Kant’s *Religion* as a Response to the Pantheism Controversy: Between Mendelssohn and Jacobi

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Abstract: This paper places Kant's *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason* within the historical context of the pantheism controversy between Mendelssohn and Jacobi. I argue that reading *Religion* with this context in mind shines new light upon passages connected with the need for a moral archetype and prototype in the form of Christ, as well as various comments upon the relation between Christianity and Judaism. Within this new viewpoint, we can also see *Religion* as ultimately concerned as promoting a Christianity, broadly understood, as the most appropriate historical vehicle for the promulgation of rational religion, and thus as a cornerstone of the Enlightenment project.

Keywords: Kant, Mendelssohn, Jacobi, Christianity, Judaism, Christ, Pantheism

The question of how Kant’s *Religion* stands with regard to the Christian tradition is very much an open one for interpreters. How we see the *Religion* in this regard will depend upon many factors, including very broad assumptions concerning the aims and methods of the Critical philosophy. It is well-known that Kant intended to “deny knowledge in order to make room for faith,”[[1]](#endnote-1) but the import of this famous statement is not clear. One pertinent interpretive question concerns the kind of faith that Kant is trying to make room for with his Critical philosophy. There are a number of options here, including faith in: 1) the thing-in-itself,[[2]](#endnote-2) 2) the Pietist Christianity of Kant’s youth, 2) a less specific form of Christianity (perhaps a kind of broad Lutheranism), 3) a deism that does away with commitment to a personal God, 4) a kind of rational religion that emphasises the importance of morality, and involves some kind of realist commitment to God and immortality, and 5) another kind of rational religion that again prioritises morality, but does not involve any kind of supernatural realist commitment in having a strict agnosticism about such questions. In case the reader may need persuading, it does matter how Kant would position himself with regard to the kind of faith that is fundamental to the Critical philosophy. The vibrant German theological tradition played a large part in Kant’s academic life, and how he sees his position with regard to that tradition will have a fundamental impact upon what he was trying to achieve with the Critical philosophy, and therefore how we read the salient texts. All this holds true for the *Religion*, a work which continues to provoke great interest today, not in the least with regard to the question of what Kant is trying to achieve in this text.

The mystery begins with the title of the work: *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason*. On the basis of the title alone, you might expect that Kant will be concerned with merely explicating the notion of purely rational religion, perhaps as part of the radical project of replacing historic religious traditions with a new kind of religion established on purely rational grounds (with anything not explicable by reason rejected as nonsensical and worthless speculation). However, Kant’s comments in the Preface to the Second Edition of *Religion* soon complicate this picture. He begins by distinguishing between two spheres, one of which contains the other: the inner circle, which is the proper domain of the philosopher, comprises a “pure *religion of reason,*”[[3]](#endnote-3) whilst the outer circle contains all purported revelation, including all historical systems of religion. Kant then describes his project in the *Religion* as “to start from some alleged revelation or other and, abstracting from the pure religion of reason (so far as it constitutes a system on its own), to hold fragments of this revelation, as a *historical system*, up to moral concepts, and see whether it does not lead back to the same pure *rational system* of religion.”[[4]](#endnote-4) The role that Kant sets for himself is from the standpoint of rational religion, examining and evaluating historical religious traditions with regard to what has already been established within the bounds of reason, with a view to judging how the historical religion measures up to its rational counterpart. If a given revelation, as part of an historical system of religion, ultimately leads to the same claims as made by rational religion, then the historical system in question can be regarded as a legitimate historical springboard for rational religion to take hold in society.

So, briefly stated, *Religion* is a text concerned with part of the social project of the Enlightenment (shared with numerous thinkers, including Lessing and Mendelssohn), namely, the establishment and proliferation of rational religion in society. The specific question that Kant sets for himself to answer in the work concerns which historical religious traditions, if any, are most suitable to act as foundations out of which this project can grow. It is recognised that rational religion is not going to be established from nothing; rather, some sort of already existing Church is required, from which the transition to a properly rational religion can begin to be effected. In addition, Kant holds that some religious traditions will be more appropriate for his project than others, depending on the extent to which the revelation claimed by the tradition in question leads back to rational religion. Clearly, an historical system of religion that already has, in essence, extensive features of rational religion will be more suitable for his project than one that does not. Hence, the experiment undertaken in *Religion* of measuring the outer circle of historical revelation against the inner circle of the rational system of religion will help us identify which historical religious tradition is the most appropriate historical springboard for the transition to a Church of rational religion.

In what follows, I will seek to expand upon this reading of the project of *Religion* by considering it in its historical, intellectual context. The question of the relation between historical and rational religion had, in the years prior to Kant writing *Religion*, been raised in a rather notorious way across Germany in the intellectual controversy between Moses Mendelssohn and Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi over the intellectual inheritance of their shared acquaintance, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing. The novelty of this paper resides in considering *Religion* as a major response to this pantheism controversy that dominated German intellectual lifethroughout the 1880s.

This interpretive approach is, as far as I am aware, distinctive in theliterature. The recent commentaries of *Religion* by James DiCenso[[5]](#endnote-5) and Eddis M. Miller[[6]](#endnote-6) do not mention any of the key players in the pantheism controversy(Lessing, Jacobi or Mendelssohn), Stephen Palmquist[[7]](#endnote-7) does not mention the pantheism controversy*,* whilst Lawrence Pasternack’s commentary only mentionsMendelssohn in passing as a Jewish acquaintance of Kant.[[8]](#endnote-8) I will argue that reading *Religion* with this context in mind shines new light upon passages connected with the need for a moral archetype in the form of Christ, as well as various comments upon the relation betweenChristianity and Judaism. In the section that follows, I will briefly trace the main events thatsparked the pantheism controversy, focusing on the debate between Mendelssohn and Jacobion the role of reason in relation to faith, and the status of Judaism and Christianity in relationto the *Bildung* project – a multi-faceted intellectual movement that, amongst other things, sought to foster cultural development (in matters of religion, for examples) in order to secure the growing realization of freedom in history[[9]](#endnote-9).

Following this, I will consider Kant’s initial reaction to the Pantheism controversy prior to the publication of *Religion*, where, I argue, we can see the beginnings ofKant’s project in *Religion*. Finally, I will consider Kant’s discussion of Christ and the moralarchetype in *Religion*, offering an interpretation based on the context of the pantheism controversy, as well as examining his critique of Judaism in relation to the supposed moralcore of Christianity. Given our discussion concerning the aims of *Religion*, I will also arguethat we can draw some wider conclusions concerning the faith that Kant is making room forwith the Critical philosophy: a broad Christianity that is the most appropriate historicalvehicle for the promulgation of rational religion.

