anglican theologians to appreciate Mansel's thought in a manner roughly akin to the presentation

of second and third chapters in this dissertation. Though, as is well-known, Cupitt's own thinking has developed dramatically since the 1960s, and while certain aspects of Mansel's thought have not entirely disappeared—the practicality of religion, and the anthropomorphic character of scriptural language, for example—Mansel's governing themes and intentions have clearly been forgotten. In 2006, Cupitt remarked that *The Limits of Religious Thought* is “a book that always has a few admirers—including, in the 1960s, me.”⁶³²

Mansel's 19th century critics judged his understanding of human reason to be overly constricting and exclusive of the spiritual character of human knowing. Whether in terms of the Absolute, the eternal consciousness or the Incarnation, writers like Green, Bradley and the *Lux Mundi* theologians were eager to articulate reality as a spiritual whole that could embrace the rapid changes and seeming progress of the modern world. However, in the 20th century it has been Mansel's supernaturalism and his high view of Scripture that have garnered resistance. To this end, his ideas have been engaged and implemented by theologians who have sought to advance immanentist and non-realist accounts of the Christian faith that relinquish the capacity of Scripture, in particular, to meaningfully refer to the character and reality of God.

However, in this chapter I argue that the skepticism and non-realism of Don Cupitt and much of 20th century Anglican theology is not a direct extension of Mansel's skepticism, but it is the result of a weakening confidence in Scripture's capacity to witness to God's character and describe God's presence in the world. This is a second form of skepticism that is easily confused with Mansel's, but in fact it has more in common with the idealist tendency to dissolve scriptural claims into the immediacy of

⁶³² Don Cupitt, *The Old Creed and the New* (London: SCM Press, 2006), 135.

spiritual experience in the service of a comprehensive and all-embracing metaphysics of explanation. Yet, as argued in the preceding chapters, these varying attempts to place the Christian faith within a metaphysical scheme that could make sense of modern developments time and again stumbled over the question of God's character as it is described in Scripture. This pertained especially to the Old Testament and to atonement theology: notions of God's anger, judgment and even violence became difficult to place within a progressive metaphysics that demanded a moral uniformity, which, in Mansel's terms, the Bible could not quite provide. Mansel's theory of regulative truth was an attempt to embrace the full range of scriptural references with all of their bewildering complexity and startling implications, without compromising the unity of Scripture, which speaks of one God across the vast array of written witness. For Mansel, as for Butler, the difficult and perplexing variety of Scripture's witness in fact provided a more compelling descriptive account of God's world. It is precisely this question of God's character that continued to trouble Mansel's 20th century interpreters, even as they found in him various theological and philosophical resources. Thus despite the fact that the postwar atmosphere in England seemed more hospitable to Mansel's theology than his own era, on the whole his 20th century readers have once again taken him in unusual and unexpected directions.

I begin by examining Mansel's reputation in 20th century surveys of Anglican theology and the extent to which his contribution to Anglican theology was erased in the schemes of Anglican idealist histories. I then turn to the various attempts at rehabilitating his writings in the works of Edwyn Bevan, Gordon Lewis Phillips, Kenneth Freeman and Don Cupitt. To these writers Mansel's ideas seemed to anticipate modern concerns about

the nature of religious language and symbolism, and yet the context of this new concern was not always more hospitable to Mansel's theology of Scripture.

In a certain sense, this somewhat convoluted and obscure genealogy of ideas in the 20th century, as in the 19th century, serves to raise pointed questions about the place of Scripture in modern theology and, more specifically, in the formation and identity of Anglican Christianity. This chapter argues that Mansel's skepticism and theory of the regulative truth of Scripture still have the capacity to offer a powerful test and critique of the continuous and competing theological visions of contemporary Anglicanism. And even more, his positive notion of a Church formed by the language and narrative of Scripture represents a compelling and coherent theological vision that deserves serious attention.

6.2 Mansel and the Historians

In the original preface to Bernard Reardon's well-known book *Religious Thought in the Victorian Age* (1971), he notes that his inspiration for the work comes from "the needs of students of religious thought in nineteenth century Britain."⁶³³ The previous works that Reardon notes are similar surveys by Vernon Storr, Clement Webb and L. E. Elliot-Binns.⁶³⁴ While Reardon himself offers a lengthy and appreciative summary of Mansel's place in Victorian theology, it is striking to note that Mansel's reputation as a theological thinker in England and beyond was almost exclusively in the hands a few idealist theologians and historians for the better part of the 20th century. The prevailing

⁶³³ Bernard Reardon, *Religious Thought in the Victorian Age: A Survey from Coleridge to Gore* (London: Longman, 1995), v.

⁶³⁴ I will not discuss L. E. Elliot-Binns' book in what follows. His history was intended as a sequel to Storr's book and in many ways continues with the same theme. The theology that Mansel stood for ignored modern scientific and moral concerns and for that reason risked driving the Church into further irrelevance. L. E. Elliot-Binns, *English Thought 1860–1900: The Theological Aspect* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1956), 10, 11, 17, 18.

theme in these complementary histories is that the Spirit has moved the Church and the world beyond the old-fashioned and morally dangerous views of Mansel wherein the scriptural narrative of God's dealings with His people is allowed to stand unaltered by modern developments.

6.2.1 *Vernon Storr: A Century of English Theology*

Vernon Storr's volume on English theology appeared in 1913 and covered the period of 1800–1860 in English theology. Storr's book is steeped in the pre-war idealism that was prevalent in English Christianity at the time and reads predominantly as a preamble to the theological movement that would come to characterize his own generation. The Oxford Movement, for Storr, characterized a profoundly negative attitude in Anglican theology that embodied a defensive and aggressive posture towards all forms of modern thought. In this respect Coleridge and Maurice were the figures who represented a deeper and more faithful stream in English Christianity: "After the collapse of the Oxford Movement came a period of reaction and negation, an hour of darkness in which Maurice so nobly upheld the torch of Christian idealism, and carried on the Coleridgean tradition of a more spiritual philosophy."⁶³⁵ In some respects, the crisis of religious belief in Victorian England was centered upon theories of the inspiration of Scripture.⁶³⁶ And yet the strict adherence to traditional understandings of inspiration by many theologians engendered a certain theological impotence just when the Church was losing touch with the world around it. Storr writes,

The traditional theology found itself powerless, for it had no religious philosophy worthy of the name. The last forty years of the century saw

⁶³⁵ Vernon Storr, *The Development of English Theology in the Nineteenth Century, 1800–1860* (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1913), 3.

⁶³⁶ Vernon Storr, *The Development of English Theology in the Nineteenth Century*, 363.

theologians forced out of their attitude of isolation, and driven to hold commerce with the wider thought around them. Thus began that period of rapid progress and enrichment which has ever since characterized theological development.⁶³⁷

Though Storr regards the writers of *Essays and Reviews* and more threatening critics like Francis Newman as dangerous, in some sense, with their heterodox implications, it is the case that such developments in Anglican theology spurred the Church toward a more truthful account of its core doctrines: “Here is the travail of the Time-Spirit; here is the living God at work. We see how this revolution in our thought is the result of the convergence of many lines of movement, how inevitable it was, how preparation had been made for it in a long past.”⁶³⁸ Such a statement characterizes Storr’s thesis as a whole: the current trends in idealist theology symbolized the culmination of the Spirit’s work in history. For this reason he gives little attention to the critics of this trajectory. Yet Storr does make one exception.

Mansel appears in Storr’s history as a confused and obstinate contrarian with little grasp of the contemporary currents in theology. As argued in previous chapters, Mill’s objection to Mansel’s defence of God’s character in the Old Testament formed the ultimate verdict on Mansel in the decades following. Storr, too, despite being critical of Mill’s empiricism, forms his judgment on Mansel’s reading of Scripture along these lines: Mansel’s literalism, in the case of the Old Testament especially, threatened to alienate an entire generation of spiritual doubters. Thus, Maurice was absolutely justified in the alarm and distaste that Mansel’s theology provoked in him: “Maurice saw that Mansel’s attitude, if it were generally adopted, could only lead to a fatal divorce between

⁶³⁷ Vernon Storr, *The Development of English Theology in the Nineteenth Century*, 5.

⁶³⁸ Vernon Storr, *The Development of English Theology in the Nineteenth Century*, 8.

theology and advancing knowledge. Death must quickly overtake English theology if the clergy were to enroll themselves as Mansel's disciples."⁶³⁹ This was in effect the judgment of S. C. Carpenter's *Church and History* as well: Mansel's views led to the "abandonment of theology,"⁶⁴⁰ though many "hasty theologians jumped at it."⁶⁴¹

6.2.2 Clement Webb

The other seminal work mentioned by Reardon is Clement Webb's *A Study of English Thought in England from 1850* (1933). Unlike Storr, Webb was an accomplished philosopher and theologian, and his book contains a far more delicate treatment of the major movements of the period under review. Webb was undoubtedly an idealist who, like many idealists in the early 20th century, had moved in a personalist direction from the philosophies of Green and Bradley.⁶⁴²

While Green, Bradley and the *Lux Mundi* writers were concerned with the threat of religious empiricism (Mansel) or moral utilitarianism (Mill), Webb's idealism is set within the changing circumstances of the early 20th century. Webb contrasts his position with emerging trends in French sociology. For example, figures like Emile Durkheim

are apt to speak of the object of their religious consciousness as though it were a merely subjective fact, the product of man's social nature. But it would in my judgment be better to acknowledge that the very social consciousness wherein consciousness of the supreme Unity has from the first been implicit is rooted in the spiritual nature of that supreme Unity itself, which in the movement of man's spiritual and social life has been

⁶³⁹ Vernon Storr, *The Development of English Theology in the Nineteenth Century*, 422.

⁶⁴⁰ S. C. Carpenter, *Church and People, 1789–1889; A History of the Church of England from William Wilberforce to "Lux Mundi,"* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1937), 480.

⁶⁴¹ S. C. Carpenter, *Church and People*, 479.

⁶⁴² Clement Webb, *God and Personality: Being the Gifford Lectures Delivered in the University of Aberdeen in the Years 1918 & 1919, First Course* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1918). In this work Webb is deeply appreciative of Green and Bradley's idealistic metaphysics, but he follows Hermann Lotze in insisting that the absolute must be conceived as a personal reality, in the light of the demands of religious consciousness (260).

carrying on that perpetual revelation and communication of itself which belongs to its own innermost being.⁶⁴³

Durkheim's tendency to reduce the aspirations of religious consciousness to relative and temporal considerations was countered by Webb with the argument that the realization of the Absolute is progressively realized in the various stages of cultural and historical striving after a primordial spiritual unity. Likewise, Webb criticizes William James' chronicling of religious experience as unduly individualistic and, on the whole, oblivious to the corporate, spiritual character of religious experience embodied in successive stages of world history.⁶⁴⁴

In this respect, Webb's history of 19th century theology, like Storr and Elliot-Binns, argues that the true lineage of Anglican theology lies in the tradition of Coleridge and Maurice, a lineage in which Mansel appears as a foil. Mansel, then, emerges in Webb's chapter on non-religious immanentism directly after a discussion of James' pragmatism.⁶⁴⁵ Mansel's theology is based upon the older understanding of Christianity that is built upon the evidence of miracles and the supernatural authority of revelation. And yet Mansel's denial of human reason's capacity to judge the contents of revelation by some independent standard grounded his thought on a "complete skepticism" that provoked the justified condemnation of Maurice and the English idealists after him.⁶⁴⁶ Thus, in Webb's view, despite him being a "pioneer of the modern study of philosophy in

⁶⁴³ Clement Webb, *God and Personality*, 218. In this particular book, Webb also demonstrates his indebtedness to great figures of Catholic Modernism like George Tyrell and Baron Von Hugel.

⁶⁴⁴ Clement Webb, *God and Personality*, 242.

⁶⁴⁵ Clement Webb, *A Study of Religious Thought in England from 1850; Being the Olaus Petri Lectures, Delivered at Upsala in 1932* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933), 88.

⁶⁴⁶ Clement Webb, *Religious Thought*, 91.

Oxford,” Mansel’s philosophical skepticism has become a forerunner to pernicious forms of religious immanentism, whether in the writings of Spencer or James.⁶⁴⁷

Webb’s volume concludes with an admission that the Great War “dealt a mortal blow to the optimistic religious immanentism.”⁶⁴⁸ Yet Webb places the blame for this “optimism” on an abstracted and conceptually banal form of idealism that preceded the personalist turn:

history, is no mere symbol of general truths for which some other and better symbol might be found, but a process in which unique individual persons perform unique individual acts. Blindness to these facts was bound to bring, and indeed has now brought, a reaction in its train.⁶⁴⁹

In many ways, Webb displays a typical postwar theological confusion that I attributed to Charles Gore in chapter five. While the progress of history had been arrested by the moral catastrophe of the war, Webb saw little connection between idealistic understandings of Scripture and the crisis of belief that emerged in the 1920s.⁶⁵⁰ In fact, despite the war, one of the great gains of theological idealism, according to Webb, has been an increase in “candour” and a generous, searching spirit that was capable of absorbing and even encouraging the “critical view of the Bible.”⁶⁵¹ Still, he laments that

a generation should be growing up to whom the Bible stories and the Scriptural phraseology, which were to their fathers as much part of the permanent furniture of their minds as the alphabet or the multiplication table, are altogether unfamiliar.⁶⁵²

⁶⁴⁷ Clement Webb, *Religious Thought*, 89, 92.

⁶⁴⁸ Clement Webb, *Religious Thought*, 149.

⁶⁴⁹ Clement Webb, *Religious Thought*, 168.

⁶⁵⁰ To be sure, Gore was far more cautious in his general assessment of historical progress than Webb, though both men allowed the war to shake, but in the end not significantly alter, their philosophical frameworks.

⁶⁵¹ Clement Webb, *Religious Thought*, 179.

⁶⁵² Clement Webb, *Religious Thought*, 182.

In essence, it was the alienation of the Scriptures, and the God they describe, from common Christian life and experience that concerned Mansel most deeply.⁶⁵³ And yet the nearly unanimous historical portrait of Mansel, drawn up by Webb and Storr, represents Mansel as a thinker badly out of touch with his times.⁶⁵⁴ Furthermore, Mansel's theology risked and actually accomplished a separation of Christian faith and the developments of the modern world. Reardon's history of Victorian theology has gone a long way in repairing the reputation of, in his words, "one of the most original religious thinkers of the century."⁶⁵⁵ While "Mansel's work still merits serious attention,"⁶⁵⁶ it was not the scope of Reardon's book to offer this attention. I will now turn to a series of writers who interpreted Mansel in light of 20th century philosophical and theological developments.

