**Scripture and Moral Examples in Pietism and Kant’s *Religion***

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ABSTRACT

This paper argues for considerable Pietist influence upon Kant’s *Religion within the Bounds of Mere Reason*, through a focus upon the topics of Scripture and the use of moral examples within the context of a religious community. The recommend approach to the use of Scripture in both *Religion* and the Pietist theology of Spener are compared, revealing deep parallels between Kant and core Pietist thought. In addition, the importance of moral examples in cultivating true, ‘moral faith’ is examined in both Kant and Pietism as a further major point of influence. The paper concludes by noting the potential significance of this Pietist influence for our wider understanding of Kant’s thought in the Critical period.

KEYWORDS

Kant, Moral archetype, Moral examples, Pietism, Scripture, Spener

**Introduction**

This paper considers two major themes of Kant’s *Religion within the Bounds of Mere Reason* (*Religion*) in regard to discerning possible Pietist influence upon his later religious thought[[1]](#footnote-1). To begin with, I will outline Kant’s treatment of Scripture in *Religion*, with a particular focus upon how it should be read within the context of the Church and how this relates to current interpretive issues surrounding the ‘two experiments’ that Kant states he is conducting in the text. I will then move on to argue that there are considerable parallels between this account and the approach to Scripture in Pietist thought[[2]](#footnote-2). To further my case, I will then consider the use of moral examples, which, for Kant, revolves around the moral archetype discovered in the figure of Christ in the New Testament, in relation to the Pietist focus upon moral examples based on conversion moments. I will argue that placing these accounts side-by-side in such a way reveals that we can reasonably argue for strong Pietist influence upon *Religion*. As such, this paper can mark the beginnings of an argument for the claim that many details of *Religion* betray the influence of the Lutheran-Pietist tradition in which Kant was raised. In concluding, I will argue that the way in which *Religion* coheres with elements of Pietism could be added to a cumulative case for reading Kant as a defender of religious faith (even a recognisably orthodox form of Christianity).

**Kant’s Treatment of Scripture**

*Religion* contains an account of the role Scripture can play in the moral development of humankind as a whole, as they progress to an eschatological end-point. Pure religious faith should be enough for all humanity to achieve an improved moral standing (it can be communicated to all other people, and is in principle equally available to all of us as a resource to draw from), but unfortunately it is not enough. We seem to find it difficult to believe that virtue is sufficient to become well-pleasing to God, and Kant notes that we have an inclination to believe instead in the need for some other form of divine service, which leads to a formulation of statutory laws in the religious community – as an example, he speaks of ‘priestcraft’ as ‘the constitution of a church to the extent that a *fetish-service* is the rule; and this always obtains wherever statutory commands, rules of faith and observances, rather than principles of morality, make up the groundwork and the essence of the church’ (6:179)[[3]](#footnote-3). Such a tendency lies not only in our own moral laxity, but also in our desire to anthropomorphise God - we are used to worldly powers that desire various kinds of non-moral service, and so we expect God to be the same[[4]](#footnote-4). We should not take from this, though, that God is not able to be influenced by humans *at all*[[5]](#footnote-5); rather, it is simply that we cannot influence the divine other than through our moral behaviour. God, as moral ruler of the world, is only interested in whether we manifest virtue in our behaviour or not; everything else is beside the point, or at least pales into insignificance in relation to morality.

However, Kant’s approach to such statutory laws, linked to divine service and historical faith, is not entirely negative, for they may have an important role to play in the social project of moral development towards an ethical community, which much take the form of a church, as we can only understand the ‘[founding of] a moral people of God… [as] a work whose execution cannot be hoped for from human beings but only from God himself’[[6]](#footnote-6). In the developing church, there will be members who are of ‘many dispositions’, and thus some ‘*public* form of obligation’[[7]](#footnote-7), not provided by reason but only by statutory legislation, will be required to help maintain the unity of the church, thereby acting as a useful supplement to the main project of the fostering of pure, rational religion. Historically, also, statutory legislation will come first, due to our propensity as human beings to focus on non-moral ways in which we may please the divine, rather than simply leading a good life. As such, ‘in the moulding of human beings into an ethical community, ecclesiastical faith naturally precedes pure religious faith’, though ‘morally speaking it ought to happen the other way around’[[8]](#footnote-8). Connected to this, in Part Four of *Religion*, Kant notes the development of principles of reason across generations, with the implication that a revelation to earlier generations might be ‘wise and very advantageous’ as an instigator for rational reflection, such that ‘everyone can henceforth convince himself of its truth by himself and his own reason’[[9]](#footnote-9), and it is for the same reason that statutory legislation will have to be given historical primacy.

In section five of Part Three of *Religion*, Kant argues for the value of Scripture as offering the kind of stable basis required for a religious community growing in its moral standing. Religions that generally base themselves on Scripture have the constancy that is missing from those that rely primarily on public observances[[10]](#footnote-10). So, whilst Scripture can overemphasise statutory laws, and thereby help contribute to an amoral ‘religion of divine service’[[11]](#footnote-11), it is nevertheless part of the necessary basis for a stable religious community to morally develop and attract new members, on the way to an idealised universal church.

Kant expands upon his view of the New Testament in particular in a letter from 1775, addressed to Johann Casper Lavater. In the context of discussing what matters from the perspective of our salvation, namely, ‘hidden inner [moral] convictions’[[12]](#footnote-12), he spells out the role that the Gospels have to play in cultivating moral faith. To begin with, he argues that we must ‘distinguish the *teachings* of Christ from the *report* we have of those teachings. In order that the former may be seen in their purity, [we must] seek above all to separate out the moral teachings from all the dogmas of the New Testament’[[13]](#footnote-13). It is the *moral message* of the Gospels, encapsulated in the teachings of Christ, that is vital for our salvation; all other content to be found in Scripture is, at least in principle, dispensable. In ‘the moral spirit of the Gospels’, Kant finds ‘a clear distinction between what I am obligated to do and the manner in which this message is to be introduced into the world and disseminated’[[14]](#footnote-14). The historically contingent aspects of the text pale in significance in comparison to the universal message of morality.