Mendelssohn, Jacobi and the pantheism controversy

One of the most significant scholarly controversies of the 1780s revolved around three figures: Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Moses Mendelssohn and Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi. Following the death of Lessing in 1881, Jacobi had infamously written to Mendelssohn, claiming that Lessing had admitted to being a Spinozist in the final months of his life. Such an accusation was extremely troubling for Mendelssohn, who had worked alongside Lessing as proponents of a German Enlightenment centred on the notion of *Bildung*, a project to reform German culture along more tolerant lines. Part of this project involved the development of a moral religion, based on a rational theology that embraced both Christian and Jewish traditions. Jacobi’s claims regarding Lessing’s apparent Spinozism, however, posed a major threat to the *Bildung* project. The clear implication that Jacobi wished to take from the example of Lessing was that any attempt to form a religion of reason would inevitably lead to atheism and moral depravity, as embodied in the popular opinion of Spinoza’s philosophy of the time.

Jacobi himself was not a pure irrationalist when it came to matters of religion. He did not claim that reason has no part to play with regard to religious faith; rather, he makes the more limited claim that relying *solely* on reason will be damaging to morality and religion. In his *Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza* (1885), Jacobi argues for the epistemological priority of faith, at the expense of anything that could be established by reason alone:

How can we strive for certainty unless we are already acquainted with certainty in advance, and how can we be acquainted with it except through something that we already discern with certainty? This leads to the concept of an immediate certainty, which not only needs no proof, but excludes all proofs absolutely, and *is* simply and solely *the representation itself agreeing with the thing being represented*… But if every *assent to truth* not derived from rational grounds is faith, then conviction based on rational grounds must itself derive from faith, and must receive its force from faith alone.[[10]](#endnote-10)

On the basis that religious conviction cannot be garnered by reason alone, but in fact relies on an immediate certainty grounded in faith, Jacobi states that the very idea of a pure rational religion is a misnomer, focusing upon the claim that any attempt at a rational religion would seek to find certainty with regard to at least some minimal form of cognition of God, his attributes and purposes. On some kind of distinction between reason (as a faculty of deduction) and intuition, as two possible sources of religious conviction, Jacobi argues that the kind of certainty that believers seem to have in the existence of God could not derive from deduction. So, the certainty of religious faith can only come from immediate intuition and not from reason. Indeed, Jacobi states that we all at least have a nascent sense (apart from reason) of God: “My dear Mendelssohn, we are all born in the faith, and we must remain in the faith.”[[11]](#endnote-11)

Following his argument for the epistemological priority of faith, Jacobi highlights the essential role that faith has, apart from reason, in reforming the individual and aiding them to counteract their naturally sinful inclinations. Christianity is not pure rational faith, but a practically-focused one, grounded in an immediate intuitive certainty. Note Jacobi’s remarkable characterisation of the nature of Christian faith:

The religion of the Christians... is a faith that has as its object, not eternal truths, but the finite, accidental nature of man. The religion of the Christians instructs man how to take on qualities through which he can make progress in his existence and propel himself to a higher life – and with this life to a higher consciousness, in this consciousness to a higher cognition... This therefore is the spirit of my religion: Man becomes aware of God through a godly life, and there is a peace of God which is higher than all reason; in this peace there is the enjoyment and the intuition of an inconceivable love.[[12]](#endnote-12)

In this way, Jacobi paints a picture of an individual coming to faith that gives no role to reason in either theoretical or practical matters. The Christian Church and scriptures have a role of educating the individual as an encouragement to engage in moral development, and this change in the individual brings about a heightened, intuitive sense of God apart from any role given to reason. Reason cannot bring about religious cognition, and it cannot conceive of what it would mean for an individual to receive saving faith. The corollary to this is the dangers that reason can pose to the development of true faith in God, insofar as it could potentially hinder the impact of Christian education and the growth of intuition of God within the individual. In fact, Jacobi argues, reason is naturally antithetical to attempts at reforming the individual, and instead seeks to discover matters for itself that are ultimately beyond its ken:

Reason that has fallen into poverty and has become speculative, or in other words, *degenerate* reason, can neither commend nor tolerate this practical path. It has neither hand nor foot for digging, yet it is too proud to beg. Hence it must drag itself here and there, looking for a truth that left when the contemplative understanding left, for religion and its goods.[[13]](#endnote-13)

Any attempt to promulgate a rational religion will be deleterious both to true saving faith and the moral calibre of individuals, which would be a decidedly unwelcome development for society. Given that the notion of a rational religion was key to the *Bildung* project, this was a clear attack upon the plans of Mendelssohn and Lessing, with the latter held up as an example of what happens when reason is prioritised and inevitably falls into speculation (namely, Spinozism and atheism).

In response to Jacobi’s accusations of Spinozism, Mendelssohn spends much of his last two works, *Morning Hours* (1785) and *To the Friends of Lessing* (1786) defending Lessing and their shared *Bildung* project. *Morning Hours* is written as a series of seventeen lectures on philosophy and religion for the benefit of his son and his friends. In the Preface to the work, Mendelssohn claims that the work is based in fact, insofar as he did give such morning lectures to his son as a way of encouraging his burgeoning intellectual talents: “During this time, my son J. was growing up. Early signs of promise made it imperative to introduce him without delay to the rational knowledge of God.”[[14]](#endnote-14) After two other pupils were added to the group, he states, “[we] conversed about the truths of natural religion.”[[15]](#endnote-15) What is not explicitly stated here is that what is being described is Mendelssohn’s son and his friends undergoing their training to prepare for their Bar Mitzvah. The preparation for adult Jewish life is thereby implicitly presented as a means by which one can be given a firm grounding in rational religion, to the extent that one can be given good reason to believe that theism must be true. Mendelssohn ends the text by highlighting the great gains available for theists by pursuing a rational religion in this manner:

It would be quite a boon for us if we could at least get our opponents to admit that a human being, when he forms the thought of a divinity, must think of this divinity as actually existing. This admission would be a very important step forward. The victory would be complete for our whole system of human knowledge, for our character, and for our deeds.[[16]](#endnote-16)

So, in opposition to Jacobi’s concerns regarding rational religion, Mendelssohn highlights what he sees as its great advantages, including bringing non-theists to the point where they must, on pain of falling into irrationality, accept the fundamental truths of theism. We also see a slightly different conception of faith at play here, insofar as it appears that Mendelssohn believes that one can be reasoned into a theistic faith (a possibility that Jacobi rejects[[17]](#endnote-17)).