6.3 Mansel the Pragmatist

At the same time as Mansel was being dismissed by idealist historians as a severe skeptic, other writers began to see Mansel as a useful antidote to the idealistic trends in English philosophy and theology. Mansel's insistence that God can only be known within the constraints of human language, and the further point that this language is limited in its capacity to refer directly to God's being, made his ideas amenable to certain 20th century intellectual trends. In an increasingly skeptical age, Mansel came to be seen as a forerunner of religious pragmatism, as suddenly his skepticism seemed to "fit" with reality. Still, it remains the case that the portrait of God that emerged from Mansel's

⁶⁵³ See chapter 3 of this document, 32–45. Mansel's understanding of the typological expansion of Scripture, centered around the person of Christ, was an attempt to present the narrative of Scripture as the encompassing framework within which Christians interpret and understand God's presence within the world.

⁶⁵⁴ L. E. Elliot-Binns' history very much confirms this portrait. *English Thought 1860–1900*, 17, 18.

⁶⁵⁵ Bernard Reardon, *Religious Thought in the Victorian Age*, 223. Unlike the previous authors, Reardon, despite having some sympathies for Maurice, nevertheless suggests that "Maurice did not get to grips with Mansel's arguments in that he did not understand the principles on which they were advanced." The conflict was an example "of the plain man's impatience with the philosopher" (242).

⁶⁵⁶ Bernard Reardon, *Religious Thought in the Victorian Age*, 224.

understanding of Scripture continued to baffle and frighten even his most sympathetic readers. Thus untethered from his scriptural affirmations, Mansel's skepticism becomes open to all manner of applications: Don Cupitt represents an extreme outcome of this possibility, as the language of Scripture is deprived of any capacity to describe God. As argued in previous chapters, Coleridge, Maurice and the *Lux Mundi* theologians brought assumptions to the scriptural text that forced them to heavily favor some images over others. With little sense of how these varying and, at times, contrasting images can be held together in a holistic sense, this dilemma was pushed to the point of denying their ability to describe God at all. I begin by discussing Edwin Bevan and Kenneth Freeman as a preamble to Cupitt, in order to mark the path that Cupitt himself travelled.

6.3.1 Edwin Bevan: Symbolism and Belief

I begin with Edwin Bevan (1870–1943) as a more moderate interpreter of Mansel than Cupitt.⁶⁵⁷ Bevan's 1933–34 Gifford lectures were published in 1938 as a book entitled *Symbolism and Belief*, which contains a long chapter on Mansel. Bevan basically affirms Mansel's understanding of religious language:

all human language applied to Him tries by figures and parables to state truth about a Reality which infinitely exceeds all man's powers of understanding or imagination. It would be a waste of time to prove by a series of quotations something which runs through all Christian literature.⁶⁵⁸

⁶⁵⁷ Bevan was an ancient historian and philosopher who spent the majority of his life in London. His influences were wide ranging: he was a well-known linguist who ascribed to a form of philosophical pragmatism and was a long-time member of the *London Society for the Study of Religion*, founded by Baron Von Hugel.⁶⁵⁷

⁶⁵⁸ Edwyn Bevan, *Symbolism and Belief*, 24.

It is the theologian's task not to look beyond the anthropomorphic character of religious language but to "to make the division between right and wrong anthropomorphism."⁶⁵⁹

In order to make this division, Bevan draws on an aspect of Mansel's thought that was generally ignored by his own contemporaries: namely, that truths of Christian doctrine meet the needs of and fit within the demands and exigencies of human nature. In other words, the truths of Christianity—the existence of God—are indemonstrable realities that can only be known to the degree that one experiences and lives by the practices these realities imply. Bevan writes,

Yet whatever our conceptions may be, we cannot refuse to admit that they are only more or less figurative representations of an unimaginable Reality, as Mansel insisted, and that we give them our allegiance because they meet the exigencies of the human spirit and issue in the mode of action and feeling we perceive to be the best, and that further, because they do this, we believe them to be in their essence true.⁶⁶⁰

Bevan here is referring primarily to Mansel's understanding of personality and the representation in Scripture of a personal God who engages humanity in a manner that is fitting with our created capacities and character. For Mansel, the practice of prayer was particularly important in this regard: in prayer, of all places, the personal and relational aspect is most intensely evident.⁶⁶¹

Figures like Maurice generally missed this aspect of Mansel's thought, which Bevan brings to light, though somewhat strangely, Bevan's own approach to separating

⁶⁵⁹ Edwyn Bevan, *Symbolism and Belief*, 26.

⁶⁶⁰ Edwyn Bevan, *Symbolism and Belief*, 335.

⁶⁶¹ Mansel spoke also of natural moral sense and innate feeling of dependence upon something greater as human realities that are satisfied in Christian revelation. But as in the case of personality, Bevan suggests that "Mansel cannot have meant that a man could no more help believing in a personal God than he could help believing in his own existence: he must have meant that, for himself and many other people, belief in God's existence was a conviction which something in themselves made it impossible for them to question" (329).

the discussion of religious symbolism and the actual Bible introduces a limit to the extent that Mansel's ideas can be appropriated. Bevan recognizes this: "Mansel's general philosophy does not stand or fall by the rightness of his belief that the Hebrew and Christian scriptures gave a representation of God every element in which had to be accepted without question, as dictated by God."⁶⁶² At a moment when Bevan seems most sympathetic to Mansel, he provides a startlingly uncharitable rendering of Mansel's understanding of the Bible. Maybe Mansel did believe in a dictation theory, but there is no real evidence to suggest it. It is true that Mansel thought the Bible could "meet the exigencies of the human spirit," but he also believed that it was an ancient document that was attested by supernatural authority. His appeal to miracles and the external evidences for the Bible's credibility was already unpopular in his own day, and even more so in Bevan's. But Mansel's supernatural understanding of Scripture does not lend itself easily to a more generalized account of religious symbolism outside of the Scriptures themselves.⁶⁶³

In the end, Bevan's reading presents a mixed picture: his own views on religious language seem indistinguishable from Mansel's, and yet he cannot quite acknowledge the primacy of scriptural language in a manner that could make complete sense of Mansel's intentions. His pragmatism in this regard works against his scriptural commitments,

⁶⁶² Edwin Bevan, *Symbolism and Belief*, 334, 335.

⁶⁶³ Edwin Bevan seems to recognize this to be the case: "How does this differ from the Pragmatic view? It differs because in religious faith there is an enduring reference all through to a Reality believed to exist in absolute independence. The worth of the conception does not lie only in its effects in experience, but in the measure of its correspondence with that Reality" (*Symbolism and Belief*, 335). Yet for Mansel this reality is bound up inseparably with a particular history embodied in the Scriptures, represented in the history of Israel, the life of Christ, and His death and return. This is not untrue for Bevan, but he cannot, like any modern he claims, follow Mansel fully in his "scripturalism."

whether intentionally or not. This is true to the extent that the “exigencies of the human spirit” claim a controlling force in his ultimate theological argument:

Those who believe the Reality behind phenomena to be Spirit, to be God, hold that we see the character of that Reality in the manifestations of the human spirit, and since we see those manifestations in a scale of worth, some higher than others—a more perfect goodness and loveliness of character, a more ardent loyalty to truth, a richer genius in apprehending beauty and making beautiful things—it is as they rise in the scale, as they are brighter and purer, that they are for us more perfect manifestations of the character of the Supreme Spirit. For Christians the human spirit reaches its highest possible point in Christ.⁶⁶⁴

Thus, while making use of Mansel’s skepticism, Bevan, like the idealists that he too criticizes for their unwarranted metaphysical assertions,⁶⁶⁵ provides an external criterion that makes reading the Bible as a unified witness difficult, if not impossible, to perform. And like for so many of the authors discussed in my first four chapters, the great obstacle in reading the Bible as a coherent revelation from God is frequently the moral picture of God that the Bible presents. So Bevan thinks that Christian symbols fit well within the “exigencies” of the human spirit, but the picture of God that the Scriptures present does not, in fact, fit within these “exigencies.” If the Bible were to be read in the way that Mansel suggested, Bevan says in passing, “we should be delivered over to a welter of contradictory superstitions.”⁶⁶⁶ But I have argued that it is within this “welter” that Mansel found the most powerful and truthful account of God’s character and activity in the world. Furthermore, Mansel, like Butler, argued that the form and content of Scripture did in fact “fit” with the character of human life.

⁶⁶⁴ Edwin Bevan, *Symbolism and Belief*, 384.

⁶⁶⁵ Bevan, in a Manselian fashion, is critical of the notion of a *nunc stans* as presented by various figures like Maurice, Bosanquet and Inge. His argument is simply that, while this particular speculation may be true of God, there is no way for the human mind to determine one way or another: “It seems to me also to theorize about the psychology of God in a way which it is absurd for human beings to do” (*Symbolism and Belief*, 96, 97).

⁶⁶⁶ Bevan, *Symbolism and Belief*, 328.

6.3.2 *Kenneth Freeman and the Death of God*

While Bevan understood Mansel within the framework of religious pragmatism, Bevan, and much less Mansel, was not quite willing to relinquish the objectivity and identity of the Christian God. Though Bevan was inclined to speak of religious or Christian symbolism in a manner that was abstracted from the actual contents of Scripture. In part, Bevan did this because the scriptural narrative and images interfered in some sense with the pragmatic “fit” that should and does exist between Christian symbols and the “exigencies” of human life. Kenneth Freeman’s book *The Role of Reason in Religion: A Study of Henry Mansel* (1969) and an earlier article on the same topic (1967) build on the aspects of pragmatism in Mansel’s thought but extend and deconstruct Mansel’s ideas in a manner that reflects the concerns of the death of God or radical theology that was popular in the 1960s.

Freeman was a philosopher of religion who taught at Cornell and Harvard in the 1960s, and though he was not an Anglican, his book marks the most sustained and singular reading of Mansel as a radical theologian. Radical theology was introduced in England most memorably by John Robinson’s *Honest to God* in 1963, and many of the concerns of Robinson’s book were altered and forcibly extended over the next three decades by Don Cupitt. I discuss Cupitt shortly, but in what follows I briefly examine the manner in which Freeman adjusts and interprets Mansel for the purposes of articulating a purely finite conception of God.

Freeman, in a slightly different vein than Lightman, suggests that Mansel initiated an inadvertent

first step in a development which leads through J. S. Mill, William James, John Dewey, E. S. Brightman and Henry Nelson Wieman and culminates in the theology of the mid 60s which emphasizes the “death of God.” For the common denominator of the radical theology is the denial of the radical metaphysical transcendency which Mansel stressed.⁶⁶⁷

In effect, Mansel’s insistence on the transcendence of God—both infinite and absolute—paired with his assertion that human knowledge can only operate within the finite realm of distinctions and relations led to an obvious removal of human reason from the realm of religion.⁶⁶⁸ For Freeman this result illustrates the impossibility of a transcendent God or at least the usefulness of such an idea. Yet Freeman argues that Mansel’s criticisms of rational theology are useful and constructive for a finite conception of God.⁶⁶⁹

Freeman’s own position does not make use of the heavy theological language of someone like Altizer, but the structure of his argument is effectually the same. Altizer’s famous claim in *The Gospel of Christian Atheism* was that “As the God who is Jesus becomes ever more deeply incarnate in the body of humanity, he loses every semblance of his former visage, until he appears wherever there is energy and life.”⁶⁷⁰ The death of God in Christ effected the gradual erosion of all religious identity and created a space in which a pragmatic religious relativism could flourish. This is the conclusion that Freeman draws out of Mansel:

Implicit in any application of religious pragmatism is an affirmation of relativism with respect to religious truth. Such a relativism can easily be

⁶⁶⁷ Kenneth Freeman, *The Role of Reason in Religion*, 106. In an earlier article on the same topic Freeman compares the seemingly disparate views of Mansel and Whitehead and suggests a fundamental affinity between the two men: Whitehead’s notion of “imaginative rationalization” was an attempt not to move beyond the elements of experience but to simply imagine the differences and relations within experience in cases where direct observation is not possible. In this sense, Freeman suggests, Mansel would have no quarrel with Whitehead’s conception of relations. Kenneth Freeman, “Mansel’s Religious Positivism,” *Southern Journal of Philosophy* (Summer: 1967): 91–102, 96.

⁶⁶⁸ Kenneth Freeman, *The Role of Reason in Religion*, 104.

⁶⁶⁹ Kenneth Freeman, *The Role of Reason in Religion*, 107.

⁶⁷⁰ Thomas Altizer, *The Gospel of Christian Atheism* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1966), 75.

absorbed into the position of finitism. Within a particular culture...one finds a certain religion which emerges as that which most nearly satisfies the wants and needs of that culture.⁶⁷¹

Freeman points to one of the principal difficulties with Mansel's theology today. Much as with Kant's transcendental categories of human thought, Mansel's appeal to the fittingness or natural correspondence between human nature and Christian revelation has been eroded by pluralistic and local accounts of what it means to be human.⁶⁷² In other words, theological or philosophical attempts to provide abstract or generalized accounts of human nature are no longer in vogue.

In spite of this objection, Freeman agrees with Mansel that the question of God's objectivity remains undecidable, and he makes no effort to prove beyond question the veracity of a strictly finite God.⁶⁷³ Rather, Freeman's point is that God's finitude is in fact more useful or pragmatic in a pluralist world and less dangerous than Mansel's fideism: "Mansel's analysis provides no framework within which one may consistently resist the various superstitions and flights of fancy which crowd in upon modern life."⁶⁷⁴ The implication here is that Mansel's strictures upon reason in the realm of theology could lend themselves to any manner of beliefs and practices. Mansel believed that Christian practices and belief should be formed by a continual engagement with Scripture through a process of Christological and typological reading that has been common throughout the history of the Church. But this is not an option that Freeman considers. In fact, Freeman

⁶⁷¹ Kenneth Freeman, *The Role of Reason in Religion*, 108.

⁶⁷² Of Kant, Tom Sparrow writes, "Givenness is equiprimordial with being; being just is however it manifests itself to whomever thinks it. It is absurd to believe, after Kant, that it can be otherwise." Tom Sparrow, *The End of Phenomenology: Metaphysics and the New Realism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 81.

⁶⁷³ Finitism, for Freeman, is "attractive," and Mansel showed that is at least "possible." Kenneth Freeman, *The Role of Reason in Religion*, 44.