As Kant continues to explain in this letter, the notion of dogmas includes ‘everything of which one could become convinced only through historical reports. . . [as well as] those confessions or ceremonies that are enjoined as a supposed condition of salvation’[[15]](#footnote-15). True (moral) faith is not to be found in that which must be historically transmitted, including testimony and ceremonial forms passed down through generations; rather, it is universally available to all rational beings, regardless of historical circumstance. In separating out the core message of the Gospels, we are simply reflecting what matters for us, our moral destiny, and the potentially universal saving faith[[16]](#footnote-16). Certainly, the New Testament does include a large amount of what would count as dogma for Kant, including miracle reports and theoretical speculation, but this is explained as a mere contingent addition due to historical circumstance, particularly the need to face the political force of Judaism[[17]](#footnote-17). Such content from the Gospels is called ‘Kat’ anthropon’ (or ad hominem), signalling that it is not universally valid, but only has an impact within specific historical circumstances[[18]](#footnote-18). It is right for humankind to build a religion that does not rely on dogma, and instead keeps at its core the universal moral message found in the Gospels.

Kant then goes on to indicate the impact this has upon how we should read and interpret the New Testament. For one thing, the text should be approached with a certain amount of hermeneutical suspicion insofar as ‘our New Testament writings can never be so esteemed as to make us dare to have unlimited trust in every word of them’[[19]](#footnote-19). Indeed, ‘no book, whatever its authority might be – yes, even one based on the testimony of my own senses – can substitute for the religion of conscience’[[20]](#footnote-20). The moral law can, and should be, sufficient for the believer to ground their faith, and thus any text will have an auxiliary role to play in an individual’s moral destiny, regardless of the traditional authority that text may have. Kant has a rather complex approach to Scripture: it should be read with a primary, moral interpretation in mind, and though it can lead to an unhealthy dogmatism in the religious community, it nevertheless helps to keep the community together in a way that is necessary for social moral development on a grand scale, so that while the religion of conscience must hold ultimate sway, we can still find a useful role for Scripture to play in a religious community.

Back in *Religion*, Kant turns to the question of interpretation with regard to Scripture in the church, and how this links to the growth of moral faith in that community. He sees interpretation as the tool with which we can help bring historical faith and pure moral religion together. *Religion* as a whole, in fact, is concerned with the relation between historical faith and moral religion, as noted by the ongoing discussion in the literature relating to the ‘two experiments’ indicated in the Second Preface to *Religion* and how these experiments are connected to the discussion of religion in the main text[[21]](#footnote-21). The discussion falls in the context of Kant’s attempt to explain what the title of the work (*Religion within the Bounds of Mere Reason*) is supposed to mean. The beginning of this explanation sees Kant speaking of two concentric circles. The wider circle contains all that pertains to faith, including both revealed and natural religion, what is taught by tradition and scripture, and so forth, whilst the inner circle contains what he calls ‘the pure *religion of reason*’[[22]](#footnote-22), that is, all the aspects of faith that can be derived from reason alone (though that does not rule out the possibility of such aspects being reinforced by historical revelation)[[23]](#footnote-23).

The significance of this delineation between the wider and narrower circles for Kant’s enterprise is that he takes the legitimate bounds of the philosopher’s project to be confined to the latter, that is, the pure religion of reason, which involves abstracting from all experience. Following this, he writes: ‘From this standpoint I can also make this second experiment’[[24]](#footnote-24), which implies that what has gone beforehand comprises the first experiment. The first experiment, then, should be understood as the aforementioned delineation of pure practical religion within the wider domain of religion; the narrower circle can then be taken as the standpoint from which the second experiment can take place. What is this second experiment? Kant writes that it is ‘to start from some alleged revelation or other and, abstracting from the pure religion of reason (so far as it constituted 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 [from which I have abstracted]’[[25]](#footnote-25). The second experiment is putting the mantra of religion being based on morality into action, insofar as we take some historical revelation that falls outside of the inner circle and evaluate it with regard to pure morality, with a view to seeing whether it can be accommodated within the pure religion of reason. If the revelation in question does not measure up to the standard of morality, then it can only at best be seen as contingent for our historical religion and for our salvation.

Kant characterises the outcome of the two experiments as ultimately ending in unification, because once a specific revelation has passed the test of being compared to the moral religion of reason, then ‘we shall be able to say that between reason and Scripture there is, not only compatibility but also unity, so that whoever follows the one (under the guidance of moral concepts) will not fail to come across the other as well’[[26]](#footnote-26). Underlying the two experiments within the context of Kant’s philosophy, then, is a wide-scale reforming project of historical religion more generally, and Christianity specifically. We evaluate philosophically various claims to historical religion to check compatibility with reason and morality, and those that pass the test can be accepted as part of a unified new religion which has as its ultimate foundation reason and morality. We can agree to an extent with the view of Pasternack, who characterises the first experiment as ‘the construction of the Pure Rational System of Religion from an *a priori* procedure rooted in moral concepts’ (in essence separating out what can fall under the umbrella of philosophical theology and what cannot), whilst the second experiment aims ‘to compare the scope of the “historical system” to the “pure rational system of religion”’[[27]](#footnote-27) (and thereby to discover what can be seen as ultimately rooted in morality). However, we must be careful not to characterise the two experiments as ultimately resulting in a large-scale *replacement* of Christianity with a new ‘pure religion of reason’. Such a view may be tempting if we underestimate the importance of the second, unifying step of the process; after all, if all he wishes to do is to undertake such a replacement, then only the first experiment, which separates the possible elements of a new pure religion of reason out from the rest of what pertains to religion generally, is necessary. The unification act of the second experiment is ultimately undertaken to purify the Christian religion, and not replace it with a new type of pure rational religion.