Mendelssohn builds upon his argument regarding Judaism and rational religion in *To the Friends of Lessing*, with a concluding attack on Jacobi, claiming that their dispute concerning Lessing and Spinozism has come to an unproductive end. Mendelssohn states, “I can as little discover for myself Mr. J’s practical principles as I can his theoretical ones. I believe that in circumstances so ill-suited to be set to rights through a disputation, it is well that we go our separate ways,” and that Jacobi may as well “return back to the faith of his fathers, bring a muzzled reason into obedience through the conquering might of faith, beat back any upswelling doubt.”[[18]](#endnote-18) The implications for Jacobi’s brand of Christianity in this quote is quite clear, insofar as his defence of his faith is characterised as undermining reason and ignoring the doubts that naturally spring to mind once the main tenets of his faith as are brought under rational scrutiny. Mendelssohn had discussed his view of the role of reason in *Morning Hours*, in which he describes an allegorical dream concerning two figures, who are personifications of common sense and contemplation, acting as guides on a trip through the Alps. As the story proceeds, these two guides part ways, and the travellers are unsure as to who to follow. Fortunately, reason, personified as an elderly woman, comes along and reassures the travellers that their two guides will probably soon be reunited and that she will settle the disagreement between them. As further explanation, she states,

In most cases, it is the man [i.e. common sense] who has right on his side, and, contrary to what you might expect, the woman [i.e. contemplation] must usually submit herself to his better instruction. And even if right at times is on her side, his stubbornness makes him unwilling to yield.[[19]](#endnote-19)

So, the role given to reason is clear, namely, to settle disputes between the more speculative side of human inquiry, in the guise of contemplation, and its more grounded side, as common sense.

However, Mendelssohn’s story does not end well for either reason or common sense, for when Lady Contemplation returns, she monopolises the attention of the travellers, who in turn drive reason and common sense away. This allegory is clearly an attempt to illustrate how he understand Jacobi’s rejection of *Bildung* and the role of reason in relation to the Christian faith: he has given in to the natural temptation to fall under the spell of mere contemplation and speculation, to reject the moderating force of common sense and the primacy of reason in balancing common sense and contemplation. There is the further implication of a contrast struck between Mendelssohn’s Judaism (taught in his morning lectures to his son and his friends) and Jacobi’s Christian faith. Whilst Mendelssohn has allowed reason to fulfil its rightful role as a balance between common sense and contemplation, Jacobi’s Christianity has led him to fall in with the travellers of the allegorical dream, giving in to the temptations of contemplation, and ignoring reason and common sense.

Mendelssohn draws the contrast even more explicitly in *To the Friends of Lessing*, where he defends his stance and his faith against the attacks of Jacobi:

I for my part remain with my Jewish infidelity. I place my trust in no mortal’s ‘angel pure mouth’, nor would I rely upon the authority of an *archangel* when it came to eternal truths upon which human happiness rests since in this matter I either stand or fall upon my own two feet... I therefore return to the faith of my fathers, which in accordance with the original meaning of the word, is not a faith in a teaching or an opinion, but is a trust and confidence in God’s attributes... He has the power to bestow upon humans the ability to recognize the truths upon which happiness is based... Strengthened by this unwavering faith, I seek to learn and be persuaded of as much as I can from wherever I can.[[20]](#endnote-20)

In this passage, Mendelssohn presents some of the elements of a programme for those seeking a rational religion, a project for which he argues his Jewish faith is well-suited. Such an individual will not be satisfied with the mere pronouncements of external authorities and apparent revelation from religious contemplation and speculation, but will rather use all of the resources at their disposal, including the faculties of reason and common sense. The approach is justified from a theistic standpoint, Mendelssohn argues, because there is good reason to believe that God would give us the inner resources required to attain the most important truths (with respect to our moral and salvific destiny) for ourselves, without having to rely upon external sources.

Mendelssohn’s approach here also ties in with the defence of rational theism and religious toleration he offers in *Jerusalem* (published in 1783, just before the pantheism controversy). In this text, Judaism (in its essential aspects, at least) is presented as a natural religion, insofar as it does not rely upon revealed religious claims that are entirely unavailable to reason: “Judaism boasts of no *exclusive* revelation of eternal truths that are indispensable to salvation, of no revealed religion in the sense in which that terms is usually understood.”[[21]](#endnote-21) Not only does it not rely on specific historical revelation, Judaism neither leans upon the kind of mysteries that characterise many of the core Christian doctrines, and leads to the view of faith espoused by Jacobi that hurriedly seeks to limit the role of reason with regard to religious claims. In addition, as Gottleib points out,[[22]](#endnote-22) Mendelssohn sees such a view of faith as inevitably leading to oppression, both in and outside of the Church, insofar as the inevitable questioning of reason has to be undermined by the religious authorities, who have a vested interest in maintaining their role as guardians of special mysteries and specific historical traditions. So, Jacobi’s understanding of faith is antithetical to the kind of liberal religious project espoused by Mendelssohn and Lessing in the *Bildung* project. Having briefly reviewed the details of this project, and the controversy surrounding it that was stirred by Jacobi, we can now consider Kant’s response to this debate in the mid-1880s, before we go on to consider the account of rational religion provided in his *Religion*.

Kant’s initial response to the pantheism controversy

Although initially reluctant to enter the fray, Kant eventually came to play a public role in the pantheism controversy. In 1786, Kant published two short texts that explicitly reacted to the debate: *What does it mean to orient oneself in thinking?* and *Some remarks on L.H. Jakob’s Examination of Mendelssohn’s Morning Hours*.