⁶⁷⁴ Kenneth Freeman, *The Role of Reason in Religion*, 108.

credits the finite understanding of God and all reality—“the single realm theory”—to pioneers in biblical criticism such as Strauss, F. C. Bauer and the authors of *Essays and Reviews*.⁶⁷⁵ Furthermore, Mansel’s belief in the supernatural reality of God in the Bible—miracles and all—is, according to Freeman, a view that in light of recent “Biblical scholarship...has been generally discredited.”⁶⁷⁶ Freeman goes on to conclude, “Without this presupposition, however, Mansel’s approach is largely vitiated.”⁶⁷⁷ Naturally, this goes without saying; Mansel would never have denied that his whole worldview hung without reserve upon the reality of God and the credibility of the Spirit’s witness in Scripture.

While Freeman’s reading of Mansel is creative and at times complimentary—“Mansel had struck at the vital center of the new wave of religious thought”⁶⁷⁸—more than anything, his book demonstrates the profound weakening of confidence in the capacity of Scripture to describe and form Christian practices and beliefs. Freeman may be right that the philosophical apparatus that surrounds Mansel’s understanding of Scripture contains problems and vulnerabilities. But as argued in chapter three of this dissertation, Mansel’s work is best understood from within his greatest commitment—that Scripture, as a whole, provides a unified witness to the actions and character of God in history. Any philosophical or theological theory that tries to pull this apart must be examined and criticized from the position of faith. So, like Bevan, Freeman assumes that the Scriptures in their entirety cannot describe and illuminate the contemporary world. His goal is pragmatic in the sense that he wants to articulate a religious philosophy that

⁶⁷⁵ Kenneth Freeman, *The Role of Reason in Religion*, 5–7.

⁶⁷⁶ Kenneth Freeman, *The Role of Reason in Religion*, 102.

⁶⁷⁷ Kenneth Freeman, *The Role of Reason in Religion*, 102.

⁶⁷⁸ Kenneth Freeman, *The Role of Reason in Religion*, 2.

can accommodate a limitless pluralism, which he regards as the true characterization of the contemporary world. Freeman's assumption, more baldly stated than Bevan's, is that the contemporary world, its knowledge and achievements, is so unprecedented that the God of the Scriptures appears irrelevant and lost, in some way, within the past. It is this simple assumption that informs the whole of Cupitt's work.

6.4 Don Cupitt and Religious Non-Realism

At the time of Freeman's book, Don Cupitt was a young priest and theologian with a teaching post at Emmanuel College in Cambridge. In the articles he published in the late 1960s on Mansel, there were slight indications of the direction he would eventually go with books like *Taking Leave of God*. Cupitt has become known for his claim that religious language does not refer to an objective God outside or even within the world. Indeed, there is a clear path of development between the two stages for Cupitt, but my purpose in what follows is not to simply describe this development but to relate it to Mansel's central ideas concerning the limits of knowledge and the character of the Scriptures. My argument is that Cupitt's skepticism about the realistic nature of scriptural language has little to do with Mansel. However, there are clear affinities between Cupitt's position and idealists like Green and Bradley, and it is within this tradition of English religious skepticism that Cupitt's non-realism is more accurately located.

6.4.1. Early Articles on Mansel

Cupitt's article on Mansel's theory of regulative truth (1967) makes the case that Mansel's theory simply represented a traditional theological notion that God's very being is incomprehensible, though God's action in the world and relation to His creation are revealed in Scripture. Far from advocating a skepticism that removes God from the world, Cupitt suggests that "Mansel stands for continuity between things human and

things Divine. God mercifully attaches us to himself by engaging our human thoughts and affections.”⁶⁷⁹ Cupitt goes on:

To Mansel the power of the Christian revelation to develop human nature to its full capacity is a most important evidence of its truth, and the God who wills to be thought of as Father and Husband not only enriches those natural relations, but is known in them. Revelation is adapted to our powers of thought, moral activity, and affection alike; but still more to human nature as a whole...Mansel is rather concerned for a wholeness, a “kindness” which he finds in orthodoxy and would not see diminished.⁶⁸⁰

This is, to some extent, the picture that I present of Mansel: despite the dominant image of Mansel as a severe and cold skeptic who defended an image of God that was offensive to so many, the prevailing theme for Mansel is the gracious “kindness” of a God who inhabits and indwells human reality in order to know and save His people. Yet within this picture of God’s nearness or proximity to human life, Cupitt writes that for Mansel “theology is continually haunted by the thought of God’s transcendence, even though that thought can never be brought to perfect clarity in reflection.”⁶⁸¹

Despite these sympathetic reflections, Cupitt is not uncritical of Mansel. First, he questions whether Mansel should have located the limits of thought strictly within the religious realm and not applied them to all fields of knowledge. Mansel, Cupitt suggests, was possibly “led astray in *The Limits* by the demands of his Butlerian scheme.”⁶⁸² But it is difficult to see how this could be the case, at least in Mansel’s mind. The lectures open with the quote from Hamilton that all problems of theological knowledge are mirrored in philosophy, in respect to knowledge of God and the nature of the Infinite or Absolute. For

⁶⁷⁹ Don Cupitt, “Mansel’s Theory of Regulative Truth,” 116.

⁶⁸⁰ Don Cupitt, “Mansel’s Theory of Regulative Truth,” 117.

⁶⁸¹ Don Cupitt, “Mansel’s Theory of Regulative Truth,” 119.

⁶⁸² Don Cupitt, “Mansel’s Theory of Regulative Truth,” 110.

better or for worse, it would be hard to contest this notion within Mansel's work. Cupitt, however, may have had his reasons for suggesting this, as will be seen.

Secondly, Cupitt argues that Mansel's understanding of analogy was a relative latecomer to his thought, a notion he went searching for in response to Goldwin Smith.⁶⁸³ It is true that Mansel introduced the idea of his fairly straightforward view of analogy after he delivered his lectures, but it seems like a natural suggestion on the heels of his theory of regulative truth: the language of revelation is primarily practical—it forms the thoughts and actions of believers—but in faith, if not in conception, the Christian believes that there is an analogical relation between the language and God Himself. But Cupitt seems to prefer a version of regulative truth without the possibility of any known correspondence: “If Mansel to some extent abandoned the original strictness of his doctrine of regulative truth, and developed it into a kind of theory of analogy, he made no progress. His original position, bleak though it is, is surer.”⁶⁸⁴ How this more “bleak” position could cohere with Cupitt's other assessment of Mansel's kind and holistic orthodoxy is not clear, and Cupitt does not explore it. It does suggest, perhaps, an uncertainty in his own mind.

Indeed, several years later, in a series of exchanges on Mansel with F. W. Dockrill, Cupitt seems to adjust his view of Mansel. In one instance he summarizes Mansel's view by suggesting that “Christian dogmas have always been authoritative guides to conduct rather than authoritative diagrams of deity.”⁶⁸⁵ Suddenly Cupitt sounds more like the reckless critics of Mansel's own day who did not grasp the tension between

⁶⁸³ Don Cupitt, “Mansel's Theory of Regulative Truth,” 114.

⁶⁸⁴ Don Cupitt, “Mansel's Theory of Regulative Truth,” 115.

⁶⁸⁵ Don Cupitt, “What Was Mansel Trying To Do?,” 545.

knowledge and practice that he was attempting to hold together. In a more definitive statement, Cupitt restates his own view of the debate between Mansel and Maurice:

Mansel allows that our knowledge of God is in the form of the consciousness “of the relation of a Person to a Person.” But the concept of God as personal is a concept of him that is limited and finite. It cannot be a constitutive concept, that is, a concept which truly represents him as he is in himself...Maurice believes that the basis of knowledge is a real ontological communion between knower and known. We can have and we can speak of such an experience in the case of God. Our talk of God is not metaphorical but refers directly to a genuine and conscious experience of him. A few years ago it seemed obvious to me that Mansel was nearer the truth. He is clear, Maurice is obscure: yet if Maurice is right, how can Maurice be obscure, and how can Mansel hold the opinions he does? Moreover, Maurice clearly lost the argument. Elsewhere in his writings he talks more like Mansel, and I had the impression that his passionate nature, and the demands of controversy, led him to rhetorical exaggeration. Now however, I feel a little more sympathy for Maurice’s opinion, but it would be a long story to say why.⁶⁸⁶

The reference here to his “story” leaves the reader guessing, but Cupitt has subsequently left us with no shortage of material to trace this story. What is curious, however, is that Maurice’s notions of “ontological communion” and direct and conscious experience of God should become attractive to Cupitt at a moment when he began moving in his non-realist direction.

6.4.2 *Christ and the Hiddenness of God*

Cupitt’s now well-known book *Taking Leave of God* appeared in 1980 to much controversy and attention. While it was an announcement of Cupitt’s non-realist position, any careful reader of Cupitt could well have seen it coming. By his own account, in a written reply to Rowan Williams’ critique of his book, Cupitt makes this comment:

Taking Leave of God is strongly Kantian, and reflects the influence of Mansel’s theory that religious truth is regulative, and of Wittgenstein’s

⁶⁸⁶ Don Cupitt, “Mansel and Maurice on our Knowledge of God,” *Theology* 73 (July 1970): 301–311, 311.

interpretation of Kierkegaard. In retrospect I now see it as completing a development which began as far back as *Christ and the Hiddenness of God* and even earlier. *The World to Come*, by contrast, reflects the recent joining of hand between American and French philosophy as seen, for example, in what Rorty has lately been writing about Derrida...Thus...*Taking Leave of God* rounded off what I had been trying to say for the previous dozen years, and it was followed rather than preceded by the conversion which led me to write the second book.⁶⁸⁷

Unlike the retrospective Cupitt provides in 2006, here he clearly acknowledges Mansel as a formative influence in his progression toward a non-realist position, though it is a version of Mansel that has been severely altered.

Already in *Christ and the Hiddenness of God* (1971) Cupitt provides evidence of this alteration. This book demonstrates an analysis of the person of Christ and His role as an object of human faith and apprehension. Cupitt pursues this study largely within the context of Anglican theology, and he provides a rare exposition of the tradition that figures largely in Mansel's background. Cupitt discusses the work of Mansel, Peter Browne, Archbishop King, Richard Whately, Copleston and Hume as varying representatives of the negative tradition within English theology. However, in a large measure Cupitt already gives Hume the upper hand against the "Demea" theologians of the Anglican tradition who employed skeptical arguments about human knowledge of God in order to create a space for Christian revelation. Cupitt writes that these theologians

were prone to argue, mistakenly I believe, that all human representations of God are on the same level. They maintained this partly out of a respectable protestant dislike of any double standard or hierarchy of degrees or proficiency among the regenerate, and partly out of suspicion that if imagery of scripture is admitted to vary in authoritativeness or adequacy the pass would be sold to the biblical critics. Both these reasons

⁶⁸⁷ Don Cupitt, "A Reply to Rowan Williams," *Modern Theology* 1, no. 1 (1984), 26.

are unsound. Even in the very earliest Christian asceticism there was an important distinction between ‘milk’ and ‘meat’ stages, and the religious life cannot move at all unless the religious symbols guiding it be arranged, as they plainly are arranged, in some kind of hierarchy.⁶⁸⁸

Clearly Cupitt takes the central claim of these writers—that God’s nature cannot be directly apprehended—and blends it with a mystical or negative component that allows for a progressive overriding of certain scriptural claims. He is right about the concern over biblical criticism, and the claims about milk and meat stages are not entirely unwarranted. The overall trajectory of this argument, however, recalls the idealist tendency to dismiss certain biblical claims and narratives as primitive or immature within the course of history.

Cupitt goes on to appropriate the narrative of idolatry that was prevalent among writers like Green:⁶⁸⁹

But in so far as the story is told successfully and convincingly it has made of God not God but a man. And so in its transcendent or prophetic mood theism is iconoclastic, it must negate its own symbolism, it must insist upon the inexpressibility and the mysteriousness of God...The image of God as in perpetual movement suggests that there can be no fixed positions and no incorrigible formulations of doctrine...For what God is, is not so much expressed in our success in speaking about him as rather indirectly suggested by our failure.⁶⁹⁰

Fixed conceptions of God and “incorrigible formulations of doctrine” are described by Cupitt as antithetical to the character of Christ’s own ministry, which was iconoclastic: it broke down the rigid religious idols and substituted an indeterminate gradient of spiritual exploration with no definite goal. This is an obvious departure from Mansel’s own reading of the Scriptures; he did in fact regard all of Scripture as on an equal field of meaning, but the field of reference was organized and interpreted by a Christocentric logic. Cupitt also

⁶⁸⁸ Don Cupitt, *Christ and the Hiddenness of God* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1971), 90.

⁶⁸⁹ See section 5.3.2 in chapter five of this document for a discussion of Green.

⁶⁹⁰ Don Cupitt, *Christ and the Hiddenness of God*, 202.

employs a Christocentric hermeneutic, but it is one that sheds referential meaning rather than gathering it. In this way, as early as 1971 he was expressing views that were consistent with writers like Altizer.

Cupitt was aware that he was only using a portion of Mansel's ideas, and like Freeman, he rejects his views of Scripture. In part this is because Cupitt, like other radical theologians, holds to a narrative in which the old ontology that upheld analogical reasoning about the knowledge of God had collapsed and given way to sheer authority.⁶⁹¹ But the authoritarian view—Mansel's own, he suggests—hovers listlessly in a void that cannot justify the claim:

The anthropomorphic imagery through which we relate ourselves to God is incapable of rational justification. In H. L. Mansel's terminology, it is not speculatively true: but it may nevertheless be regulatively true. The imagery may be used because it is authorized, it is to be believed and obeyed... We have argued against this that no satisfactory justification can be given of the claims to authority of the Bible, the church or whatever else is supposed to be the authoritative source of action guiding religious imagery.⁶⁹²

In severing this connection between the Bible and its divine authorization, Cupitt places the whole range of Scripture in a highly precarious position. An example of this is his reading of Christ's death:

Jesus' own living out of his anthropomorphic faith disclosed that its own logic led to its own loss. In obedience to God as he conceived God, Jesus was obliged to lose the imagery, to experience the distance of God, the Messianic Woes and the Cross. The optimistic imagery which pictured God as fatherly, good and loving, if it was lived, led to its own renunciation.⁶⁹³

⁶⁹¹ Don Cupitt, *Christ and the Hiddenness of God*, 205.

⁶⁹² Don Cupitt, *Christ and the Hiddenness of God*, 205.

⁶⁹³ Don Cupitt, *Christ and the Hiddenness of God*, 212.