So, *Religion* as a whole is intended to explore the relation between moral religion and historical faith (particularly that of Christianity). Scripture, then, in helping to bridge moral religion and historical faith, is central to Kant’s project here, and he consider this topic in Section Six of Part Three. Kant argues that, as part of this project, interpretation of Scripture should focus on promoting morality, even if it may appear forced, as such an interpretation will not ultimately be too forced anyway, due to the moral religion that will have been ‘hidden in human reason’[[28]](#footnote-28) when such Scripture was produced. The distinction that Kant draws between the certification and the exposition of Scripture is also important here. Certification of Scripture can occur through investigating the origins of the text, whilst exposition is attained through understanding the historical context and the original language of the text[[29]](#footnote-29), and thus discerning its meaning for the original community in which it was produced. Such scholarship has secondary value, for Kant, in relation to the moral interpretation of Scripture: as the ‘moral improvement of human beings… constitutes the true end of all religion of reason’, it follows that moral considerations will give us ‘the supreme principle of all scriptural exegesis’[[30]](#footnote-30). Kant expresses his conclusion of the discussion of Scripture thus: ‘There is, therefore, no norm of ecclesiastical faith except Scripture, and no other expositor of it except the *religion of reason* and *scholarship* (which deals with the historical element of Scripture). And, of these two, the first alone is *authentic* and valid for the whole world’[[31]](#footnote-31).

To conclude this section, Kant has a rather nuanced and often overlooked approach to Scripture in *Religion*. As part of his reforming zeal for the Church, Kant is advocating an approach to Scripture that focuses upon the moral content of the text, at the expense of a reading more interested in dogmatics. Scripture has a dual function of not only helping to keep a religious community stable across generations, but also of tapping into a moral religion of reason, such that it can cultivate a true moral faith. For those who see Kant more as a philosopher of the Enlightenment, it may be surprising to discover that Scripture has a key role to play in the project of *Religion*, which involves nothing less than the wide-scale reform of the Church and the moral development of society as a whole. As we move on to consider the Pietist approach to Scripture, particularly that of Spener, we will see similar themes that suggest a deep underlying influence, particularly with their shared sense of the potential power of Scripture upon the moral development of the individual and religious community.

**Scripture in Pietist thought**

How Scripture should be treated in the content of a religious community was a very important issue for Pietists: indeed, their idiosyncratic use of Scripture marked them out as decisively stepping away from orthodox Lutheranism. Spener, perhaps the most significant inaugurator of Pietist thought, reaffirms the importance of interpretation of Scripture[[32]](#footnote-32), and in particular wishes to place emphasis on the moral content of Scripture. An overly theoretical, speculative approach to Scripture will result in an interpretation devoted to ‘subtleties’, instead of the moral teaching contained within, and reflect in tandem a growth of self-love and other personal and social ills:

Subtleties unknown to the Scriptures usually have their origin, in the case of those who introduce them, in a desire to exhibit their sagacity and their superiority over others, to have a great reputation, and to derive benefit therefrom in the world. Moreover, these subtleties are themselves of such a nature that they stimulate, in those who deal with them, not a true fear of God but a thirst for honour and other impulses which are unbecoming a true Christian. . . . [Thereby both] preachers and hearers confine themselves to the notion that the one thing needful is the assertion and retention of pure doctrine[[33]](#footnote-33).

The overly theoretical approach to Scripture, then, not only has a moral impact upon those who study Scripture, reflecting a desire to achieve honour and intellectual superiority, but also has a morally deleterious effect throughout the Church, as lay members begin to focus on subtle doctrine, rather than on the moral teaching that is truly important for their faith and eventual salvation (a reflection of Kant’s emphasis upon a moral reading of Scripture, as opposed to one focused on dogma that may have a morally undesirable effect upon the religious community).

Spener’s approach to Scripture must also be understood in the context of his hopes for a church of the ‘priesthood of all’[[34]](#footnote-34) and the loss of emphasis on rigid hierarchy, which is reflected in Kant’s general suspicion of statutory laws in the religious community linked to the maintenance of such a hierarchy[[35]](#footnote-35). Such a project includes Scripture being made available to all, with all believers encouraged to engage in their own extensive reading programme, by themselves and in small groups, apart from the usual exposition of Scripture by clergy in church services. He recommends, for instance, that ‘the books of the Bible be read one after another, at specified times in the public service, without further comment’[[36]](#footnote-36).

Spener wishes for the lay member of the church to be confronted with passages from Scripture for the first time without any further comment or interpretation immediately following, which seems to imply that there might be something valuable in a *prima facie* response to a given passage, perhaps suggesting that there is something inherent in the individual that can discern truth in that passage before it could potentially be distorted through the interpretation of others. Given Spener’s focus upon the moral response of the individual, we can perhaps see this *prima facie* response as one ideally grounded in the feeling of the moral law, before speculative theorising begins to work its own interpretation. We can see, then, Spener’s recommendation of Scripture being read by all as part of his drive towards the priesthood of all, grounded in the feeling of the moral law that inheres in all human beings and can thereby bring a true moral religion together, reflected in Kant’s later claim that a potential universal moral religion of reason could be engendered through the right approach to Scripture.

Further, Spener posits a close connection between religion and morality in a similar way to Kant[[37]](#footnote-37). If, as I argue, there is a strong Pietist influence in Kant’s thinking on religion, it may be interesting to note that Spener does posit a strong connection between faith and good conduct, and it is very much faith that is the key foundation of moral virtue: ‘[Our] works or godly life contribute neither much nor little to our salvation, for as a fruit of our faith our works are connected with the gratitude which we owe to God, who has already given us who believe the gift of righteousness and salvation’[[38]](#footnote-38). Here, Spener is taking a familiar Lutheran line: moral virtue is grounded in faith, which is what truly matters for salvation and the perfection of humankind.

However, this is not to denigrate in any way the importance of good works, as these will still play an important role in the life of the true Christian, though it is the case that alone, they will not secure salvation for the individual. They will simply *naturally follow* from true faith in God. Mori notes that, ‘Pietists claimed that while faith is undoubtedly essential, it must for this very reason ‘bear fruit’ if it is true faith at all. . . . A holy Pietist lifestyle reveals that Christ lives within a person’[[39]](#footnote-39). So, there is no complete reduction of religion to morality here: it is more that the two go hand-in-hand, with faith being the primary partner that begins the process of moral development. Indeed, the relation is such that we can *infer* a lack of true faith from actions that are not in line with God’s will and the moral law:

How many there are who live such a manifestly unchristian life that they themselves cannot deny that the law is broken at every point, who have no intention of mending their ways in the future, and yet who pretend to be firmly convinced that they will be saved in spite of all this!. . . . [T]hey believe in Christ and put all their trust in him, that this cannot fail, and that they will surely be saved by such faith. Accordingly they have a fleshly illusion of faith (for godly faith does not exist without the Holy Spirit, nor can such faith continue when deliberate sins prevail) in place of the faith that saves. This is a delusion of the devil[[40]](#footnote-40).