In the first of these, Kant objects to the positions of both Jacobi and Mendelssohn, though the former certainly receives the most stringent criticism. Kant claims that whilst Jacobi’s attack on reason leads more directly to the dangers of superstition and enthusiasm (Kant describes Jacobi as offering “a principle of enthusiasm in the dethroning of reason”[[23]](#endnote-23) and in a letter from 1786, Kant also refers to Jacobi’s role in the controversy as “an affection of *inspired enthusiasm* trying to make a name for itself”[[24]](#endnote-24)), Mendelssohn’s stance also has potentially pernicious implications, insofar as he fails to recognise the need for a critique of reason. Mendelssohn’s defence of the primacy of reason in matters of faith could very easily lead to speculative theories based on a notion of rational insight.[[25]](#endnote-25) Without a Kantian critique, we are unable to come to a kind of rational faith that does not “degenerate into a misuse and a presumptuous trust in the independence of [rational] faculties from all limitations.”[[26]](#endnote-26) If Mendelssohn had recognised the importance of investigating the subjective principles of reason, then he would have been able to avoid prioritising theoretical or speculative reason in a manner that could ultimately lead to dogmatism, immorality and even political authoritarianism, given the need of the state to ensure that order is kept in society. Kant paints a stark picture of the future of such a society, in which citizens lose “the freedom to think.”[[27]](#endnote-27) Mendelssohn’s approach to reason within the *Bildung* project, then, is ultimately self-defeating, insofar as a liberalising, rationally-grounded religious project ends up encouraging irrationality and the undermining of freedom.

We can also briefly consider *Some remarks*, which was written by Kant as a preface to a book-length critique of *Morning Hours* by a philosopher at Halle, Ludwig Heinrich Jakob. For his own part, Mendelssohn recognised that Kant would have a negative reaction to *Morning Hours*, writing to him in a letter from 1785, “Though I no longer have the strength to study your profound writings with the necessary concentration, I recognise that our basic principles do not coincide.”[[28]](#endnote-28) Again, Kant criticises Mendelssohn for his use of reason in speculative matters, beyond the realm of possible experience, arguing that his use of reason with regard to deciding upon these issues leaves the door open for religious enthusiasm and unrestrained speculation:

once one concedes to pure reason in its speculative use the faculty to enlarge itself to insights beyond the boundaries of the sensible, then it is no longer possible to restrict it to this object; and not enough that it will then find a wide field opened for all kinds of enthusiasm, it will also believe itself capable of deciding through ratiocinations even about the possibility of supreme being.[[29]](#endnote-29)

Kant at least implicitly points towards the pantheism controversy here by noting Spinoza as an example of a thinker who allowed his speculative use of reason to lead him into enthusiasm and false notions concerning the divine, and so it is understandable how the kind of thought pursued by Mendelssohn and Lessing could lead one to Spinozism.[[30]](#endnote-30)

Kant then raises a couple of more detailed points against Mendelssohn’s position, first focusing on the claim that many philosophical problems are the product of unresolved linguistic confusion. In *Morning Hours*, Mendelssohn writes,

You know how much I am inclined to explain all the disputes of the philosophical schools as mere verbal disputes, or at least as originally springing from verbal disputes. Change the least little thing in the silhouette, and straightaway the whole picture takes on a different aspect, another physiognomy. So it is also with words and their definitions.[[31]](#endnote-31)

Kant argues that this is implausible, in that whilst there is indeed ambiguity in language, “it cannot take long before those who have initially disunited themselves in their use note the misunderstanding and avail themselves of other words in their place, such that in the end there are just as few homonyms as there are synonyms.”[[32]](#endnote-32) Though temporary confusion can arise from the misleading nature of some language-use, it is always eventually dispelled, unlike the perennial problems of philosophy: he states, in contradicting Mendelssohn, “I am, however, of a completely opposite opinion and assert that in matters over which one has quarrelled over a long period of time, especially in philosophy, there has never been at the basis a quarrel of words but always a true quarrel over things.”[[33]](#endnote-33) Such an emphasis on language leading philosophers astray is just a way, Kant argues, of avoiding the important task of facing up to the very real conflicts within reason itself that can only be resolved through critique. As a specific instance of this failure, Kant also criticises Mendelssohn for not recognising the distinction between thing-in-itself and appearance.[[34]](#endnote-34)

However, despite these comments, it is clear from these brief texts that Kant is not yet ready to fully enter the fray with regard to the pantheism controversy. The main focus here is criticising Mendelssohn for not taking Kant’s Critical project into account, particularly its revolutionary impact upon metaphysics and our understanding of reason. While he does briefly touch on Jacobi’s account of faith, and the manner in which it could lead to damaging superstition and enthusiasm, and criticises Mendelssohn himself for potentially leading down that path, Kant nevertheless avoids touching on the explosive issue of the nature of a possible rational religion, and the relation of that religion to the historical religious traditions of Judaism and Christianity. That engagement was to come a few years later with the publication of *Religion*.

The question of historical faith

A letter to Jacobi in 1789 highlights that Kant was inspired by Mendelssohn, Jacobi and the events of the pantheism controversy to consider the question of the possible historical springboard for a religion of reason in *Religion*. Kant begins this letter by praising Jacobi’s *Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza in Letters to Moses Mendelssohn*, which had just been published in its second edition, and instigating a discussion of the legitimate grounds of theological insight. Kant states that Jacobi had shown “the difficulties of the teleological road to theology, difficulties that seem to have led Spinoza to his system,”[[35]](#endnote-35) without thereby abandoning any possible access to religious cognition through reason. Addressing Jacobi, he writes, “I think that you do not regard the compass of reason as unnecessary or misleading in this venture. The indispensable supplement to reason is something that, though not part of speculative reason, lies only in reason itself, something that we can name… but that we cannot grasp.”[[36]](#endnote-36) So, Kant is praising Jacobi on the basis that the latter’s care in speculative matters has not hindered him from recognising the possible use of reason to gain the insights embodied in a religion of reason.

Following this praise for Jacobi, Kant immediately goes on to address the question of the necessity of an historical revelation in addition to the germ of the religion of reason that he claims Jacobi recognises:

The question whether reason could only be *awakened* to this conception of theism by being instructed with historical events or whether it would require an incomprehensible supernatural inspiration, this is an incidental question, a question of the origin and introduction of this idea. For one can just as well admit that if the gospels had not previously instructed us in the universal moral laws in their total purity, our reason would not yet have discovered them so completely; still, *once we are in possession of them*, we can convince anyone of their correctness and validity using reason alone.[[37]](#endnote-37)

Kant is foreshadowing the balanced approach to the question of the necessity of historical revelation found in *Religion*: he allows for the possibility of a suitable historical revelation being required to highlight the possibility of a true moral faith, but once this has occurred, it is then for reason alone to investigate this faith and discover that this tradition is indeed propagating a proper rational faith.[[38]](#endnote-38) At this moment, though, he is leaving an open question as to whether an historical system of religion is in fact required for reason to discover moral laws in their total purity: such questions would be left for *Religion*, to which we now turn.