Whereas someone like Austin Farrer, for example, suggested that Christ “clothed” Himself in Old Testament images as He went to the cross, Cupitt only acknowledges one family of images and suggests that all biblical imagery is lost and renounced in Christ’s death. The suffering servant of Isaiah or the judgments of God upon the nation of Israel are excluded by Cupitt in favor of the “optimistic imagery” of God’s overriding goodness and love. However, in Mansel’s terms, God’s goodness and love were informed and colored by scriptural narrative in all of its particularity, an interpretation that Cupitt does not seem willing to consider.

Thus *Christ and the Hiddenness of God* interprets Jesus as ultimately unknowable and yet as a symbol of God’s hiddenness that constantly destroys and removes fixed conceptions of God. Such an interpretation implies a developmental reading of history that places Cupitt in close proximity to idealists like Green and Bradley who could not countenance the idea that the Bible might describe God and the world in any kind of definite manner. In addition, Cupitt, in this early stage, reflects the ambivalence of Bevan’s reading of Mansel, for whom Mansel’s skepticism functions as a theory of religious symbolism that relates only sporadically to the actual biblical record.

6.4.3 *Taking Leave of God*

Inherent within Cupitt’s early views that religious symbolism—scriptural symbolism—required constant supersession was a progressive theory of knowledge that impinged upon his conception of modernity. Like Bevan, Cupitt seems to merge scriptural symbolism into a more generic account of religious symbolism that becomes subject to a process of continual purgation: these symbols have only temporal use in an intellectual process that approaches the truth through a constant supersession of traditional language

and symbolism. Nearly all the books that surround *Taking Leave of God* (1980)—*The Leap of Reason* (1977), *The World to Come* (1982), *The Sea of Faith* (1984)—contain genealogies of modernity that document the emergence of a new consciousness that demands the alteration of traditional religious beliefs.⁶⁹⁴ Yet Cupitt's desire to retain the usefulness of religious symbolism complicates his own narration of modernity in a manner that illustrates some of the difficulties of his own position.

For example, in *The Leap of Reason*, Cupitt asserts that traditional belief in a realist God has become increasingly difficult, but the role of faith remains integral in human life. He follows a version of Kierkegaard and suggests that faith does not have to be oriented toward an object, but in itself it represents “an ecstasy, standing outside one's habitual ways of thinking.”⁶⁹⁵ This ecstatic character emerges from the ability to recognize our situation in the world: “So religion aspires after absolute knowledge, while yet it recognizes that our situation is such that absolute knowledge is not attainable...precisely because we can grasp what relativism is and asserts, we can transcend it.”⁶⁹⁶ By us standing outside of our moment, or transcending the present, relativism is no longer a threat to the truth but an explanation of the world. Here Cupitt expresses an ontology of his own: “The interpretive plasticity of the world describes the curious way in which the world of our experience is seemingly willing to lend itself to interpretation in terms of a great variety of different programmes.”⁶⁹⁷ This intense form of subjectivism is, for Cupitt,

⁶⁹⁴ In *The Leap of Reason* Cupitt credits the religious wars of the 17th century for creating an atmosphere of skepticism about metaphysics. This atmosphere led to scientific exploration and a growing interest in the material world conceived apart from dangerous metaphysical notions that might lead to violence and discord. Don Cupitt, *The Leap of Reason* (London: Sheldon Press, 1976), 10.

⁶⁹⁵ Don Cupitt, *The Leap of Reason*, 68.

⁶⁹⁶ Don Cupitt, *The Leap of Reason*, 66.

⁶⁹⁷ Don Cupitt, *The Leap of Reason*, 56.

compatible with the nature of the world, and the act of grasping at once both the possibility and relativity of one's framework is what Cupitt calls the act of faith.⁶⁹⁸

Cupitt would not hold to this definition of faith throughout the rest of his career, but it still helps to underline some of the difficulties with the non-realist position. For example, at the end of *Taking Leave of God*, Cupitt expresses himself in Feuerbachian terms: "I continue to speak of God and to pray to God. God is the mythical embodiment of all that one is concerned with in the spiritual life."⁶⁹⁹ For Cupitt, these concerns of the spiritual life have shifted dramatically in the modern world, and correspondingly, so has the "mythical embodiment" of God. It is clear that the religious language he holds on to—prayer, spirituality—has been abstracted and no longer has a definitive place within a tradition of faith, much like for Bevan before him.⁷⁰⁰ In the end the language that does survive, already unrelated to a scriptural context, is powerless to describe the world. The act of description is left to the rarified feeling of ecstatic faith, which comes to terms with the metaphysical closure of the world and the unreality of God. While Cupitt's genealogy of modernity retains certain loose theological indicators like "death" and "rebirth,"⁷⁰¹ it is clear that history is now under the control of a force that has nothing to do with providence in any biblical sense. In his own words, "The attempt to retain religious meanings fixed

⁶⁹⁸ Steven Shakespeare comments on this general shift in understanding Kant's categories of understanding: "Kant wanted to hold on to the necessity of our shared conceptual apparatus, and so preserve the objectivity of knowledge, but it was not long before his views were radicalized by Nietzsche and others, who drew attention to the contingent, fictional character of our structures of knowledge and truth." Steven Shakespeare, "A Hiding to Nothing: Cupitt and Derrida on the Mystery Tour," in *New Directions in Philosophical Theology: Essays in Honour of Don Cupitt* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 104.

⁶⁹⁹ Don Cupitt, *Taking Leave of God* (London: SCM Press, 1980), 166.

⁷⁰⁰ I argued that Bevan abstracted religious symbolism from a concrete scriptural framework, but Bevan was not a non-realist in Cupitt's terms. He in fact believed that Christian faith, in its commonly accepted forms, was still the most viable and fitting form of religious faith.

⁷⁰¹ Don Cupitt, *The Sea of Faith* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1984), 17.

must fail, because the process of historical change slowly evacuates them and turns them into superstitions.”⁷⁰²

If there is a power behind this “evacuation,” it is not represented by any variation of Christian doctrine, such as the Incarnation and death of Christ is utilized by Altizer. Rather, Cupitt speaks about the real context in which this shift has occurred as an earthly encounter with the void:

Everyone must eventually come to terms with his own transience and the Void that encircles him. Religion is about that; not about consolation, but first and foremost about the truth of life. You must enter what *The Cloud of Unknowing* calls a nothing and a nowhere, full blind and full dark.⁷⁰³

The history of modernity for Cupitt is about the unveiling of the void and the immediate encounter that occurs between humanity and reality once religious illusions have become unmasked. Morality is constituted by moral action without the promise of any eternal reward: morality for its own sake, carried out in the void.⁷⁰⁴

But this narrative—the emergence of the disinterested and the autonomous, fearless self—would again shift for Cupitt. As Gavin Hyman has noted, in the 1980s Cupitt, like many intellectuals of the time, began to transition from a Kantian epistemology toward a postmodern understanding of the subject and morality.⁷⁰⁵ Steven Shakespeare notes that Cupitt’s early non-realism was simply a form of classical Kantian Liberalism: “Theology is presented in a thoroughly dialectical guise, in which its positive images must always be treated as contingent creations, to be shattered as soon as we are

⁷⁰² Don Cupitt, *The Sea of Faith*, 16.

⁷⁰³ Don Cupitt, *The World to Come* (London: SCM Press, 1982), 154.

⁷⁰⁴ Don Cupitt, *The World to Come*, 159. Cupitt writes that the old order of eternal rewards “has lost moral authority and in many cases has even become highly objectionable, and it belongs to a past when people lived within narrow myths that have now died.”

⁷⁰⁵ Gavin Hyman, “Disinterestedness: The Idol of Modernity,” in *New Directions in Philosophical Theology: Essays in Honor of Don Cupitt* (Lancaster: University of Lancaster, 2002), 50.

tempted to cling to them and confuse them with the reality of God.”⁷⁰⁶ The reality of God is unknowable and cannot be spoken of in any stable manner.

But in the 1980s Cupitt would shift his views in this respect toward a more postmodern understanding of language. He had already been reading Wittgenstein, but his encounter with Derrida moved his non-realism to another level. For example, instead of God being a void beyond or hidden within experience, Cupitt writes,

God is not selfsame, but creates precisely by an endless moving on and pointing to something else. He is not a being, but the universal sign of relation, a principle of otherness and difference that divides the Void to form the field of meanings and gradations of value. He creates not by hugging his own divinity but by renouncing it.⁷⁰⁷

The endless moving and pointing of language is no longer part of a narrative of progress or of the emergence of human responsibility but is simply “an immanent process of dialectical development without any inbuilt and overriding purposiveness, and only a flux of differentiations without any substances or sheerly given atomic units to build with.”⁷⁰⁸

This represents yet another metaphysical conception of the world in which the Christian faith has only a fading purpose, as it is merged into the infinite field of signs and meanings. Cupitt writes,

The general metaphysics picture that we work towards—it is only a picture, and we work only towards it, because these must not be done too crudely—seems to be a little reminiscent of F. H. Bradley’s metaphysics of feeling, and also of Russell’s neutral monism in its attempt to achieve a flat two dimensional surface.⁷⁰⁹

⁷⁰⁶ Steven Shakespeare, “A Hiding to Nothing,” 105.

⁷⁰⁷ Don Cupitt, *The Long Legged Fly: A Theology of Language and Desire* (London: SCM Press, 1987), 106.

⁷⁰⁸ Don Cupitt, *The Long Legged Fly*, 7.

⁷⁰⁹ Don Cupitt, *The Long Legged Fly*, 10.

To be sure, Cupitt's idea here does sound much like Bradley's absolute, an objectless totality of all experience without any reference to an outside.

The shifts in thinking that characterizes Cupitt's thought represent a relentless press towards an immanent and immediate religious faith. This, perhaps, can account for his growing appreciation of Maurice and his corresponding uncertainty about Mansel stated earlier.⁷¹⁰ Indeed, according to Shakespeare, Cupitt's evolved position represents an even more severe form of immanentism than Derrida's: Derrida spoke of the "secret," the unknowable embedded in the world, which is possessed by no one and which holds the immanent world, and persons within it, open toward the other.⁷¹¹ But for Cupitt, "The text seems trapped by an overwrought dualism. Either Platonism or 'nothing is hidden.'" ⁷¹²

Yet, despite these differences, Cupitt's vision of life in this new world, "solar loving," is typically postmodern. Life is lived through "ecstatic" immanence "immersed in and unreservedly given over to its own utter transience."⁷¹³ Solar love is "ardent and heedless,"⁷¹⁴ unbounded in some way, unstructured by traditions but set loose among the infinite variations of reality. Cupitt argues that there is nothing hidden within human beings or outside of them, and this metaphysical doctrine commands "you to live as the Sun does, expending yourself in communicative life giving self-externalization."⁷¹⁵ Atheism, Cupitt suggests, "sides with the Son against the Father," which, in effect,

⁷¹⁰ This is not to say that Maurice's theology inevitably issues in something like Cupitt's theology. Rather, the press for an immanent encounter with God that is less troubled by the tension of natural and supernatural reality, which characterizes Maurice's thought, for Cupitt is resolved by eliminating the supernatural reality of God entirely.

⁷¹¹ Steven Shakespeare, "A Hiding to Nothing," 109.

⁷¹² Steven Shakespeare, "A Hiding to Nothing," 111.

⁷¹³ Don Cupitt, *The Last Philosophy* (London: SCM Press, 1995), 82.

⁷¹⁴ Don Cupitt, *The Last Philosophy*, 81.

⁷¹⁵ Don Cupitt, *Solar Ethics* (London: SCM Press, 1995), 26.

overthrows the established order and calls for a continual clash with fixed and established norms.⁷¹⁶ The contrast of law and gospel is a derivative of the Father-and-Son contrast:

Gospel ethics tries to live beyond the distinctions, and therefore to live purely affirmatively, without *ressentiment*, without differences of respect, without dividing, discriminating or excluding. It is an ethical style for an “open” world that no longer has a fixed structure.⁷¹⁷

Certainly these words recall Collingwood’s comment that Bradley was seeking to amend Mansel’s “project of dividing” reality into distinctions and limitations.⁷¹⁸ For Cupitt, as for Bradley, even the distinction of the natural and the supernatural threatens to tear the fabric of the world.

Cupitt’s vision of the world is not unlike John Caputo’s, another philosopher of religion strongly influenced by Derrida. In *The Weakness of God*, Caputo writes,

The name of God is the name of an event transpiring in being’s restless heart, creating confusion in the house of being, forcing being into motion, mutation, transformation, reversal. The name of God is the event that being both dreads and longs for, sighing and groaning until something new is brought forth from down below. The name of God is the name of what can happen to being, of what being would become, of what rising up from below being pushed being beyond itself, outside itself, as being’s hope, being’s desire.⁷¹⁹

For Caputo, the indeterminacy of God “calls us beyond ourselves, down unplotted paths and into unexplored lands, calling us to go where we cannot go, extending us beyond our reach.”⁷²⁰ While Caputo’s use of the “impossible”⁷²¹ as a hidden promise within the

⁷¹⁶ Don Cupitt, *Solar Ethics*, 66.

⁷¹⁷ Don Cupitt, *Solar Ethics*, 65, 66.

⁷¹⁸ R. G. Collingwood, “The Metaphysics of Bradley,” 236.

⁷¹⁹ John Caputo, *The Weakness of God: A Theology of the Event* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2006), 9.

⁷²⁰ John Caputo, *The Weakness of God*, 11.

⁷²¹ See Caputo’s *On Religion* for a description of the impossible and its quasi-theological role within the life of faith: “the name of God is the name of the chance for something absolutely new, for a new birth, for the expectation, the hope.” John Caputo, *On Religion* (London: Routledge, 2001), 11.

immanent world may have been more than Cupitt might concede, the overall effect of Caputo's philosophy upon the traditions of Christian theology is largely the same: the particularities of doctrine, the specific narrative of Scripture and spectrum of Christian beliefs that anchor piety, are dissolved in the cycles and circles of indeterminacy.⁷²² The Scriptures, for Caputo and Cupitt, have their place within the flux of reality, but they, like everything else, are set adrift within a more comprehensive metaphysical scheme.