Spener is clearly airing a grievance regarding a widespread misunderstanding of the import of the primacy of faith in Lutheranism. Though good works do not influence God’s bestowal of grace upon us, that does not mean that we are given *carte blanche* to act as we please, in that anyone who has true faith will act well as a matter of course, and so moral behaviour should not be an issue. ‘All those who live under the rule of sin’, Spener writes, ‘can have no other kind of faith than such human delusion’[[41]](#footnote-41), they have not let the Word of God ‘penetrate inwardly into [their] heart’[[42]](#footnote-42).

As Spener and Kant consider the contemporary Lutheran church, they are struck by the widespread immoral behaviour, and thus can gain a sense of the lack of true faith throughout the church, despite having moral faith at its core. In imagery paralleling Kant’s picture of the inner, moral core and the outer shell of religion, Spener writes, ‘[a]lthough our Evangelical Lutheran church is a true church and is pure in its teaching, it is in such a condition, unfortunately, that we behold its outward form with sorrowful eyes’[[43]](#footnote-43). It is perhaps one of the problems of Luther’s pronouncements regarding the (non)relation between good works and salvation that it may perhaps give those who are still mired in self-love and lack true faith an excuse to act as they please as long as they proclaim faith in God.

Further to this, for Pietists, the treatment of Scripture was bound up with the important notion of conversion. Francke placed conversion at the centre of the Pietist tradition[[44]](#footnote-44), with a particular focus upon the individual immanent experience of an individual who has undergone a kind of irreversible conversion[[45]](#footnote-45). It is not self-evident, prior to conversion, that the content to be found in Scripture is in itself divinely inspired. It is only when conversion has had the requisite impact upon the will that I have already alluded to that the intellect is moved to accept the validity of the divinely inspired contents of Scripture. Such an impact, allowing us to read and trust in the divinely-inspired content of Scripture in the right way, is the same kind of impact that also shaped our will into living a more pious life. The belief that right interpretation of Scripture is available to anyone with true faith was reflected in the general conventicle practice of allowing all members of the meetings to reflect publicly upon passages from Scripture[[46]](#footnote-46).

Outside the Pietist tradition, offering such access to Scripture to the lay reader was unheard of, and marked a fundamental trust in the lay reader of true faith to interpret the Bible correctly. As such, the standard Pietist view of the reading of Scripture is echoed in *Religion*, insofar as it takes true faith, grounded in genuine moral development, to reveal what is important in Scripture, and it goes together with the impact of conversion upon the will such that one can begin to progress morally and start helping to build God’s Kingdom on earth. Kant is perhaps slightly different in stressing that what is important in Scripture is the moral aspect of the subtext, and how the divine inspiration inherent in the text can aid us in the pursuit that truly matters to God, i.e. our project of progress towards moral perfection, rather than basing the interpretation of texts as moral feeling. Nevertheless, again we can see a strong Pietist influence upon *Religion* here[[47]](#footnote-47). To further press my argument, in the following section, I will move on to consider the themes of moral examples and the moral archetype in Kant’s *Religion* and Pietism.

**Moral Examples and Archetypes in Kant and Pietism**

Another important aspect of *Religion* is Kant’s discussion of the moral archetype, linked to the example[[48]](#footnote-48) of Christ, as found in Christian Scripture. This notion forms the core of the discussion of Part Two of *Religion*. Kant posits an ideal of humanity that is available to all of us, namely, ‘*Humanity. . . in its full moral perfection*’[[49]](#footnote-49). Such an ideal is immediately connected to Christ through quotation of Scripture, such as when Kant remarks that ‘the idea of him proceeds from God’s being; he is not, therefore, a created thing but God’s only-begotten Son, ‘the *Word*’ (the *Fiat!*) through which all other things are, and without whom nothing that is made would exist’[[50]](#footnote-50). From the presence of such an ideal, we are thereby given a duty to try to ‘*elevate* ourselves to this ideal of moral perfection, i.e. to the prototype of moral disposition in its entire purity, and for this the very idea, which is presented to us by reason for emulation, can give us force’[[51]](#footnote-51): we also have a duty to make ourselves into a moral example, in line with the ideal of humanity (which forms another facet of Kant’s emphasis upon the importance of moral examples throughout humankind, not just limited to that presented by Christ).

So, the ideal of humanity has two intertwined functions: setting us an obligation to emulate it, as well as simply offering something to aim for. In addition, the ideal of humanity is also to be taken as revelation: ‘[Precisely] because we are not its authors but the idea has rather established itself in the human being without our comprehending how human nature could have even been receptive of it, it is better to say that that *prototype* has *come down* to us from heaven, that it has taken up humanity’[[52]](#footnote-52). We can therefore understand this ideal of humanity as a kind of ‘inner revelation’ through our own reason[[53]](#footnote-53).

Kant enunciates precisely what he means by an ideal in the *Critique of Pure Reason*: ‘an individual thing which is determinable, or even determined, through [a general] idea alone’[[54]](#footnote-54). Ideals are generated from ideas of things that we are familiar with, and from them we generate perfected representations of these things that can help regulate our behaviour such that we can aim to progress toward these ideas. Pasternack points to the moral *Urbild* as being a ‘representation that helps us grasp moral perfection and so helps guide us in our own efforts’[[55]](#footnote-55): however, there is nothing more to the *Urbild* than an aid to practical guidance, as ‘ideals are just images we utilize in our pursuit of various goals’[[56]](#footnote-56). In objection to this view, we should note, though, that given the potential implantation of the moral religion of reason within us all as created beings, the ideal of humankind can act *both* as practical guidance *and* as a source of at least some sense of how things are with regard to our moral destiny - we no longer need to choose between the two. So, we do not have to agree with Pasternack that there is nothing more to the *Urbild* than a mere symbolic representation that can act as a moral guide.