The question of rational religion and the necessity for an historical faith goes right to the heart of the Christian faith. The self-understanding of Christianity is fundamentally bound up with its historical particularist claims regarding Jesus of Nazareth and the Christ event. For Christians, there are a specific set of historical events that have unique significance with regard to the establishment of genuine faith and the true Church. Whilst people who lived prior to the life of Christ are not necessarily damned, any religion that they may have held will ultimately fall short of the saving faith made possible through Christ. Those who propose a rational religion may therefore seem to threaten the very essence of Christianity, insofar as its fundamental historical particularism is undermined. If there is indeed a rational religion, then it seems there is no need for particular historical events, such as the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, to awaken true faith, for all the resources required are already there, grounded in universally available reason. So, Kant’s project in *Religion,* and elsewhere in texts of the Critical period, of excavating a pure rational religion may seem to imply a rejection of the fundamentals of the Christian faith.

If we are to interpret Kant in this manner, this will have an impact upon how we approach his comments concerning the example of Christ in *Religion*: specifically, the historical Christ becomes a mere moral example, amongst other legitimate contenders, for reason to use as a reflective tool to construct a rational ideal of moral perfection. Vanden Auweele provides a good example of such an interpretation of Kant’s Christology, arguing that, as far as Kant is concerned,

While Christ is a symbol of moral perfection, he is also a replaceable symbol whose function could be taken up by any other personification of the moral ideal. Kant has fairly little interest in the historical Jesus, to the extent that Keith Ward is correct to highlight ‘whether Jesus ever existed or not is beside the point’.[[39]](#endnote-39)

If this is an accurate reading of Kant’s Christology, then the challenge to anything approaching orthodox Christianity is severe indeed, insofar as the historical particularism that lies at the heart of the Christian tradition cannot cohere with a view of Christ as an interchangeable moral symbol. So, it would seem that Kant’s commitment to rational theology has led him to entirely abandon the Christianity of his childhood and young adulthood.

However, before we attribute such a radical view to Kant, we would do well to pause and carefully review some of the relevant passages in *Religion*. Specifically, with the context of the pantheism controversy in mind, I argue we need to consider Kant’s comments regarding Judaism in *Religion* as a critique of Mendelssohn. If Kant were wishing to downplay the historical significance of Christianity and the Christ event, then we would not expect him to speak of the origin of Christianity in the way he does. In fact, he does write of the origin of the Christian Church as a uniquely significant event: “We cannot… begin the universal history of the Church… anywhere but from the origin of Christianity, which, as a total abandonment of the Judaism in which it originated, grounded on an entirely new principle, effected a total revolution in doctrines of faith.”[[40]](#endnote-40) By speaking of the move from Judaism to Christianity as a total abandonment, we have an implicit critique of Mendelssohn’s claims regarding Judaism and rational religion, and a signal that Christianity is the right candidate for the historical springboard of a purified faith. Kant pushes this point by arguing that any link made between Judaism and Christianity was merely for purposes of political expediency (in the sense of spreading Christianity in the most efficient manner possible), and does not reflect any similarity in terms of a shared essence of rational faith:

The care that the teachers of Christianity take... to link it to Judaism with a connecting strand, in wishing to have the new faith regarded as only a continuation of the old one which contains all its events in prefiguration, shows all too clearly that their only concern in this matter is, and was, about the most apt means of *introducing* a pure moral religion in place of an old cult to which the people were much too well habituated, without, however, directly offending against their prejudices.[[41]](#endnote-41)

The establishment of Christianity, Kant argues, was not intended to develop Judaism further in the direction of a true moral faith; rather, it was the founding of an entirely new religion under the political cover of an existing religious tradition.

As part of his critique of Mendelssohn’s claims regarding Judaism and rational religion, Kant offers a number of arguments against considering the Jewish tradition as the historical foundation of a universal moral religion. All these arguments are intended to establish the claim that the Jewish community is fundamentally and solely political, not religious, in nature. As evidence for this claim, he first states that Jewish law is merely concerned with external actions, and therefore only social order, and not underlying maxims, which is the true sphere of moral worth. Even the Ten Commandments, Kant claims, have no interest in the moral worth of actions:

And although the Ten Commandments would have ethical validity for reason even if they had not been publicly given, yet in that legislation they are given with no claim at all on the *moral disposition* in following them (whereas Christianity later placed the chief work in this) but were rather directed simply and solely to external observance.[[42]](#endnote-42)

Kant argues that Jewish law is therefore merely concerned with social order and upholding a political community, with no interest at all in upholding faith and morality. So, the Jewish faith actually consists in political laws, not religious ones.

The fundamentally political nature of Judaism is further shown, for Kant, by the lack of a core commitment to belief in an afterlife. Kant states that a fundamental belief in the afterlife is a necessary condition for moral faith, following on from his discussion of the practical postulates in earlier Critical texts. In order for the moral law to have any validity, the highest good for us (happiness in proportion with virtue[[43]](#endnote-43)) must be possible for us, but such a state is only possible if we have an immortal existence, so that we can engage in “endless progress toward complete conformity [of inclination with virtue],”[[44]](#endnote-44) in other words, so that we are able to engage in an ongoing task of shaping our inclinations such that we can increasingly approximate the holy will of God in our actions. If one is not committed to an afterlife, then, one immediately undercuts the validity of the moral law, as one is denying that the goal that the moral law aims at is ultimately achievable. So, a pure moral faith will involve some form of commitment to an infinite afterlife.

In contrast to such a faith, Kant argues that Judaism does not have an *inherent* commitment to the afterlife. However, this is not to say that Jews do not believe in the afterlife;[[45]](#endnote-45) rather, the claim is that such a belief is an inessential appendage to Jewish law, ultimately stemming from a nascent sense of the necessity of the afterlife for the rationality of a moral life:

It can hardly be doubted that... the Jews too must have had a faith in a future life... for this faith automatically imposes itself upon everyone by virtue of the universal moral predisposition in human nature... [but] such a faith never was an integral part of the legislation of Judaism.[[46]](#endnote-46)

Again, Kant points to politics as an explanation for why we do not find a commitment to the afterlife at the core of Judaism, arguing that Jewish lawgivers were merely concerned with worldly rewards and punishments, and not considering any potential divine system of justice in the afterlife.