Despite the fact that Cupitt's religious non-realism underwent certain shifts throughout his career, he was clearly drawing on trends that began in the 19th century and even earlier. In this way, the differences that mark his thought between a more explicitly Kantian phase and his subsequent postmodern adjustments are perhaps overstated.⁷²³ In either case, Cupitt is advocating for an alternative metaphysics that places traditional theological claims under a master system that is purported to be closer to reality. Rowan Williams draws attention to this aspect of Cupitt's work and suggests that Cupitt appeals "repeatedly to the self-evidence of what he is saying in respect of the contemporary consciousness" as if the character of the world were obvious to all.⁷²⁴ Williams' own strategy in replying to Cupitt is not to disprove his vision "but rather to

⁷²² Caputo refers to traditional theologies of the Church as strong theologies: "I love the strong theologies that I know the way I love great novels, but I maintain an ironic distance from them occasioned not only by the fact that they are invariable in league with power but also by my conviction that the event that is astir in the name of God cannot be contained by the historical contingency of the names I have inherited in my tradition." John Caputo, *The Weakness of God*, 9.

⁷²³ Gavin Hyman for instance thinks that this distinction is imperative for understanding Cupitt, although in some way Cupitt never really escapes the modernist trappings of the desire to create an all-encompassing metaphysics. But it could be argued that postmodern religious arguments, for example Caputo's, represent a metaphysical rendering of the world all the same. Gavin Hyman, *The Predicament of Postmodern Theology*, 58.

⁷²⁴ Rowan Williams, "Religious Realism: On Not Quite Agreeing With Don Cupitt," in *Wrestling With Angels: Conversations in Modern Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich: William B. Eerdmans, 2007), 230.

ask whether the vision commended is quite as consistent, attractive, and livable as it is made out to be.”⁷²⁵

In this respect, the comparison of Mansel and Cupitt is revealing. Clearly, by 2006 Cupitt had largely forgotten about Mansel, but even his earlier suggestions that he appropriated Mansel’s theory of regulative truth now seem suspect. Williams’ question about the consistency and attractiveness of Cupitt’s vision is obviously important, but with respect to Mansel, it is clear that within Cupitt’s metaphysics the Scriptures, unhinged from any theological reality, cannot even serve a regulative function. In fact, it was Cupitt’s doubts about the validity of the Bible, the moral portrait of God that it presents, and the overall narrative that it describes that provoked his non-realism in the first instance. Despite his attempts to embrace “ordinary” reality and the world as it is, his works are full of sarcasm and cynicism with respect to the “mythological” beliefs of “ordinary folk.”⁷²⁶ He condemns the pastoral theology of *The Book of Common Prayer*, which along with the Scriptures has lost so much “explanatory utility.”⁷²⁷ Whereas Mansel’s intention was to uphold the faith and piety of common Christians and to place that piety within a scriptural context, the effect of Cupitt’s work has been to undermine that piety at every turn, to question the notion of prayer and to deride any providential concept of God that permits the agency of the Holy Spirit within the created world. Like Bevan and Freeman, Cupitt reads Mansel as a kind of pragmatist, and yet it is not clear that Mansel’s view of God as represented by the whole of Scripture is pragmatic in any way. In fact, in Cupitt’s terms, the “traditional” notion of God is destructive of personal

⁷²⁵ Rowan Williams, “Religious Realism: On Not Quite Agreeing With Don Cupitt,” 230.

⁷²⁶ Don Cupitt, *The Sea of Faith*, 19.

⁷²⁷ Don Cupitt, *The Sea of Faith*, 31.

piety and creates contradictions and insoluble difficulties for individual spiritual experience.

Still Cupitt's work is highly important for illuminating the crisis of faith within which we continue to live. The "self-evidence" that Williams alludes to is not without warrant, and Cupitt's assumption that the Bible has lost all explanatory value and moral credibility is a serious consideration for modern theologians. However, Cupitt's attempt to recast certain aspects of the Christian faith within an alternative metaphysical vision clearly fails to do justice to the integrity of the Scriptures. The Scriptures look utterly lost in Cupitt's world of "solar living" and eternal flux. In some respect Cupitt is an allegory of Mansel's deepest fears, that the Scriptures cannot live long in metaphysical systems that pull apart, reorder and subject the coherence of the Bible to the scrutiny of a higher or lower principle.⁷²⁸ At the very least, Cupitt has the courage of his convictions, and his work illustrates the incongruence of two, maybe more, vying worldviews. Whether as a pragmatist, idealist or some kind of postmodern theologian, the effects of these varying influences for Cupitt continually disrupt and break down the stability of Scripture's witness to God's character and reality in the world. The basic assumption that Cupitt accepts wholesale from a certain strand of Anglican idealism is that the world has moved beyond the point at which the Scriptures in their entirety can refer meaningfully to God.

6.5 Mansel and the Unity of Scripture

Mansel's reputation was solidified early in the 20th century by historians who read him as a foil for the dominant movement of the Spirit in history. Writers like Bevan,

⁷²⁸ In a letter to novelist and devotional writer Elizabeth Sewell where Mansel is providing feedback on her brother William's recent book, he writes, "I cannot pray to the great substance which lies behind the phenomena of the universe. I may just as well pray to the laws of gravitation...on my part prayer implies power but a power who I can influence, a power who can grant my prayer." A letter to Miss Sewell, MS d. 32 (Oxford: Bodleian Library), 1868.

Freeman and Cupitt sensed the Spirit moving in a different direction and found in Mansel an early opponent of certain strands of metaphysical idealism and theological realism. But both of these interpretations of Mansel were agreed that the Scriptures in their entirety could no longer speak convincingly, accurately or reliably about God and the world. The Scriptures, for Bevan, seemed to inhabit a shadowy region somewhere between religious truth and outdated fiction. This was initially true for Cupitt, but he pushed the confusion toward at least one possible outcome: that the Bible does not actually describe a real, supernatural God at all.

But for Mansel the theory of the regulative truth of Scripture was a device to defend the power of the whole Bible to shape and order human life, in the midst of the metaphysical and historical difficulties within Scripture itself. Human reason itself has no vantage point from which to adjudicate the contradictions and complexities of Scripture's witness to God's presence in the world. Thus, Scripture can only be regulatively true if it is free to operate as an indivisible whole. This is Mansel's concluding point in his lectures:

The life of man is one, and the system of Christian faith is one: each part supplying something that another lacks...But we may avail ourselves of that which satisfies our own peculiar needs, only by accepting it as part and parcel of the one indivisible whole.⁷²⁹

For a rhetorical flourish, he uses the image of a tree:

The tree is not then most flourishing, when its branches are lopped, and its trunk peeled, and its whole body cut down to one hard unyielding mass; but when one principle of life pervades it throughout; when the trunk and the branches claim brotherhood and fellowship with the leaf that quivers,

⁷²⁹ Henry Mansel, *The Limits of Religious Thought*, 187.

and the twig that bends to the breeze, and the bark that is delicate and easily wounded and the root that lies lowly and unnoticed in the earth.⁷³⁰

This is the kind of appeal to the diversity of religious experience that Freeman and Cupitt were after, perhaps, but Mansel—without warrant, they would say—encloses this experience within the scriptural world of Christian faith, which “so strangely yet so fully adapts itself” to human experience.⁷³¹

This point concerning Mansel’s work found expression in Gordon Lewis Phillips’ little-known book called *Seeing and Believing* (1957).⁷³² *Seeing and Believing* is a short and somewhat obscure work that is intended as a criticism of modern Anglicanism and its inclination toward the “historian’s” sense of probable faith and mistrust of the Bible. It is in this sense that Phillips turns to Mansel as a long-forgotten figure who argued for a form of Christian faith that embraces the whole of revelation. “There is plenty of room,” Phillips writes, “for ‘spiritual search.’ But not, for a Christian, to find the truth—only to penetrate ever deeper into its reference and meaning.”⁷³³

Mansel’s understanding, Phillips writes, of the act of faith as an acceptance, in total, of scriptural revelation is based upon his understanding of human knowledge and God’s indwelling of human reality: “This means that the knowledge we have of God in this life is not a knowledge of God in his absolute nature but only as he is reflected in the

⁷³⁰ Henry Mansel, *The Limits of Religious Thought*, 186.

⁷³¹ Henry Mansel, *The Limits of Religious Thought*, 186.

⁷³² Gordon Lewis Phillips was, at the time, the rector of Northolt, but, perhaps more notably, he was a student and intimate of Austin Farrer’s. Philip Curtis, *A Hawk Among Sparrows: A Biography of Austin Farrer* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1985). Curtis references Phillips’ own account of conversations between himself and Farrer, 85.

⁷³³ Gordon Lewis Phillips, *Seeing and Believing*, 8.

life of us, his creatures.”⁷³⁴ This reflection within creation marks the essential character of the Scriptures, which cannot be separated into divine or human aspects:

Most valuable of all, his conclusion establishes the essential unity of divine revelation and the utter impossibility of accepting some truths on the basis of their divine authority and rejecting others, when it suits, by appealing to human reason as the ground for their rejection.⁷³⁵

Human reason, in the case of the Bible, is inhabited by God’s intentional presence, and while God is transcendent, He approaches the world from within the created constraints of human life.⁷³⁶

Phillips’ own purposes for endorsing Mansel’s views is bound up with the notion of the regulative truth of Scripture as Mansel explained it. But Phillips uses the more straightforward theological language of holiness and sanctity. Holiness or sanctity, for Phillips, can only be forged in the posture of submissiveness and reception, and this is precisely what Mansel’s theology accomplishes.⁷³⁷ Phillips writes,

We should be alarmed at the absence in our communion of that specific type of Christian living which we call sanctity and we should be uneasy that clash between modern culture and divine revealed truth, has not

⁷³⁴ Gordon Lewis Phillips, *Seeing and Believing*, 61.

⁷³⁵ Gordon Lewis Phillips, *Seeing and Believing*, 63.

⁷³⁶ Phillips understood Mansel’s work as preparatory of Austin Farrer’s theology of scriptural images: “His lectures seem to be an early edition of the more recent Bampton Lectures for the year 1948, *The Glass of Vision*, by Dr. Austin Farrer” (Gordon Lewis Phillips, *Seeing and Believing*, 60). The statement is surprising because Farrer and Mansel have occupied different positions within the history of Anglican theology, and yet the claim is not without warrant. In *The Glass of Vision* Farrer makes arguments that sound highly resonant of Mansel’s account of scriptural language: “the images are supernaturally formed, and supernaturally made intelligible to faith. Faith discerns not the images, but what the images signify: and yet we cannot discern it except through the images.” Austin Farrer, *The Glass of Vision: The Bampton Lectures of 1948* (Westminster: Dacre Press, 1948), 110. Yet as critics have mentioned, there tends to be in Farrer’s understanding of inspiration and providence a deliberate confusion between God’s agency and human creative powers. Brian Hebblethwaite suggests that “Farrer says almost nothing about miracle except these few remarks about the Gospel miracles as exceptions to his general idea of providence, and even here he rejects ideas of violation and reverts to the doctrine of the enhancement of natural powers which appeared in *A Glass of Vision*, where the distinction between providence and miracle was lacking.” Brian Hebblethwaite, “Austin Farrer’s Concept of Divine Providence,” *Theology* 73 (1970): 541-551, 548.

⁷³⁷ Gordon Lewis Phillips, *Seeing and Believing*, 80.

produced in our land and in our tradition that vivid sign of supernatural operation, which we see in France.⁷³⁸

Phillips goes on: “The methods of historic theology lead only to probable certainties. And probable certainty makes no saints.”⁷³⁹ The frequent polemic in his book against “historic theology” is one that Phillips astonishingly never really develops, but it is a clear reference to the contemporary tendency to relativize theological claims within varying traditions, whether within the biblical world or subsequent ecclesial traditions. Furthermore, the “probable certainty” that he pillories is not the probabilism of Butler, Mansel and Newman, for whom the weighing of probabilities demands decision and commitment. Rather, he is referring predominantly to the weakening effect of historical studies on the credibility of the Bible and the traditions of the Church.

Despite its unusual argumentation and at times tendentious presentation, Phillips’ book is surprisingly prescient. For example, much like Stephen Sykes in *The Integrity of Anglicanism*, he questions the assumption that Anglicans have played a mediating role between rival traditions. But he asks, “have Anglicans so mediated from principle? And if so, what is this principle? Is it the principle...that absolute truth is not revealed?”⁷⁴⁰ Such a claim “seems to make nonsense of the Scriptures...For we must pay serious attention to the fact that this generalization of what Anglicans have in fact been found to do, is now itself being offered as a canon of theological truth.”⁷⁴¹ In other words, Phillips grasps hold of Mansel’s concern that a search for a comprehensive theology or metaphysics that can contain a constant questioning of biblical credibility, and that can erase fundamental

⁷³⁸ Gordon Lewis Phillips, *Seeing and Believing*, 78. He refers here to the conversion of “Psichari or a de Foucauld or in a St. Therese.”

⁷³⁹ Gordon Lewis Phillips, *Seeing and Believing*, 78.

⁷⁴⁰ Gordon Lewis Phillips, *Seeing and Believing*, 73.

⁷⁴¹ Gordon Lewis Phillips, *Seeing and Believing*, 73.

theological differences, risks pulling apart the comprehensive totality of the scriptural witness. The cost of such a risk, for Phillips and for Mansel as well, is nothing less than the holiness and sanctity of the Church.

Phillips issues another challenge, which might be well received today: “It is surely time that the dogmatic theologians of our communion plucked up their courage...and stretched out hands in holy alliance to the biblical scholars, their proper allies and who, left to themselves, look so forlorn.”⁷⁴² This plea stems from his belief that Scripture must be received and read as a comprehensive whole that is not intended to be divided and separated along critical or traditional lines. In this respect, Mansel has never had a more sympathetic reader.⁷⁴³ In Phillips, Mansel’s view that the Scriptures provide a comprehensive account of reality and God’s providential engagement with the world receives a very forceful expression. To be sure, since *Seeing and Believing*, very few of Mansel’s readers have taken up this case.

If the goal of idealists like Green and Bradley was to articulate reality as a spiritual whole, they found this holistic framework in a developmental metaphysics that appeared broader and more comprehensive than the biblical account of God’s presence in the world. The *Lux Mundi* writers were not willing to do this, but their demand for a spiritually holistic theology struggled to relate portions of Scripture to the strictures of their progressive scheme. While 20th century writers like Bevan, Freeman and Cupitt did not employ the same idealistic framework, they nevertheless took over the assumption that a truthful account of reality, whether theological or philosophical, cannot be found

⁷⁴² Gordon Lewis Phillips, *Seeing and Believing*, 74.

⁷⁴³ Phillips, for example, perceives no real difference between Mansel and Maurice: they simply argued toward the same end using different methods. Gordon Lewis Phillips, *Seeing and Believing*, 65.

within the entire scriptural account. These writers used the limitations of human thought as a device to not limit their own speculations but rather the writings of the scriptural authors themselves. In Phillips' terms, this kind of "historicism" inhibited the power of Scripture to form Christian lives. For Mansel, these developments obscured the image in which God is known in the world, and because holiness concerns the whole person, the whole breadth of Scripture, and the strange, mysterious and loving God it describes, must be allowed to address itself to the Church.