Given the possibility of the development of this ideal and its connection to our moral development, we can discern further aspects of what must be the case regarding the ideal. Kant sees the ideal as necessarily pointing towards ‘a human being willing not only to execute in person all human duties, and at the same time to spread goodness about him as far wide as possible through teaching and example, but also, though tempted by the greatest temptation, to take upon himself all sufferings, up to the most ignominious death, for the good of the world and even for his enemies’[[57]](#footnote-57). The divine moral order is the measure of all things, and when the individual plays their part in this order, we can say of them that they display a ‘*practical faith in this Son of God*’[[58]](#footnote-58). Such faith is achieved when we recognise and internalise this ideal as given by God, and as generating the concomitant duties and motivation to moral improvement, with the usual Critical provisos against hubris, either on the theoretical side (unjustified speculation) or the practical side (moral laxity). However, Kant’s positing of this ideal as revelation by God is not enough to secure his place within Christian tradition, for the latter holds a historical particularism regarding the historical figure of Jesus of Nazareth, which posits a unique event of the Incarnation and Resurrection centred around this figure, in terms of Kantian theology, an ‘outer revelation’ which can be measured for its veracity against the inner revelation of the ideal of humanity.

Kant considers the possibility of such an outer revelation in Section B of the first part of Part Two, entitled ‘The Objective Reality of this Idea’, where he at first seems to reject the historical particularism of Christianity by 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’[[59]](#footnote-59). As the moral law commands unconditionally, it simply does not matter whether or not there is a real, historical example that matches up to the ideal, or at least it *should* not matter to us. Apart from any particular historical experience or testimony we may or may not have, we have a duty regardless to emulate the personified idea of the good principle, from the very fact that such an idea is immediately available to us through our reason: ‘From the practical point of view this idea has complete reality within itself. For it resides in our morally-legislative reason. We *ought* to conform to it, and therefore we must also *be able to*’[[60]](#footnote-60). If an individual does require such an example, then they ‘thereby [confess] to [their] own moral *unbelief*, to a lack of faith in virtue which no [historically-based] faith. . . can remedy, for only faith in the practical validity of the idea that lies in our reason has moral worth’[[61]](#footnote-61). The inner revelation of the moral law, and the ideal of perfected humanity which can arise from the workings of our reason, should be enough to achieve the moral progress that is possible for all humankind. In fact, due to the inscrutability thesis we considered earlier, we could not even have an outer experience of the ideal, due to the fact that the ideal itself concerns an inscrutable disposition.

The historical particularism of Christianity centred on Jesus of Nazareth, then, is not morally necessary. However, it may be necessary in another sense. We are imperfect creatures, for whom the moral law is not enough, even though it should be, and as such, we require for motivation moral examples as something that our senses can latch on to. In a significant footnote, Kant 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[[62]](#footnote-62).

Given an assumption of an agenda in *Religion* that is perhaps not anti-Christian but at least wishes to move beyond Christianity, it is natural to suppose that he is denigrating the historical particularism of Christianity, taking it as simply a reflection of our morally tainted nature that we need myths such as those surrounding Jesus of Nazareth in order to aid our moral development, and thus as an aspect of Christianity that must be dropped at some point on the road to a pure, moral religion[[63]](#footnote-63). Perhaps Kuehn is correct that ‘Kant’s Jesus is no Christ’ and that ‘the existence of God and the immortality of the soul are the only essential ideas of moral religion’[[64]](#footnote-64), such that we can see Jesus of Nazareth as simply a useful moral example amongst potentially many others, and one that need play no necessary part in an idealised moral religion.

However, such an assumption is unwarranted, as we can posit God as allowing for the fact that the moral law and the ideal of humanity implanted within us are not enough for human beings in their fallen state, and acting accordingly in bringing about the Incarnation and Resurrection of Christ. There is no need, in other words, for us to read Kant here as arguing against the historical particularism of Christianity given the fact that the moral law should be enough: after all, as we saw before, Scripture itself should not be necessary for human beings to act well and cultivate a true faith, but given the reality of our fallen state, it is nevertheless required. Thus, it is only on the assumption that Kant has a particular anti-Christian agenda, and nothing inherent to the text, that we are lead to the conclusion that he is arguing against the historical particularism of Christianity.

Indeed, as Palmquist has shown, the passage we are considering can reasonably be construed as a defence of the traditional Christian understanding of the Incarnation[[65]](#footnote-65): for example, even though Kant remarks that the historical example of ‘a supernaturally begotten human being’ is ‘from a practical point of view. . . of no benefit to us’[[66]](#footnote-66), he is not rejecting the Incarnation, but rather ‘emphasizing that we must not lose sight of Jesus’ *humanity*’[[67]](#footnote-67), in case the example begins to seem too remote for us to possibly emulate[[68]](#footnote-68). Indeed, further on in the same section, Kant allows that the example of Christ (as both human and divine) be acceptable for moral faith: ‘a divinely disposed teacher’ could ‘speak truly of himself as if the ideal of goodness were displayed incarnate in him’[[69]](#footnote-69), as long as Jesus’ divinity is understood in line with the archetype that is available to all rational beings[[70]](#footnote-70).

Further, whilst we may not be able to decisively have experience of the moral disposition of Christ such that we can *know* that he is the incarnated Son of God, nevertheless we have room for faith in him as divine. Indeed, given that his example is not only compatible with moral faith, but indeed can encourage it, the historical particularism of Christianity can sit happily within moral religion, and we can also use the test of practical reason to offer justification for believing that God, given his moral status and desire to bring about the moral development of humankind, *would* offer us the example of Christ. Therefore, a recognisably orthodox Christology can be maintained within the Critical system, and Kant’s worries, expressed in *Religion*, regarding the misconstrual of the moral archetype and the example of Christ is just another facet of his project to combat moral laxity and religious superstition. From this analysis of Part Two of *Religion*, it is clear that Kant recognises the potential power of moral examples upon the individual, in particular the moral example presented by Christ. He is very keen to offer an account of the proper approach to Christ as revealed in Scripture and through the moral ideal, in a manner that links fruitfully with the moral development of both the individual and the community. In addition, as I have argued, such an approach does not take Kant beyond a recognisably orthodox approach to Christology, particularly with regard to the historical particularism of Christianity[[71]](#footnote-71).