Kant further seeks to undermine the religious status of Judaism by arguing that it lacks the universality of a potential genuine moral faith. The Jewish law is established for a particular chosen people, selected out by God from the rest of humankind. He paints a very negative view of a potentially exclusionary aspect to the claims of Judaism: “Judaism rather excluded the whole human race from its communion, a people especially chosen by Jehovah for himself, hostile to all other peoples and hence treated with hostility by all of them.”[[47]](#endnote-47) Kant argues that a pure, rational religion, grounded in a universal Church, could not arise out of such a social-religious structure that did not in principle allow for outsiders to access the community and claim the salvation offered by their God. Kant argues that the “distinguishing mark of the true church is its *universality*”[[48]](#endnote-48) and he is in no doubt that Judaism falls significantly short of passing this test.

So, Kant sees Judaism as manifestly unsuitable as an historical springboard for the establishment of a rational, universal religion. However, Kant does not only reject Judaism as a candidate for such a role, in that through his treatment of the historical figure of Christ, he actively argues for Christianity as the only religious tradition with a core of rationally-grounded moral faith. We will consider this account in the following section.

The significance of Christ

We have seen that Kant, perhaps rather unexpectedly, treats the establishment of Christianity as a uniquely significant historical event, bringing about a complete revolution in faith and leaving behind (what he takes to be) the political legalism of Judaism. What was so historically significant in the figure of Jesus of Nazareth (referred to here as “the teacher of the Gospel”[[49]](#endnote-49))? First, Kant claims that Christ’s teaching was truly revolutionary in promoting, for the first time, a truly moral faith that emphasised becoming pleasing to God through good conduct, rather than through amoral religious works:

as one worthy of this mission, [Christ taught] that servile faith (in days of divine service, in professions and practises) is inherently null; that moral faith, which alone makes human beings holy ‘as my father in heaven is holy’[[50]](#endnote-50) and proves its genuineness by a good life-conduct, is on the contrary the only one which sanctifies.[[51]](#endnote-51)

However, it was not just his teaching that was significant; on the contrary, the example Christ provides through his own conduct is just as important for the establishment of a truly moral faith.

Kant argues that Jesus gave, through his life and “undeserved yet meritorious death, an example conforming to the archetype of a humanity well-pleasing to God.”[[52]](#endnote-52) We see in Jesus’ life and death an historical example that reflects a particular idea present in reason, namely, a personified, idealised representation of moral perfection – an historical prototype of the archetype of perfect humanity[[53]](#endnote-53). Kant deals with the question of this archetype earlier in *Religion*, where he speaks of an ideal residing in our reason that we have a duty to “elevate ourselves to,” and which indeed “gives us power for this.”[[54]](#endnote-54) When we reflect upon this ideal, it allows us to grasp what we ought morally to do in order to approximate the most perfect form of humanity. In this way, we are offered a prototype for all rational beings to follow, and this should be enough for us to develop towards moral perfection.

At first glance, this position may seem to undermine the necessity of an historical example in the form of Christ to provoke moral reflection and offer a guide to what is the morally right thing to do in any give situation. Seeing as we all, in virtue of being rational beings, have an idea of moral perfection that is in principle sufficient for us to morally develop, then no historical example is required: indeed, this seems to be what Kant first suggests, in stating that there is “no need [from a practical perspective]… of any example from experience to make the idea of a human being morally pleasing to God a model to us; the idea is present as model already in our reason.”[[55]](#endnote-55) If that was how Kant leaves it with regard to the question of a moral prototype, then this would seem to fundamentally undercut his commitment to the historical particularism and significance of the birth of Christianity.

However, Kant adds that an historical example is nevertheless required, due to our limited state, particularly with regard to our reason. In a footnote, he writes,

It is plainly a limitation of human reason, one which is ever inseparable from it, that we cannot think of any significant moral worth in the actions of a person without at the same time portraying this person or his expression in human guise… for we always need a certain analogy with natural being in order to make supersensible characteristics comprehensible to us.[[56]](#endnote-56)

Though we should not need an historical example, one is needed because we find it impossible to engage in moral reflection without considering a concrete human example as undertaking that action. It is precisely this necessary historical example, an example *par excellence*, that the Christian tradition uniquely provides.[[57]](#endnote-57)

So, we can see a reason for Kant holding that the Christian Church is the appropriate historical springboard for a rational, moral religion. The example provided by the figure of Jesus of Nazareth meets the abilities and limitations of our reason perfectly, in that it provides a concrete example that meets the model of the moral prototype already present in our reason. It is undeniable that Kant seems to worry about other aspects of the Gospel narrative affirmed by the Christian tradition, such as the virgin birth[[58]](#endnote-58) and the resurrection[[59]](#endnote-59) (though Firestone has recently proposed an argument for bodily resurrection as part of a Kantian moral faith, on the basis that the highest good would involve the possession of a physical body[[60]](#endnote-60)), which could potentially undermine the usefulness of Christ as a human moral example by stressing his divine, otherworldly status.

However, as Palmquist[[61]](#endnote-61) points out, Kant explicitly leaves the door open for a later moral interpretation of such doctrines by other scholars. Kant gives us the task of undertaking a moral interpretation of “the revelation we happen to have,”[[62]](#endnote-62) and this would include such potentially troublesome doctrines such as the virgin birth and the resurrection. Though Kant may not have made the attempt to give such an interpretation in *Religion*, this does not mean that it cannot be done. In the Preface to the Second Edition of *Religion*, Kant refers to the text as a *versuch* (experiment or attempt) “to start from some alleged revelation or other and, abstracting from the pure religion of reason… to hold fragments of this revelation, as a *historical system*, up to moral concepts, and see whether it does not lead back to the same pure *rational system* of religion.”[[63]](#endnote-63) Kant is therefore showcasing a particular method for beginning to move, in a philosophical manner, towards a rational religion by measuring particular historical claims of revelation up to the yardstick given by our nascent sense of a moral faith. *Religion* is thus a limited test-case for this project and should not be taken as the final word on the suitability of particular Christian doctrines for acting as part of the starting-point for a rational religion. So, even though Kant is unsure concerning the incorporation of doctrines such as the virgin birth and the resurrection, this does not entail that he is writing them off altogether as wholly unsuitable for this project.