6.6 Conclusion: Scripture and Contemporary Anglicanism

While Cupitt's philosophy of religion represents a radical departure from mainstream Anglican theology, there can be little doubt that it draws on themes that have been present within 19th and 20th century Anglicanism. For example, the 1922 report *Doctrine in the Church of England* reveals the clear influence of an idealist metaphysics that was prevalent at the time. The section on Scripture talks about the unity of the "whole" Bible but cautions that the "limitations of the human writer and his age distort for us the presentation of this central theme [God's love], as when vindictiveness is attributed to God."⁷⁴⁴ Likewise, the brief statement on Scripture includes the following qualification of prophecy: "We cannot now regard as a principal purpose or evidence of Inspiration the giving of detailed information about the future."⁷⁴⁵ This claim is made in light of "knowledge now at our disposal" and the "progressive self-revelation of God in history" through the Spirit's work within but also without the narrative of Scripture.⁷⁴⁶ The history of the Bible describes "higher conceptions of God supervening upon lower

⁷⁴⁴ *Doctrine in the Church of England: The Report of the Commission on Christian Doctrine Appointed by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York in 1922* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1938), 28.

⁷⁴⁵ *Doctrine in the Church of England*, 29.

⁷⁴⁶ *Doctrine in the Church of England*, 31.

ones, through the continual communion and conflict between the spirit of man and the Spirit of God.”⁷⁴⁷

These types of claims, typical in many ways of *Lux Mundi* and Anglican idealism, flow from a shared assumption with Cupitt: namely, that the historical isolation and limitations of the biblical authors require the reordering and, in some cases, the modification or disposal of certain portions of Scripture. In the case of the report, the Holy Spirit, rather than leading the Church into the truth of Scriptures, leads the Church into the truth almost in spite of the many scriptural irregularities. Obviously Cupitt represents an extreme form of this method, but both *Doctrine in the Church of England* and Cupitt are operating within the same assumption that the witness of the whole Scriptures has been severely weakened by the critical analysis of the Bible. Perhaps more fundamentally, the historical limitations of Scripture provide an escape from the difficult moral and character depiction of God that proved so difficult for Mansel’s contemporaries and has continued to be so into the 21st century.

In the third chapter I discussed Rowan Williams’ suggestion that within Anglicanism there have been two forms of skepticism at work: the first considers the limitations of human thought and dangers of dogmatic closure “because the search for definite boundaries suggests that you might be ‘in possession’ of the territory.” The second form is “generated by Enlightenment suspicion of authority, in which the target of the questioning is the formulae as such and the processes by which they were shaped.”⁷⁴⁸

Williams’ distinction is very useful, and it highlights a feature of Anglicanism that is

⁷⁴⁷ *Doctrine in the Church of England*, 29. Again, such a statement could be taken in a variety of manners. The language is strongly reminiscent of Coleridge: spiritual communion is the essential aspect of the biblical records, and certain portions of the Bible are related more intensely to this central aspect than other.

⁷⁴⁸ Rowan Williams, *Anglican Identities*, 81.

commonly suggested but less commonly understood. Williams speaks about the place of “sanctioned words” but not always knowing “where the boundaries” are within these words. But in order for these words to be available as “territory” to move within, they must be allowed to function beyond the limitations of historical context. To be sure, it is not totally clear if Williams is referring to the words of Scripture or strictly doctrinal formulae. But in either case, there has been a strong tendency in modern Anglicanism to limit the breadth and capacity of certain portions of Scripture for fear of letting the claims of one age speak to another.

There is a way then in which the two skepticisms that Williams speaks about become difficult to distinguish, at least with respect to the reading of Scripture. Clearly Cupitt, while holding on to certain generalized theological notions, no longer believed that the Bible, in its entirety, was capable of speaking to the unprecedented developments of the modern world. This was not true for the writers of *Doctrine in the Church of England* or the *Lux Mundi* theologians, but clearly the limits of human thought became useful as a strategy, not so much for curtailing human speculations but for limiting the claims of certain biblical writers. The fear of theories like verbal inerrancy is obvious in the report and in the writings of many theologians of that era, and yet the alternatives so often suffer from a piecemeal approach to the Bible.⁷⁴⁹ As I have argued through the preceding chapters, certain streamlined theological views—God’s love, spiritual communion—were shaped and formed often with little appeal to the complicated and complex narrative of God’s covenantal relationship with His people.

⁷⁴⁹ *Doctrine in the Church of England*, 11.

Therefore, if a certain kind of skepticism is indeed a virtue within Anglican theology, there appears to be a need for greater clarification of the term's use. Skepticism, of Williams' first variety, is typically paired with a theological and ecclesial vision of comprehensiveness and a reluctance to claim full "possession" of any particular truth. In L. William Countryman's terms, this represents the difficult but profound vocation of Anglicanism, to exist somewhere between the "Pope" and the "Paper Pope."⁷⁵⁰ Yet Stephen Sykes has questioned the coherence of this notion: "Comprehensiveness is, therefore, per se, a radically unclear notion, requiring qualification to give it precision; and it is for this reason that when it is used in Anglican apologetic it has to be used in contexts which make clear both what is comprehended and what is still excluded."⁷⁵¹ In Sykes' terms, if it is indeed Anglicanism's vocation to live within a unique ecclesial position without the customary confessional or authoritative boundaries, some kind of theological account of this position must be given.

Stephen Ross White, in his book *Authority in Anglicanism*, attempts to offer such an account, though it suffers from the same ambivalence toward Scripture that has characterized Mansel's readers. White acknowledges that writers like Cupitt have clearly touched a nerve with many people, and Cupitt's work raises profound questions for Anglicans: "Indeed, if scripture, creed and doctrines are found to be relativistic through and through, then where can such authority any longer be convincingly located?"⁷⁵² White remarks that modern fundamentalism and returns to scriptural inerrancy have been effective in resisting radicalism, though this has never really been an option for

⁷⁵⁰ L. William Countryman, "Anglicanism's Entangled Sense of Authority," in *A Questioning Authority: The Anglican Witness to the World*, ed. Jeremy Morris (London: *Third Millennium* 5, 2002), 4.

⁷⁵¹ Stephen Sykes, *The Integrity of Anglicanism* (London: Mowbrays, 1979), 8.

⁷⁵² Stephen Ross White, *Authority and Anglicanism* (London: SCM Press, 1996), 56.

Anglicans.⁷⁵³ To suddenly revert to a strict scripturalism would upset the delicate balance of Scripture, reason and tradition. White accepts Cupitt's view that all knowledge is relative to time and circumstance, and he also agrees that the biblical notion of a God who acts and intervenes in history is now impossible to accept.⁷⁵⁴ Thus White's own proposal is a radical return to a simplified belief in the person of Jesus freed from the imprisonment of traditional doctrinal formulations:

Such a doctrinal method, if followed, allows Christianity to become infinitely flexible in its response to the world without ever abandoning its basic conviction as to the centrality of Jesus Christ and his place as the locus of God's self revelation to humankind. We are set free from the shackles of rigid doctrinal formulations (which as relativism rightly acknowledges are always cast in the mold and language of a particular age) and allowed to formulate our own more provisional...estimates of how and what we can rightly be said to believe.⁷⁵⁵

White's comments could be interpreted in a variety of manners. What is clear, however, is that once again the limits of human thought and the relativity of all truth claims seem to have more purchase on the past than on the present. This, according to Timothy Gouldstone, has long been one of the pervading themes of Anglican Liberalism, "a radical transformation of the concept of revelation which sees it as a created reality rather than as a reality given from above."⁷⁵⁶ "Given from above" need not imply any specific theory of inspiration, but at the least it must mean that the words and narrative of Scripture are not realities that can be isolated within the relativity of the past without implication for contemporary Christian theology and practice.

⁷⁵³ Stephen Ross White, *Authority and Anglicanism*, 59.

⁷⁵⁴ Stephen Ross White, *Authority and Anglicanism*, 63. White writes, "Can we still believe that God acts in the autocratic and interventionist way which our prayers seem to suggest and to require of him? And if, as I believe, the answer to this question is 'no,' then we are faced with a yawning gap between what we say and what we actually believe."

⁷⁵⁵ Stephen Ross White, *Authority and Anglicanism*, 128.

⁷⁵⁶ Timothy Gouldstone, "Evangelicals and Contemporary Anglican Theology," in *Churchman* 095, no. 2 (1981): 110–122, 119. Gouldstone makes these comments with direct reference to Cupitt.

Sykes does believe that a partial account of Anglican comprehensiveness is possible:

The dispersal of authority in Anglicanism is rooted in the conviction that Christians to whom the Scriptures are read in their own language are able to judge of the essentials of the faith. Because it is a liturgical provision that the Scriptures should be heard, and because the Scriptures are contextualized in worship which seeks at once to evoke the fundamentals and induct the worshipper into the heart of Christian experience.⁷⁵⁷

Sykes here assumes that the Scriptures are a living reality within the life of the Church and that within the breadth of Scripture the “heart of Christian experience” is found and negotiated. Such a position does not beget an obvious clarity on matters of belief and practice, but it does ensure the context in which Christians will discuss and determine these realities. Furthermore, it states that the Scriptures as a whole form this experience.

Sykes’ understanding of the comprehensiveness of Anglicanism coheres with Ephraim Radner’s in an essay entitled “The Scriptural Community: Authority in Anglicanism.” Radner suggest that the conception of a scriptural community allows the Church to remain open to historical realities while remaining under some kind of communal authority.⁷⁵⁸ Indeed this was the vision that Thomas Cranmer set in *The Book of Common Prayer*. Radner writes,

Cranmer is adamantly opposed to viewing Scripture primarily as a source of right doctrine, and therefore as the object of human reasoning and interpretation; rather Scripture is to act as the practical “organizer of life” for the whole people, and its meaning is accessible only to the “virtuous” who submit to the corporate demands of the church’s “body.”⁷⁵⁹

⁷⁵⁷ Stephen Sykes, *The Integrity of Anglicanism*, 99.

⁷⁵⁸ Ephraim Radner, “The Scriptural Community: Authority in Anglicanism,” in *The Fate of Communion: The Agony of Anglicanism and the Future of the Global Church*, ed. Ephraim Radner and Philip Turner (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 90–112, 90.

⁷⁵⁹ Ephraim Radner, “The Scriptural Community,” 103.

Cranmer's intentions in this regard represented

a broad theological argument about the nature of the Christian Church's authoritative witness within a "communion of the scripturally molded" whose contours lay in the practices of a people's common worship and order...and in the virtues of a person's scripturally-infused social relationships ("duties") rather than in the dogmatic integrity of a person's discourse.⁷⁶⁰

Such a reading of Anglican origins might be contested, but it is my argument that Mansel's theology was intended to uphold a vision of the Anglican Church as a scriptural community that is molded by and lives within the language and narrative of Scripture. To the degree that modern forms of skepticism have made such a vision inconceivable, Mansel's limits of thought and theory of regulative truth were intended to create a space in which the Church could find its life within the Scriptures. The fear of Cupitt and others that such a view would sever the connection between Christianity and a changing world only holds if the Bible itself is incapable of describing and encompassing the world as it is currently known. Clearly for Sykes, Radner and, I argue, Mansel, the Scriptures are capable of forming and molding the contemporary Church. Mansel's notion of the practicality of the Bible and the capacity of its language to "expand" around a changing world favored a strong understanding of biblical inspiration without committing the Bible to specific theories of inspiration. Indeed, the foil of verbal inerrancy seemed to have obscured this possible understanding of Anglicanism's ecclesial identity for writers like Cupitt, Bevan and White. Yet it seems that a programmatic skeptical and relativistic approach to the Bible in modern Anglicanism has had an alienating effect between the modern Church and the Scriptures in which its life is to be found. One of the most grave consequences is that modern Christianity in general has been given over to historical

⁷⁶⁰ Ephraim Radner, "The Scriptural Community," 105.

narratives like that of Cupitt's and its more mainstream variants, wherein the development of the world has begun to outstrip the history in which God has formed and shaped His people.

Conclusion

In the preceding chapters I argued that Mansel's theological skepticism and theory of regulative truth have been rarely understood and summarily dismissed as counterproductive to his actual purposes. Yet, this dissertation has maintained that Mansel deserves to be read today not as a Kantian philosopher, or as the father of English Agnosticism, but as an orthodox theologian who engaged the place of Scripture and its role in the Church. Mansel's theology should be remembered today not as a half-way house between belief and unbelief, but as a robust account of how traditional and Scriptural Christian faith can flourish in an increasingly hostile context. The Philosophy of Herbert Spencer and the later theology of Don Cupitt stand within a stream of English thought that Mansel resisted at every turn. Though the contemporary image of Mansel has been branded by his association with these two figures, it is time to acknowledge the real context in which Mansel made his arguments and the particular claims which he made concerning the Bible. By way of conclusion I will offer a discussion of Mansel's place among a few contemporary Anglican theologians in order to briefly suggest a manner in which his thought might be applicable today.

The recent surge of interest in typological or figural reading of the Bible has served to once again highlight the question of metaphysics and ontology in relation to theology and the Scriptures. If the historical-critical tendency to focus upon the text itself and the historical context from which it emerged has not rendered satisfactory results for many contemporary theologians, what reality within or behind the text enables a typological reading of the Bible? A Catholic theologian, Matthew Levering, has argued persuasively that Christian exegesis "will need a theological-metaphysical (sapiential)

stance critically adequate to the theological and metaphysical realities whose active historical presence the Bible depicts.”⁷⁶¹ Whatever the details of this stance, Levering suggests that “such typological exegesis cannot stand on its own” but requires the magisterium of the Church to gauge and assess the various performances of these readings.⁷⁶² Of course, such appeals to the Church’s magisterial authority are not quite so straightforward for Anglican theologians. Though, if the entire Scriptures are to continue in their role as a practical organizer of the Anglican Church’s common life—or the common life of any Christian Church—the question of what holds the Scriptures together and allows them to describe and shape our current existence remains as pressing as ever.⁷⁶³

Mansel’s theology today may be most relevant in its ability to test and examine theological systems which seek a grounding in Scripture but explore that larger philosophical context in which Scripture is rooted. I have argued throughout that Mansel’s skepticism was a method designed to allow the full range of Scriptural ‘facts’, language and imagery to stand out against the, at times, obscuring effects of philosophical or theological systems. He schematized these effects through the concepts of Dogmatism and Rationalism, not concepts represented by moods or argumentative tenor, but by an actual method of intellectual engagement with theological realities. For example, he writes:

The one [Dogmatism] seeks to build up a complete scheme of theological doctrine out of the unsystematic materials furnished by Scripture, partly by the more complete development of certain leading ideas... The other

⁷⁶¹ Matthew Levering, “Participation and Exegesis: Response to Catherine Pickstock”, *Modern Theology* 21, no.4 (October 2005), 587-601, 598.