As part of my wider argument for considerable Pietist influence upon *Religion*, it should be noted that the power of a moral example, through biographies and other stories, was taken into account by the Pietism that Kant was raised in, to the extent that Pietist literature was dominated by conversion accounts and other examples of living a godly life. Such literature not only sought to proclaim the engendering of true faith, but also the positive impact that faith has upon their lives[[72]](#footnote-72). Whilst the story of conversion and new faith was generally the main focus of the text, the way in which this new faith manifested itself in the individual’s life is important to give an objective grounding to the belief that grace has indeed been visited upon the individual in question.

Such a strategy was important in the face of the scepticism and doubts raised by the Enlightenment. Whilst conversion from other faiths and other denominations within Christianity was still important, the focus was very much upon the shift from a ‘nominal Christian’ to a true believer that has received God’s grace and has begun to live a better life (such a shift tended to be labelled *Bekehrung* rather than the standard *Konversion[[73]](#footnote-73)*). A ‘conversion moment’ like a *Bekehrung* was a notion that many orthodox Lutherans felt uncomfortable with, as it could potentially be linked to some sort of effort on the part of the individual that would somehow bring about grace. However, as Lutheranism developed, some began to posit a conversion moment as a beginning of ‘true faith’, such as Theophil Grossgebauer who introduced metaphors such as rebirth and regeneration connected with a definite moment of conversion[[74]](#footnote-74).

The widespread acceptance of *Bekehrung* in the Pietist tradition, and the concomitant importance of conversion narratives and moral examples for those connected with the tradition, are particularly associated with the biography of Francke, who famously had his doubts swept away in a sudden moment of realisation of the divine. The potential significance of moral examples in bringing together a community of ‘true believers’ is something that Kant, brought up in the Pietist tradition, will have had great experience of. However, the emphasis on conversion narratives within Pietism was something that a significant number of Pietists felt uncomfortable with: Francke himself expressed worries regarding self-deception and attempts at ‘forcing’ the process[[75]](#footnote-75). It is entirely plausible that Kant also saw a tendency amongst Pietist accounts of conversion towards the kind of superstition and delusion he naturally rebelled against, and thus shifted his focus purely onto the moral example of Christ, grounded in Scripture, rather than on the many disparate religious accounts of pious lives circulating Europe at the time. Nevertheless, the possible impact of a moral example upon individuals and wider communities will have stayed with him, and will have influenced his account of the moral archetype here in *Religion*.

So, following on from our earlier discussion on Scripture, we can see parallels between Kant’s treatment of Scripture, and his account of the ‘moral archetype’ and the historical example of Christ. Whilst Scripture should not be necessary for the moral development of humankind, it nevertheless is important for bringing religious communities together, such that they can operate harmoniously, in accordance with the moral law, and achieve genuine moral development. We are imperfect beings, who are easily led astray from the obligations that the moral law imposes upon us, and so an external source of revelation (in the form of Scripture) is required as a core component of religion that individual believers can coalesce around. However, in the same way that an overemphasis on the divinity of the moral example could lead to moral laxity and superstition, Scripture also needs to be handled sensitively, with a focus on the moral core of religion being revealed to true believers, rather than the attempt to set up morally lax approaches to divine service. Ultimately, though, there is a validation of Scripture as revelation, just as with the moral archetype. Given Kant’s apologetic approach, grounded in orthodox Christianity, focusing on the ‘moral core’ of Scripture does not necessarily imply a distancing from theological realism – indeed, the universalism of Scripture, if it accords with the moral law within all of us, can act as a sign of divine intervention, and thus can be taken to point towards the God of classical theism.

**Conclusion**

This paper has argued for a significant Pietist influence upon Kant’s *Religion*. Through an examination of the accounts of Scripture and moral examples in *Religion* and Pietist thought, I have argued that we can find considerable parallels such that we can reasonably argue for positive Pietist influence upon Kant’s later religious thought.

If it is the case that Kant continues to be influenced by Pietist ideas up until the later years of his philosophical writing, then this is of potentially wide significance. For one thing, it may point towards Kant wishing to stay within the bounds of Christian orthodoxy in his Critical system, in contrast to some who may attempt to read him as a deist or even atheist. Indeed, we could even potentially go on to read Kant’s Critical works, particularly those that are more focused on religious issues such as *Religion*, as consciously formulated defences of Christianity (though with a reforming zeal), and not as an attempt to replace Christianity with a new ‘religion of reason’. Thus, what may seem as something of a side-issue in Kant-scholarship, may turn out to offer a way of bringing about a wide-scale reinterpretation of Kant’s philosophy of religion and its impact upon the wider system of his Critical philosophy. Further to this, recognising the Pietist influence upon *Religion* may help us to understand what Kant is trying to do in the text: that is, what kind of project he has for the religious community, and society more generally. The reforming concerns of the Pietists may have had an impact upon Kant, and led him to use his philosophy to promote a unified Church, with a ‘priesthood of all’, in which all are united in a true moral faith.