One question we can finally consider is just how unique Kant thinks the example of Christ and the Christian tradition is in offering a moral example and a focus for a new rational moral faith. If it turns out that Christ and Christianity are not all that special to Kant, then this would undermine my thesis that he is, in *Religion*, intending to offer a strong argument in favour of the role of Christianity within the Bildung project, against Mendelssohn’s claims concerning Judaism as a rational religion. Manfred Kuehn has recently argued that the treatment of Jesus within *Religion* is intended to show that he is merely one good moral example amongst potentially many others, not confined to the Christian tradition, and that Kant had become aligned with Neologist theologians of the time who were engaged in an “attempt to empty the concept [of Jesus as Christ] of all historical content and to fill it with purely rational content instead.”[[64]](#endnote-64) On this reading, Kant entirely rejects the historical particularism and significance of Christianity, insofar as there is nothing special or unique about the moral example provided by Jesus of Nazareth. In the treatment of Christ as archetype in *Religion*, Kuehn argues, “Kant does not feel the need… to derive a faith in Jesus, the saviour, from the historical record and his moral teachings.”[[65]](#endnote-65)

However, as we have seen, this interpretation does not cohere with the claims Kant makes regarding the emergence of Christianity out of Judaism, as part of his response to Mendelssohn. Kant is engaged in an historical argument, as much as a philosophical one,[[66]](#endnote-66) with Mendelssohn, and does attribute unique historical significance to the emergence of the Christian Church, through the life, work and death of Jesus of Nazareth. Though the end-goal is a purely rational religion, Kant is concerned in *Religion* with where we are now, with the religious traditions we have inherited from the past. Kant’s argument is not, pace Kuehn, to abandon Christianity, and any ideas that are distinctively Christian. Rather, viewed in the context of the pantheism controversy, we see Kant as in fact defending Christianity, though the goal may be to ultimately leave it behind. This reading is confirmed in the Preface to *The Conflict of the Faculties* (published in 1798, five years after *Religion*), in which Kant confirms his “highest tribute of respect to Christianity” that he had made in *Religion* by proclaiming its harmony “with the purest moral belief of religion” and its status as “the best and most adequate means of public instruction available… that is truly conducive to the soul’s improvement”.[[67]](#endnote-67)

To return to where we started, with regard to Kant’s response to the pantheism controversy, we can read him as trying to find a middle ground between Jacobi and Mendelssohn. On the one hand, he sides with Mendelssohn in affirming the primacy of reason in religious matters, but on the other, he tempers his stance somewhat by incorporating a role for the historical particularism of Christianity in the envisioned future of the Bildung project. By viewing Kant’s *Religion* in the context of the pantheism controversy, we can come to a deeper understanding of both the wider aims of the text and some of the central, often quite controversial, claims that are made.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have approached the question of the moral archetype and prototype in Kant’s *Religion* within the historical context of the pantheism controversy between Mendelssohn and Jacobi, a dispute that Kant played a minor part in a few years prior to the writing of *Religion*. Whilst Kant clearly broadly agrees with the *Bildung* project, and agrees with Mendelssohn that Jacobi’s account of faith and reason easily leads to superstition and enthusiasm, he disagrees with the details of the account of rational religion, and its relation to the historical religious traditions of Judaism and Christianity, that Mendelssohn presents in *Jerusalem* and elsewhere. As we saw, in his initial responses to the pantheism controversy, Kant’s critique of Mendelssohn focuses on the latter’s failure to take the *Critique of Pure Reason*, and the limitations it places upon speculative reason, into account in his approach to religious and metaphysical matters. Due to Mendelssohn’s overconfidence in theoretical reason, he is led to consider Judaism as the historical religion closest to an idealised rational religion. However, one of the lessons of Kant’s Critical philosophy is that rational religion is based on reason in its practical employment, and thus connected inextricably to a kind of moral faith.

I argue that in *Religion*, Kant embarks on a more wide-ranging, and potentially much more confrontational, critique of Mendelssohn’s stance within the bounds of the *Bildung* project. One aspect of this critique is an approach to both the figure of Christ and the historical religious tradition of Judaism that places Christianity clearly at the centre of the historical basis for a true rational religion. The moral example of Christ is placed in such a way that Christianity is affirmed as the most appropriate historical basis for the realisation of this religion. Why does Kant, who is ultimately interested in the establishment of a universal, rationally-grounded moral religion, emphasise Christianity and the figure of Christ to such an extent in *Religion*? The answer lies in the context of the pantheism controversy, specifically his reaction to Mendelssohn’s claims regarding the relation of Judaism to such a rational religion, and its potential role as an historical vehicle for it. One of Kant’s aims with *Religion* is to argue against Mendelssohn by positing Christianity as a unique historical religious tradition, containing a core of moral religion that makes it uniquely suited for the role he wants it to play as part of the *Bildung* project. When seen in this context, it makes more sense why he emphasises Christianity to such an extent, whilst potentially ultimately arguing for leaving Christianity behind in a new universal Church.

We can thus see Kant’s *Religion* as attempting to tread a middle ground between the two sides of the pantheism controversy: Mendelssohn and Jacobi. Reason can have primacy in religious matters, but the historical particularism of Christianity is not inimical to a universal religion of reason. *Religion*’s overall aims as a text are also illuminated: it is a defence of Christianity in a way, but it is certainly not a straightforward one. Christianity is defended as part of the overall strategy of establishing a rational religion and the text is therefore aimed at those who share in this liberalising project of developing an enlightened religion based on universal morality. We can thus also see *Religion* as a major part of Kant’s ongoing contribution to the Enlightenment project of seeking to establish a rationally-grounded religion that will garner specific social benefits. I hope to have shed some light on how *Religion* can be read partly as a response to the pantheism controversy, and how this interpretation can explain the presence of some of the more defiantly Christian elements of that text[[68]](#endnote-68).

1. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason,* trans. & ed. Paul Guyer & Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 117; Bxxx. References to Kant’s works are to the relevant volume of the *Cambridge Edition of the Works* *of Immanuel Kant* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992-), followed by the standard scholarly reference to the *Akademie-Edition* Vol. 1-29 of *Gesammelte Schriften* (Berlin: Georg Reimer & Walter de Gruyter, 1900-). An exception is made for the *Critique of Pure Reason*, which is referenced in the usual A/B format. All translations (with some occasional minor changes) are taken from the English translation noted in individual references. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. A suggestion made by Palmquist: see Stephen Palmquist, “Faith as Kant’s Key to the Justification of Transcendental Reflection”, *The Heythrop Journal* 25 (October 1984): pp. 442-455. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Immanuel Kant, *Religion and Rational Theology*, trans. & ed. Allen Wood & George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 64; 6:12. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. James DiCenso, *Kant’s Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason: A Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Eddis N. Miller, *Kant’s Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015). [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Stephen R. Palmquist, *Comprehensive Commentary on Kant’s Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2016). [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Lawrence R. Pasternack, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Kant on Religion within the Bounds of Mere Reason* (London: Routledge, 2014), p. 198. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. The manner in which the Bildung project grew out of the work of Enlightenment thinkers, such as Kant, is described in detail by Gjesdal: Kristin Gjesdal, “Bildung”, in *The Oxford Handbook of German Philosophy in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Michael N. Forster & Kristin Gjesdal (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 697-706. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, *The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel Allwill*, trans. & ed. George di Giovanni (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1994), p. 230. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Ibid., p. 231. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Ibid., p. 232. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Moses Mendelssohn, *Last Works*, trans. Bruce Rosenstock (Urbana; Springfield, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2012), p. 3. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Ibid., pp. 134-5. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Jacobi, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, p. 230. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Mendelssohn, *Last Works*, p. 175. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Ibid., pp. 72-73. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. Ibid., p. 175. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. Moses Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem: Or on Religious Power and Judaism*, trans. Allan Arkush (Waltham, Mass.: Brandeis University Press, 1983), p. 97. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. See Micah Gottleib, *Faith and Freedom: Moses Mendelssohn’s Theological-Political Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 108. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. Kant, *Religion*, p. 6; 8:134. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. Immanuel Kant, *Correspondence*, trans. & ed. Arnulf Zweig (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 251; 10:442. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. See Kant, *Religion*, pp. 12-13; 6:140-1. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. Ibid., p. 17; 6:146. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. Kant, *Correspondence*, p. 230; 10:413. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology, History, and Education*, ed. Günter Zöller & Robert B. Louden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 178; 8:151. [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. See Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. Mendelssohn, *Last Works*, pp. 92-93. [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. Kant, *Anthropology*, p. 179; 8:152. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. See Ibid., pp. 179-80; 8:153-4. [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. Kant, *Correspondence*, p. 319; 11:76. [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
36. Ibid. In speaking of an indispensable supplement to reason that lies within reason and cannot fully be grasped, Kant seems to be indirectly referring to his notion of the moral archetype in the form of Christ, which is explored in *Religion* (see below). Thus, this letter strengthens my case that *Religion* was shaped by Kant’s response to the pantheism controversy. [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
38. Kant, *Religion*, pp. 136-41; 6:103-109. [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
39. Dennis Vanden Auweele, *Pessimism in Kant’s Ethics and Rational Religion* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2018), p. 180. [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
40. Kant, *Religion*, p. 156; 6:127. [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
41. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-41)
42. Ibid., p. 155; 6:126. [↑](#endnote-ref-42)
43. See Immanuel Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, ed. Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 228; 5:110. [↑](#endnote-ref-43)
44. Ibid., p. 238; 5:122. [↑](#endnote-ref-44)
45. For his part, Mendelssohn argues for an inherent commitment to the afterlife in Jewish law: Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem*, p. 90. Kant shows awareness of this argument in a footnote in *Religion*: Kant, *Religion*, pp. 186-7n.; 6:166. [↑](#endnote-ref-45)
46. Ibid., p. 155; 6:126. [↑](#endnote-ref-46)
47. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-47)
48. Ibid., p. 146; 6:115. Kant names four tests of determining whether a given historical religion is a true church, but the preceding quotation and elsewhere shows that it is universality that is the most important for him: see Ibid., p. 136; 6:101-2. [↑](#endnote-ref-48)
49. Ibid., p. 156; 6:128. [↑](#endnote-ref-49)
50. Kant appears to be referencing Matthew 5:48. [↑](#endnote-ref-50)
51. Kant, *Religion*, p. 156; 6:128. [↑](#endnote-ref-51)
52. Ibid., pp. 156-7; 6:128-9. [↑](#endnote-ref-52)
53. Kant uses the term *Urbild* (archetype) to refer the ideal of moral perfection existing as an idea, and *Vorbild* (prototype) to refer to this ideal existing as an historical person. [↑](#endnote-ref-53)
54. Ibid., p. 104; 6:61. [↑](#endnote-ref-54)
55. Ibid., p. 105; 6:62. [↑](#endnote-ref-55)
56. Ibid., p. 107; 6:64-65. [↑](#endnote-ref-56)
57. Palmquist has also stressed the unique significance of the example of Christ for Kant, as “the key source of human hope that we too can *become* acceptable to God despite our initial decision to let evil rule”: Palmquist, *Comprehensive Commentary*, p. 166. [↑](#endnote-ref-57)
58. See Kant, *Religion*, p. 119; 6:80. [↑](#endnote-ref-58)
59. See Ibid., p. 157; 6:128. [↑](#endnote-ref-59)
60. See Chris L. Firestone, “Rational Religious Faith in a Bodily Resurrection,” in *Kant and the Question of Theology*, ed. Firestone et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 241-5. [↑](#endnote-ref-60)
61. Palmquist, *Comprehensive Commentary*, p. 290. [↑](#endnote-ref-61)
62. Kant, *Religion*, p. 142; 6:110. [↑](#endnote-ref-62)
63. Ibid., p. 64; 6:12. [↑](#endnote-ref-63)
64. Manfred Kuehn, “Kant’s Jesus,” in *Kant’s Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason: A Critical Guide*, ed. Gordon E. Michalson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014). [↑](#endnote-ref-64)
65. Kuehn, “Kant’s Jesus,” p. 173. [↑](#endnote-ref-65)
66. As shown by the fact that as much of *Religion* is given to various historical theses as philosophical-religious claims. [↑](#endnote-ref-66)
67. Kant, *Religion*, p. 242; 7:9. [↑](#endnote-ref-67)
68. I am grateful to Stephen Palmquist, John Shand, and an audience at Keele University for their comments on earlier versions of this paper. [↑](#endnote-ref-68)