⁷⁶² Matthew Levering, “Readings on the Rock: Typological Exegesis in Contemporary Scholarship,” *Modern Theology* 28, no. 4 (October 2012), 707-731, 727.

⁷⁶³ See chapter 5 of this dissertation, 48–50, for a discussion of Scripture’s role in historic Anglicanism.

[Rationalism] aims at the same end by opposite means. It strives to attain to unity and completeness of system, not by filling up supposed deficiencies, but by paring down supposed excrescences.⁷⁶⁴

It was not so much, as some contemporaries feared, that Mansel disliked the actual discipline of theology, but rather that all theological reasoning must continually adjust to the contours of Scripture, which “supplies him [the theologian] with facts to which his system has to adapt itself.”⁷⁶⁵ These facts, Mansel argued, reveal one God that is received in faith through the medium of an “incomplete system”, the missing portions of which cannot simply be supplied through our reasoning.⁷⁶⁶

Kant’s application of certain moral standards to the character of God—a common move, as I have argued, throughout the 19th century—provided Mansel with an easy example of Rationalism at work in theology.⁷⁶⁷ However, Dogmatists were perhaps more difficult to locate, in part because the definition Mansel provides admits a certain level of ambivalence: at what point does theological writing begin the process of filling out an incomplete system?⁷⁶⁸ This question becomes even more vexed when these so called Dogmatists make use of a wide range of Scriptural reference to build up their systems. While Mansel defended criticisms of the sacrificial or penal aspects of the Atonement, he

⁷⁶⁴ Mansel, *Limits of Religious Thought*, 4,5. Mansel rejects the one possible meaning of Dogmatism: “I do not include under the name of Dogmatism the mere enunciation of religious truths, as resting upon authority and not upon reasoning...”, 2.

⁷⁶⁵ Mansel, *Limits of Religious Thought*, 3.

⁷⁶⁶ Henry Mansel, *Limits of Religious Thought*, 6.

⁷⁶⁷ My introduction looks at Mansel’s criticism of Kant more closely. Mansel’s greatest criticism of Kant was that his philosophical system reduced prayer to a therapeutic activity that had no communicative relation to a real, personal God who can listen and respond. *Limits of Religious Thought*, 15.

⁷⁶⁸ Mansel provides the example of Samuel Wilberforce’s *Doctrine of the Incarnation*. Wilberforce argues that Christ assumed an abstract humanity in the Incarnation not a “new person” but a “substratum, in which personality has its existence.” Mansel’s response is that this theory “requires a realist theory of the nature of universal notions.” But surely, he argues, such a theory should be necessary for belief in the reality of the Incarnation. Henry Mansel, *Limits of Religious Thought*, 9,10.

was nervous about Atonement accounts that were rooted in some kind of logical or theological necessity.⁷⁶⁹

Thus, for Mansel there is a danger of saying too little or saying too much about the character of God: “Throughout every page of Scripture, God reveals himself,”⁷⁷⁰ and the needs of any theological system need to be assiduous in allowing and illuminating the manner in which Scripture does this. Mansel’s deeper concern was not just exegetical: if God truly reveals himself and is apprehended on “every page of Scripture” then the frameworks or systems that we bring to the Scriptures needs to be flexible and spacious enough to adjust to “the many colored rays into which God’s presence is refracted in its passage into the human soul.”⁷⁷¹ Inversely, the incomplete character of Scripture—its many colored rays—implied a scheme of salvation that was broad enough to include and expand around the endless peculiarities of created life without surrendering its unity. Scripture’s breadth, for Mansel, was a function of its Divine inspiration, which relays wisdom, knowledge and events in human terms, but not derivable from any independent human source. Rationalism and Dogmatism, while trying to create a wider, more comprehensive system, in fact narrowed the scope of Scripture by attempting to dull or smooth over the edges of a language that was chosen as the most appropriate manner in which to speak of God.

It is interesting then, to read the contemporary Anglican theologian John Milbank in light of Mansel’s criticism of Dogmatism in theology. Milbank’s theology is an

⁷⁶⁹ Mansel quotes Butler in this regard, who cannot rule out the question of “whether God could have saved the world by other means than the death of Christ.” In this way, as I have argued earlier, Mansel made arguments, much like Athanasius and other Church fathers, about the fittingness of God’s actions in Christ, even if they were not necessitated by some internal or external factor in God’s character. Henry Mansel, *Limits of Religious Thought*, 194.

⁷⁷⁰ Henry Mansel, *Limits of Religious Thought*, 14.

⁷⁷¹ Henry Mansel, *Limits of Religious Thought*, 6.

interesting example not only because of its powerful influence in contemporary theology but also because of its stated ambition to unite all reality within a theological perspective. His critique of modern liberalism and its genealogical roots in the medieval theology of Duns Scotus, while not entirely original to Milbank, has still provoked deep resonances and profound criticisms amongst his readers. Radical Orthodoxy in general, the movement Milbank has championed, has been influenced by Cupitt's non-realism and the challenges it presents for modern theology.⁷⁷² Milbank's ontological claims can be read as a response and counter to Cupitt's skeptical and non-realist theological positions. However, like Cupitt's, one of the most common criticisms of Milbank's theology has been that his ontological arguments have been used as a wide brush to paint sweeping judgments over the historical genesis of modernity and over the Scriptures themselves.⁷⁷³

But it is not the case the Milbank is unconcerned with Scripture. For example, in *Theology and Social Theory* Milbank is sympathetic to the narrative concerns of theologians like Lindbeck and Frei: "George Lindbeck and Hans Frei have been quite right to call us back to narrative as being that alone which can 'identify' God for us."⁷⁷⁴ However, Milbank goes on to say, "But more attention must be paid to the structural complexity of narrative, and especially the way it has to assume a never fully representable synchronic setting, which means that it always in a fashion anticipates the

⁷⁷² Catherine Pickstock, "Theology and Post-modernity: An Exploration of the Origins of a New Alliance", *New Directions*, 67.

⁷⁷³ Benjamin Sargent, "John Milbank and Hermeneutics: The End of the Historical Critical Method?" *Heythrop Journal* LIII (2012), 253. Sargent criticizes Milbank's treatment of two biblical texts—Colossians 1:24 and 2 Corinthians 1:3–12—and his argument that the Church participates in a "continuing atonement." Sargent suggests that Milbank oversteps bounds of the text and ignores the historical-critical scholarship on the topic (258).

⁷⁷⁴ John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell Pub., 2006), 387.

speculative task of ontology and theology.”⁷⁷⁵ While Lindbeck argues that the narrative of Scripture is ruled by a Christological focus, Milbank argues that Lindbeck’s focus upon the narrative of Scripture lifts the actual stories out of their historical setting as they become a speculative norm that is applied to varying historical moments.⁷⁷⁶

This does seem to be an accurate depiction of Lindbeck’s view. In *The Nature of Doctrine* he writes, “it is the religion instantiated in Scripture which defines being, truth, goodness and beauty, and the nonscriptural exemplifications of these realities need to be transformed into figures of the scriptural ones.”⁷⁷⁷ Lindbeck’s worry about the ontological status of doctrinal statements is, in part, that they lack the first order versatility of scriptural images: “If...the doctrine is a proposition with ontological reference, only one type of theory has a chance of being true.”⁷⁷⁸ Thus, in a similar manner to Mansel, and even Butler, Lindbeck argues that the Scriptures form a framework within which people “live their lives and understand reality.”⁷⁷⁹

However, it is this precise aspect of Lindbeck’s thought that Milbank wants to distance himself from, in some respects, because he does not seem to believe that the Scriptures can perform that function. Though Milbank at least agrees with Lindbeck and Frei on the narrative character of theological truth, the narrative he has in mind is perhaps something larger: “The metanarrative is not just the story of Jesus, it is the continuing story of the Church, already realized in a finally exemplary way by Christ, yet still to be

⁷⁷⁵ John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 387.

⁷⁷⁶ Milbank writes: “Thus Christians are seen as living within certain fixed narratives which function as *schemas*, which can organize endlessly different cultural contents,” John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 388.

⁷⁷⁷ George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 118.

⁷⁷⁸ George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 106.

⁷⁷⁹ George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 117.

realized universally, in harmony with Christ, and yet differently, by all generations of Christians.”⁷⁸⁰ This statement alone is not alarming, but the implications of this “metanarrative” begin to accumulate some familiar concerns: “It is, in fact, at the point where the metanarrative requires a speculative ontology to support its meta-status, that Christian counter-history is revealed as also a ‘Christian sociology.’”⁷⁸¹

It is within this speculative ontology that Milbank’s moral concerns about violence come into view as a controlling idea in his theology. The stories of the Bible serve this larger vision in an aesthetic fashion that makes concrete and persuasive the ontological priority of peace: “We need the stories of Jesus for salvation, rather than just a speculative notion of the Good, because only the attraction exercised by a particular set of words and images causes us to acknowledge the Good and to have an idea of the ultimate telos.”⁷⁸² Within this “ultimate telos,” rooted in an ontology of peace, Milbank states that punishment and judgment have no real theological reality:

For every time we punish, or utter a judgment against someone held in our power, we deny that person’s freedom and spiritual equality: she does not have equal rights to speak about or act against our sins. This stance of judgment and punishment is never occupied by God, because he pronounces no sentences that we do not pronounce against ourselves.⁷⁸³

What exactly this statement means with respect to biblical interpretation is not necessarily clear for Milbank. For example, is it scripturally possible to speak of a God who does not pronounce and enact judgment and punishment? Of course, this not quite what Milbank is saying: *Theology and Social Theory* concludes with the affirmation that

⁷⁸⁰ John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 389.

⁷⁸¹ John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 390.

⁷⁸² John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 401. Milbank goes on: “Without attachment to a particular persuasion—which we can never prove to be either true, or non-violent—we would have no real means to discriminate peace and truth from their opposites.”

⁷⁸³ John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 427.

God has judged, once and for all, the violence of secular reason that has worked destructively inside and outside the Church.⁷⁸⁴ But there remains at least some question about the scriptural character of the God who makes this judgment. For example, the Church's "break with Judaism" forms part of its political critique of violence.⁷⁸⁵

Hans Boersma has criticized Milbank's seeming rejection of God's use of redemptive violence but has also pointed to Milbank's more recent adjustments.⁷⁸⁶ Certainly in *Being Reconciled* Milbank takes a more complicated stance on the question of violence and pacifism, but it is also in this work that some of his philosophical assumptions come to bear, perhaps awkwardly, on the central theological question of atonement.⁷⁸⁷ It is not so much that Milbank's account of forgiveness and Christ's atonement falls outside of some kind of orthodox limits, but more that it receives a rather narrow scriptural profile. For example, Milbank speaks of forgiveness in contrast to the position of Duns Scotus:

Once more, Scotus's ontic conception of God makes him think of divine initiative and human response as external to each other, in such a way that our merit becomes too much ours, or at any rate something that does not of itself return to God, but rather something which God may or may not graciously receive. One consequence of this loss of a sense of participation is therefore a loss also of a sense of exchange between infinite and finite.

⁷⁸⁴ John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 442.

⁷⁸⁵ Hans Boersma has highlighted this aspect of Milbank's thought and questioned his resistance to the idea of redemptive violence, which appears so nakedly in the pages of Scripture. Yet for Boersma it is not Milbank's ontology of peace that is the problem: "Recognition of the need for pedagogic or redemptive coercion and violence does not at all require Milbank to abandon his participationist ontology of peace—divine violence, after all, does not have primacy but is used in the interest of eschatological absolute peace." Hans Boersma, "Being Reconciled: Atonement as the Ecclesio-Christological Practice of Forgiveness in John Milbank" *Radical Orthodoxy and the Reformed Tradition: Creation, Covenant and Participation*, Edited by James K. Smith and James Olthius, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 202. Maybe it is true that Milbank could simply absorb the notion of redemptive violence into his ontology of peace, but such an inclusion would surely require some alterations to his larger commitments.

⁷⁸⁶ Hans Boersma, "Being Reconciled," 199.

⁷⁸⁷ John Milbank, *Being Reconciled*, 40.

Milbank understands Christ's death on the cross as an instantiation of an infinite divine gift exchange, a circulating process that knows no beginning or end:

Christ's earthly self-giving death is but a shadow of the true eternal peaceful process in the heavenly tabernacle, and redemption consists in Christ's transition from shadow to reality—which is also, mysteriously, his “return” to cosmic omnipresence and irradiating of the shadows.⁷⁸⁸

At every opportunity Milbank qualifies and downplays the sacrificial language that surrounds the scriptural representation of Christ's death in favor of his all-embracing theological vision:

Hence the divine answer to the original human refusal of his gift is not to demand sacrifice—of which he has no need—but to go on giving in and through our refusals of the gift, to the point where these refusals are overcome. Christ's abandonment offers no compensation to God, but when we most abandon the divine donation it surpasses itself, and appears more than ever, raising us up into the eternal gift-exchange of the Trinity.⁷⁸⁹

One could argue that Milbank's theology of atonement expands into an almost impersonal process of eternal gift exchange that receives concrete and finite reality in the life of Christ.⁷⁹⁰ But I do not think Milbank intends to remove the personal and relational aspect of forgiveness that is so characteristic of Christian piety.

However, in Mansel's terms, it does seem that Milbank's moral and speculative concerns place the scriptural depiction of God's character in a difficult position. Milbank himself admits that an ontology of peace and the ontological participation in that reality is a speculative idea that cannot be demonstrated.⁷⁹¹ Yet despite the contingent nature of the claim, Milbank states that this “Catholic vision of ontological peace now provides the

⁷⁸⁸ John Milbank, *Being Reconciled*, 100.

⁷⁸⁹ John Milbank, *Being Reconciled*, 100.

⁷⁹⁰ John Milbank, *Being Reconciled*, 196.