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**Author biography**

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1. I wish to thank anonymous reviewers for this journal for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Arguing for Pietist influence upon *Religion* is not novel and I seek to expand upon previous efforts by other scholars in offering further evidence in support of this interpretive position. Palmquist, for example, in his recent commentary, has also explored the manner in which *Religion* in particular reflects aspects of Pietist thought: for example, he argues that Kant’s rejection of vicarious atonement and the importance of personal holiness, at the expense of mere confession of Christian belief, gives good reason to believe that ‘Kant can be taken as putting forward and affirming (at least in a qualified way) a version of Pietist theology, even in his old age’ (Palmquist, *Comprehensive Commentary on Kant’s Religion Within the Bounds of Bare Reason* (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2016), 2). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. References to Kant’s works are by the *Akademie-Edition* Vol. 1-29 of *Gesammelte Schriften*. An exception is made for the *Critique of Pure Reason*, which is referenced in the usual A/B format. All translations are taken from the relevant volume of the *Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992-). The volumes consulted are as follows: Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*. Edited and translated by Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Immanuel Kant, *Correspondence*. Edited and translated by Arnulf Zweig (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Immanuel Kant, *Religion and Rational Theology*. Edited and translated by Allen Wood and George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See 6:103. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Miller suggests the view that Kant suggests that human beings have no influence upon God (Miller, *Kant’s Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason: A Reader’s Guide* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 92-93). This is a potentially misleading way of putting things, as clearly for there to be any sort of sense in which God interacts personally with creation, he has to come under some sort of influence, including that of actions and thoughts of human beings. Kant’s key concern is delimiting *how* we can influence God (through morality alone), rather than questioning our ability to influence God *at all*. As a reviewer correctly pointed out, Kant includes a discussion of Pietism in *The Conflict of the Faculties* (1798), as part of a section entitled ‘General remark: On religious sects’ (see 7:54-59). Though this discussion shows some negativity on Kant’s part with regard to the Pietist approach to grace, this does not contradict my claims here regarding the use of Scripture and moral examples in *Religion*. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. 6:100. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. 6:105. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. 6:106. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. 6:156-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. See 6:107. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. 6:106. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. 10:175. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. 10:176. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. 10:179. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. 10:177-78. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. In Part Three, Section VI of *Religion*, Kant speaks of ‘religion of reason’ as a potential ‘expositor’ of Scripture, providing norms for interpretation that will be ‘*authentic* and valid for the whole world’ (6:114). As DiCenso notes, this implies that we have principles for the interpretation of Scripture, through the religion of reason, that are ‘publicly accessible to all persons, and they are universalizable in the manner of the moral law’ (James DiCenso, *Kant’s Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason: A Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 166). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. 10:177. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Anything ‘taken-to-be-true’ in these cases would certainly come under the rubric of persuasion, rather than conviction, for Kant. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, he distinguishes between ‘kat’ anthropon’ (according to the person) and ‘kat’ aletheian’ (according to the truth) (A739/B767), in the context of a discussion of the polemical use of reason in defending beliefs from a theoretical perspective. Such a defence may be possible kat’anthropon, with subjective validity for a particular individual, at the same time as that individual not being in an epistemic position to have a positive proof for the belief kat’ aletheian. An in-depth discussion on conviction and persuasion in Kant can be found in Andrew Chignell, ‘Belief in Kant’, *Philosophical Review* 116:3 (2007): 323-360, *passim*.. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. 10:178. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. 10:179. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. It is worth noting that Pasternack questions the very basis of scholarly discussion on the two experiments, in that he attributes it to a misreading of the term *Versuch* by interpreters, which has traditionally been taken as ‘experiment’, rather than, as he believes it should be, as ‘attempt’, and as such, Kant’s second attempt should be taken as referring to the second edition of *Religion* (Lawrence Pasternack, ‘The ‘Two Experiments’ of Kant’s *Religion*: Dismantling the Conundrum,’ *Kantian Review* 22:1 (2017): 107-131, at 124-127). Pasternack’s interpretation of the German text, and the further supporting evidence he offers, is by no means conclusive: for example, Kant’s use of the term *Versuch* in the title of his essay on theodicy, *Über das Mißlingen aller philosophischen Versuche in der Theodicee*, should certainly be taken as ‘trial’ or ‘experiment’, following the traditional rendering of the title as *On the miscarriage of all previous trials in theodicy*. It is worth briefly mentioning some of the recent competing interpretive lines on the ‘two experiments’ issue. One of the more positive readings of the two experiments, with regard to Kant’s continuing connection to the Christian tradition, which I broadly follow, is that suggested by Firestone and Jacobs, who argue that the first three Parts of *Religion* contain the first experiment, which ‘explicates the pure religion of reason based on a priori principles’, whilst Part Four contains the second, in which a purported revelation is tested ‘according to the sphere of reason to see whether it leads back to’ the pure religion of reason, in order to ‘show the presence of rational religion within the broader sphere of Christian doctrine’ (Firestone & Jacobs, *In Defense of Kant’s Religion* (Bloomington.: Indiana University Press, 2008), 114-115). Such an interpretation can be contrasted with some who wish to emphasise a merely moral interest in the Christian tradition, such as Hare, who characterises the second experiment as a ‘raiding party’ aimed at potentially stealing aspects of Christian doctrine for translation into the pure religion of reason (John Hare, *The Moral Gap: Kantian Ethics, Human Limits, and God’s Assistance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 40). [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. 6:12. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. The delineation between the rational core of one universal religion and various historical manifestations of it is echoed in a footnote from *Perpetual Peace*, where a connection is also made between there being one universal religion and one universal morality for all humanity – see 8:367n. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. 6:12. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. 6:13. Kant leaves open the possibility of the process of unification involving certain elements of historical religion being jettisoned (I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for offering clarification on this point). [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Lawrence Pasternack, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Kant on Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 79. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. 6:111. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. See 6:113. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. 6:112. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. See James K. Stein, ‘Philipp Jakob Spener (1635-1705)’, in *The Pietist Theologians: An Introduction to Theology in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. C. Lindberg (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 84-99, at 88. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. PD 96. The abbreviation PD is used for references to Spener, *Pia Desideria* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964). [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. See PD 92-95. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Indeed, in *Religion*, Kant refers to the ‘degrading distinction between laity and clergy’ (6:122), which will ideally be eventually jettisoned by the Church (my thanks to an anonymous reviewer for bringing this passage to my attention). [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. PD 89. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Spener does not have a detailed moral theory. Brown writes that he finds in the early Pietist literature ‘a *love theology*’ in which ‘[f]aith grasps God’s love through Christ which alone brings about holy actions’ (Brown, *Understanding Pietism* (revised edition) (Nappanee, IN: Evangel Publishing House, 1996), 21-22). There is little more detail to be found that might help us construct a systematic ethical theory from Spener. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. PD 63. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Ryoko Mori, ‘The Conventicle Piety of the Radicals’ in *A Companion to German Pietism, 1660-1800*, ed. Douglas Shantz (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 201-224, at 214. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. PD 64. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. PD 65. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. PD 66. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. PD 67. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. See Markus Matthias, ‘Pietism and Protestant Orthodoxy’ in *A Companion to German Pietism, 1660-1800*, ed. Douglas Shantz (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 17-49, at 28-32. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. A kind of conversion which Kant seems to point to in Part One of *Religion*, where he speaks of a revolution in the ‘mode of thought’ (6:47) that brings about a ‘subject receptive to the good’ (6:48), a kind of moral conversion that we can only understand as being effected through supernatural assistance. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. See Mori, ‘The Conventicle Piety of the Radicals’, 209-211, at 215. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. This is not to say that there are not some other differences between Kant and Pietist approaches to Scripture, such as the role of the philosopher in *The Conflict of the Faculties* (see e.g. 7:36-48 – my thanks for a reviewer for raising this point). However, the argument offered here allows for some (even substantial) differences between Kant and Pietism on Scripture, as I merely wish to argue that there is good evidence of strong influence upon Kant in the *Religion* on certain topics. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. As Moran notes, Kant holds that moral examples have a role to play in the moralisation of children, at the point where ‘pupils begin to discuss moral problems specifically’ and the ‘instructor slowly draws out of the student basic moral principles’ (Kate A. Moran, ‘Can Kant have an Account of Moral Education?’, *Journal of the Philosophy of Education* 43:4 (2009): 471-484, at 478-79). Though the use of examples is limited with regard to everyday moral decisions, the pedagogical role of such examples is significant for Kant with regard to practicing our moral judgement: O’Neill has pointed out that this places him in a significant moral tradition reaching back to the New Testament and the Ancient Greeks: ‘In viewing examples of moral (or immoral) action as schematic illustrations of moral theory or outlook, which helps to develop powers of judgement, Kant joins a long tradition which sees attending both to hypothetical cases and to the deeds and lives of others as ways in which to develop powers of discrimination about cases requiring action’ (Onora O’Neill, ‘The Power of Example’, *Philosophy* 61 (1986): 5-29, at 9). Building upon recent work on Kant’s account of pedagogy, Stroud argues that we can find the promotion of an ‘educative rhetoric’ in Kant’s works, which involves the proper use of moral examples such that they ‘[play] a non-manipulative role in cultivating children and adults from individuals possessing social prudence and skilfulness to agents instantiating Kantian autonomy’ (Scott R. Stroud, ‘Kant on Education and the Rhetorical Force of the Example’, *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 41:5 (2011): 416-438, at 418). Thus, as part of Kant’s theory of moral examples, the example of Jesus of Nazareth can play a key role in the moralisation of humankind, helping us to follow the moral law in a manner which preserves our autonomy, regardless of theological commitments. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. 6:60. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. 6:61. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Kant explores the distinction between inner and outer revelation in his *Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion*. Inner revelation is glossed as ‘God’s revelation to us through our own reason… a pure pure idea of the understanding, an idea of a most perfect being’, whereas outer revelation comes to us ‘through works, or through words’ (28:1117-8). Kant grants primary status to inner revelation, in that they are the ‘touchstone by which I recognize *whether an outer revelation is really from God*, and it must furnish me with proper concepts of him’ (28: 1117). [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. A568/B596. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Pasternack, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Kant*, 136. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Ibid., 135. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. 6:61. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. 6:62. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. 6:63. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. 6:64-65n. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Such an interpretation can be found, for example, in James DiCenso, *Kant’s Religion*,99-107. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. 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), 156-174 at 173. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Stephen Palmquist, *Kant’s Critical Religion* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 207-216. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. 6:63. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Palmquist, *Kant’s Critical Religion*, 212. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Further to this, Palmquist writes that the ‘*nature* of Jesus as the Christ is undoubtedly his main concern’ here (Palmquist, *Kant’s Critical Religion*, 210), and that Kant’s lack of explicit reference to Jesus or Christ can be taken as ‘a sign of deep respect for both the man and his teachings’ (Ibid, 210n). [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. 6:65-66. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for clarification on this point. A similar interpretive line regarding the divine nature of the ideal of humanity has also been taken by Firestone and Jacobs, who argue for a Platonic reading of Kant’s commitments here. They state that Part Two reveals a commitment to an idea of perfect humanity existing eternally within God: such a prototype ‘would be the ideal after which we must strive to model ourselves, and is representative of our divinely ordained moral *telos*… an ideal within God that possess a good and perfect disposition from eternity’ (Firestone & Jacobs, *In Defense of Kant’s Religion*, 158). Palmquist rightly points out that Firestone and Jacobs have been misled by Kant’s references to the Gospel of John, which often adopts Platonic imagery in regard to its Christological claims, and thus we can affirm Kant’s focus on the historical claims of Christianity here (Palmquist, *Comprehensive Commentary*, 163n). [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. As a further objection to the view proposed here, it has been suggested by a reviewer that we could still construe Kant’s treatment of Christ in the Christian tradition as having merely contingent value, and that other, similar traditions could have the same potential moral and social impact (thus, contradicting the historical particularism of Christianity). I would argue that Kant certainly does seem to hint (in Part Three, Division Two of *Religion*) that there is something unique concerning the historical establishment of the Christian church, even if such a claim could not be straightforwardly substantiated: he states that we cannot ‘begin the universal history of the Church… anywhere but from the origin of Christianity, which… effected a total revolution in doctrines of faith’ (6:127). Kant clearly thinks, then, that there is something truly historically ground-breaking regarding the origins of rational, moral religion in the beginnings of Christianity, centred on the figure of Jesus of Nazareth. It does seem that there is something special, for Kant, about the example and teachings of Christ, as offered by the Christian tradition, even though, as Kant states, ‘in the end religion will gradually be freed of all empirical grounds of determination’ (6:121). [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. See Matthias, ‘Pietism and Protestant Orthodoxy’, 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. See Strom, ‘Pietist Experiences and Narratives of Conversion’, in *A Companion to German Pietism, 1660-1800*, ed. Douglas Shantz (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 293-318, at 294. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. See Strom, ‘Pietist Experiences and Narrative of Conversion’, 296-298. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. See Strom, ‘Pietist Experiences and Narrative of Conversion’, 303-304, 310. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)