⁷⁹¹ John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 440.

only alternative to a nihilistic outlook.”⁷⁹² Of course, all Christian claims stand within this paradoxical scenario of being indemonstrable but to those who hold them, necessary and morally compelling. However, in Lindbeck’s terms, the ontological status of Milbank’s claims make it such that “only one type of theory has a chance of being true,” and it is for this reason that Milbank’s theology has provoked such wide criticism.⁷⁹³

Perhaps the greater issue though is that Milbank’s all-embracing theory and morally driven concerns—admirable in their own way—render portions of the Bible nearly unavailable for the sort of figural application that Lindbeck describes. Indeed, this was Mansel’s precise concern about theological speculative knowledge, of “Dogmatism”: that unprovable speculative claims would be used to adjust, improve or criticize the scriptural depiction of God. Mansel criticized Maurice for allowing speculation about the nature of God’s eternal life to control his reading of Scripture. Such a criticism can be made of Milbank as well, even if these speculative ideas arise in some sense from the Scriptures themselves. For Mansel, our theological ideas—speculations, perhaps—required the qualification and adjustment of the whole range of biblical material.⁷⁹⁴

⁷⁹² John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 442.

⁷⁹³ Cupitt himself has argued that radical orthodoxy is just another extension of his non-realist position in that it offers no arguments for the worldview it advances; rather, Milbank, Pickstock, Loughlin simply narrate “God into being” in a thoroughly skeptical postmodern fashion. In this sense, Milbank’s and Cupitt’s respective theological visions stand as competitive “alternatives” to what Milbank calls modern nihilism. Don Cupitt, “My Postmodern Witch,” in *Modern Believing* 39, no. 4 (Oct. 1, 1998): 9. Cupitt goes on to claim, “They have made the required noises; but they have not delivered clear arguments for the realism they seem to profess. They are indeed a group of my own former pupils, and they are perhaps all of them teaching a version of ‘active non realism.’”

⁷⁹⁴ In Mansel’s lectures on Gnosticism one almost expects his section on Clement of Alexandria to be critical with respect to the speculative character of Clement’s theology. But on the contrary, though aspects of Clement’s style may not have been to Mansel’s taste, he speaks glowingly of Clement’s overall method: “Yet, however highly Clement may rate the knowledge which he attributes to his true Gnostic, several features are worthy of notice by which it is distinguished from that knowledge claimed for themselves by the Gnostic heretics. First, it is not a special gift of nature, but a habit painfully acquired by preparation and discipline. Secondly, it is not a mere apprehension of speculative theories, but a practical principle, embracing action and love. Thirdly, it is founded on faith; the matter and substance of its doctrine is that

But for Mansel, it was not just correct exegetical methods that were at stake but the actual capacity of his generation to be able to recognize its Lord in the only source that revealed Him. This ability, Mansel perceived, had everything to do with the perception of the actual character of the Biblical God and his activity in the world. Milbank's desire to describe the world in all embracing theological terms, from a Christian perspective, is admirable. But there is a way in which Milbank's ontology takes over Scriptures role in doing this. While Milbank's theological ontology offers a strong alternative to Cupitt's assertion that we can no longer believe in the metaphysical reality of God, Milbank does less to counter Cupitt's equally unsettling conviction that the Scriptures have lost their capacity to describe the modern world. This was the simple intention of Mansel's theory of regulative truth, but it is possible that his theory brought the language of Scripture too close with its, at times, frightening, threatening and perplexing revelation of God's character. His commentary on Matthew and his sermons made a modest attempt toward providing an internally coherent and consistent portrayal of God's activity in the world, read through the lens of Jesus Christ. But his skepticism, for which he was better known, did at times leave the loose ends and seeming contradictions of the Bible adrift outside the limitations of religious knowledge. To this extent, Mansel saw his own work as preparatory for the greater task of interpreting the Bible from within its own structures, themes and particularities in order to render the Scriptures alive, unified and available to order the Church's life. In many ways, this is a task that remains very much alive and contested today.

which is revealed through Christ; its pre-eminence consists in the manner and certainty of its apprehension, not in any new and distinct teaching. Fourthly, it is a knowledge imparted as far as is possible, possessed in this life according to man's capacity to receive it; and the limits of that capacity Clement has pointed out in several remarkable passages." Henry Mansel, "The Gnostic Heresies," 271.

The recent book *Divine Evil? The Moral Character of the God of Abraham* contains a series of essays and responses that emerged from a 2009 conference at Notre Dame. Many of these essays bear the now classic objections, so current in Mansel's era, to the moral character of God depicted in portions of the Bible, in particular the invasion of Canaan.⁷⁹⁵ Concerning these objections, Christopher Seitz writes in his essay "Canon and Conquest",

In the words of Paul, to the degree that God can be grasped in his mystery as God at all, it will be in his severity and mercy equally. As with Paul, this grasping of God, or being grasped by God, takes place inside a struggle to understand the totality of his dealings with humanity—the long story—for which Paul in Romans 11 supplies the conclusion: 'behold the mercy and the severity of God' (11: 22). Mercy and severity both, for only as related, inseparable, can they convey the truth of the mystery of God's imperative manifestations with us—what the classical tradition called God's economic life revealed through the totality of scripture.⁷⁹⁶

God's justice, for Seitz, is revealed in His mercy and severity, a claim that emerges from within the heart of the New Testament gospel account and is attested to throughout innumerable scriptural passages. Even more, God is grasped, or we are grasped by God, from within this contrast, which is a mystery, Seitz claims, but a mystery that receives its logic from the entire scriptural canon: "Goodness is understood from within the context

⁷⁹⁵ Nicholas Wolterstorff's essay is among them, though he interestingly notes that "The problem is not that we have absorbed modern enlightened views about ethical and theological matters and are, as such, morally offended by the picture of genocidal slaughter in Israel's... Our problem is rather that we have been formed in our understanding of God by the biblical acclamations of God as just and loving and shaped in our ethical thinking by God's command to do justice and love mercy." Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Reading Joshua," in *Divine Evil? The Moral Character of the God of Abraham*, eds. Michael Bergmann, Michael J. Murray, and Michael C. Rea (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 236. The point is well taken, though one might still respond that the "modern enlightened" seems unable to cope with potentially contrasting statements about the nature of God's character. Or more to the point, as Christopher Seitz argues in the same volume, the Bible itself contains answers to these concerns, however palatable they may be to various readers.

⁷⁹⁶ Christopher Seitz, "Canon and Conquest," 293.

of a life lived in relationship, and not by an external grid, when the OT reflects on how goodness might be measured.”⁷⁹⁷

In one sense, Seitz is making, in his own words, a “low flying” claim about the simple literary character of the Bible: “By its very form, the canon assists in making sense of how serial statements about God’s life in relationship to Israel are to cohere.”⁷⁹⁸

Gary Anderson’s essay “What About the Canaanites?” provides an excellent demonstration of this conviction. He argues from within the text that God was in fact dealing justly with the Canaanites by allowing them 400 years to amend their ways. Furthermore, Abraham himself made every effort to obtain the land fairly and equitably.⁷⁹⁹ Therefore, in Anderson’s words, the text itself “does not award a land to Israel in a manner that immorally voids all previous claims.”⁸⁰⁰ Maybe Mansel’s appeal to a “moral miracle” is not necessary if the text itself is careful enough to attend to this difficulty. However, the hard fact of Israel’s injunction to destroy the whole people of Canaan still remains, and in Mansel’s eyes, the truth of such an action remains hidden in the mystery of God’s mercy and judgment.

Thus in another sense, the deeper implications of Seitz’s argument seem to suggest that God is encountered most truthfully amidst the contrasts of Scripture’s portrayal. While accounts of human knowledge—its limitations, range and capacity—will no doubt vary in detail, at some point, if the Scripture’s canonical unity is allowed to emerge, the image of God that is presented must simply be accepted as a truthful account

⁷⁹⁷ Christopher Seitz, “Canon and Conquest,” 308.

⁷⁹⁸ Christopher Seitz, “Canon and Conquest,” 315.

⁷⁹⁹ Gary Anderson, “What about the Canaanites?” in *Divine Evil? The Moral Character of the God of Abraham* 282.

⁸⁰⁰ Gary Anderson, “What about the Canaanites?” 282.

of his character.⁸⁰¹ For Milbank, it is not so much that the reciprocal and peaceful exchange of the Trinitarian persons is unfaithful to this account, but the risk is that the full range of scriptural imagery that gives rise to this reality is no longer needed to adjust and calibrate the particular moments of the Church's life. The Church, for Milbank, lives within a new narrative that makes a formal break with the history of Israel even as it takes its departure from the Gospel records of Jesus' ministry. This break with Israel is motivated, at least in part, by the Church's renewed vocation to provide a moral counter-ontology to the secular ontology of violence. But the risk of this counter-ontology is that the character of God, revealed in the Scriptures, becomes increasingly difficult to grasp throughout the whole range of the biblical canon.

Milbank's genealogy of modernity is one of many similar but varying theological accounts of the modern world and the problems of secularism and unbelief.⁸⁰² In Mansel's time he was confronting a different narrative of moral and metaphysical progressivism represented by varying strands of Idealism. Mansel's concern was that the all-embracing frameworks of Idealism, even in its most theological variants, placed the world in the hands of a power that no longer resembled the God of Scripture. In fact, as the power of these frameworks expanded the Scriptural portrayal of God became increasingly problematic. Contemporary narratives of modernity tend to be devolutionary—they describe the fragmentation or the downfall of a world that once seemed more solidly Christian. Milbank's is now perhaps the best known of these narratives, but in Mansel's terms, it can be argued that Milbank's participatory ontology

⁸⁰¹ Christopher Seitz, "Canon and Conquest," 293. Seitz writes, "The character of God is inextricably connected with the character of Christian Scripture as a twofold witness."

⁸⁰² In chapter 3 I discuss Peter Harrison and William Abraham as two figures who offer comparable accounts of modern secularism.

of peace functions in a ‘Dogmatic’ sense to the degree that it fills up the missing portions of an incomplete system of revelation. It is not so much that an ontology of participation inherently misrepresents the Biblical narrative; rather, the demands of the system and Milbank’s account of its gradual eclipse describe a process that appears almost providentially implausible in Scriptural terms. Seitz’s argument that God is grasped in his mercy and severity throughout the range of Scriptural material, means that the degree to which the Church apprehends the presence of God in history must somehow be found within this contrast.

This dissertation began with an interest toward the nature of unbelief in Victorian England and in the Church of England in particular. Mansel, like many others, addressed himself to this concern and attempted to describe the Scriptures as a reality in which the Church continues to live and find its life and vocation. I have not addressed the origins of unbelief in this period or provided a genealogy of the pressures on traditional Christian faith that emerged in England. Instead I offered an account of Mansel’s response, and I explored this response in contrast to the expressions of these pressures as they reached clarity in the works of various philosophers and theologians. In addition, I argued that Mansel’s understanding of the knowledge of God in the Bible represented a fairly basic and traditional position within the Anglican theological tradition and the wider tradition of Catholic theology—even Mill acknowledged this to be true. What made Mansel’s position novel, perhaps, was that he tried to situate the conviction that God is revealed in the Scriptures within the philosophical idealistic framework of his own day. To this end, the particulars of Mansel’s skeptical epistemology may not be entirely relevant today—Seitz and Anderson clearly have no need of it to make their claims—but some framework

needs to be in place to profile the risk of allowing speculative theological or philosophical programs to control or dull the full range of scriptural testimony concerning the character of the Christian God.

Mansel's more positive vision was that the world lives within the scriptural narrative, as the images of types of the Bible have the power to expand around a changing world without altering their revelatory character. This conviction was rooted in the theological notion that God continues to live and dwell within the created world in a manner that is consistent and graspable in scriptural terms ordered around the person of Christ. The degree to which this idea was misunderstood, ignored or dismissed has had tragic consequences in the Church of England. This may seem like a gross exaggeration, but it is clear that Mansel's lectures were read by nearly everyone we now consider notable in the period's ecclesial life. The explicit rejection of Mansel's theology by so many leading figures in the Church of England, I argued, has provided a lens into the secularizing forces that increasingly overwhelmed England's intellectual life. At the heart of these forces was unease about the character of God revealed in the Bible and providentially present in the Church's life throughout history. Mansel might have done more to alleviate his critics' concerns—his distinction between regulative and speculative knowledge continually provoked distrust—but on the whole it was his insistence that God is and continues to be just like what the whole Bible describes that provoked the most visceral rejections.

Mansel's limitations as a theologian are fairly obvious. But his basic conviction that the Church continues to live within the narrative of the entire Bible is one that can be, and is being, explored in more concretely theological and biblical terms. The brief

essays of Anderson and Seitz that I referred to are examples of Mansel's conviction that the Bible represents a unified witness, the coherence of which is at times obvious and at other times needs to be established, sought out and built up. In addition, the questions about a Christian metaphysics or ontology will continue to circulate as the Church situates its convictions in a changing world. Mansel's personalism was as close as he came to an ontological worldview, but helpful as this was for his purposes, it will probably not do justice to contemporary ecclesial and societal concerns. In this way, a scriptural ontology or metaphysics might be necessary or helpful in rooting and establishing the coherence and unity of the biblical witness. But whatever form these accounts take, Mansel's rule, that our conceptual schemes must not stifle the difficulties, complexities and unity of the biblical account, I believe remains in full force.

I agree with Rowan Williams' argument that a certain kind of skepticism has been a virtue in Anglican theology, only I question whether Westcott is a compelling example of this virtue. What Mansel offers the contemporary Church is a way of configuring this skepticism so that it applies equally to the present, the future and the past. Inasmuch as skepticism has been a feature of Anglican theology, so has the desire for a comprehensive theological vision that can incorporate and explain the historical moment of any given age in which the Church lives. But as I argued, this desire has too often employed skeptical arguments to distance the entire scriptural witness from contemporary reality, instead of rendering this witness as a means to describe the Church's location within a changing world. Mansel was not over-committed on the theological sore spots of his era: penal substitution, predestination or eternal damnation.⁸⁰³ But nor was he willing to deny

⁸⁰³ Henry Mansel, *Limits of Religious Thought*, 152.

that the Scriptures, at times, spoke in these terms. Theological skepticism, properly configured, requires that the Church must make sense of these realities along with the whole range of canonical writings for the simple reason that, somehow, they describe the character and activity of God. Whether this represents an exceedingly narrow vision of the world, as Mansel's critics claimed, or a vision that is broad enough to relate and incorporate the vast array of human experience at any moment, as Mansel claimed, is a question that may indeed be undecidable. I argue that the skeptical and comprehensive trajectories of Anglican theology can indeed coalesce if the Scriptures are allowed to form the providential pattern in which the Church encounters a changing but God-created world.

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