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THE PROBLEM OF REVELATION IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY GERMANY: WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO LESSING (continued)

by LEONARD DE MOOR

DR. DE MOOR continues his study of Lessing's contribution to the concept of revelation, with special reference to his "Education of the Human Race" (1780).

AT two specific points Lessing manifested this scientific spirit in the way he handled the problem of Christianity in his day. In opposition to the dogmatic intellectualism which, as he felt, attached itself to an unsound because uncritical attitude to history, he brought to bear upon religion a new historical approach. This, we shall see, constitutes one of the important elements of his revelation-concept. His *Education of the Human Race* (1780), his most mature work, completed only a year before his death, was the ripest expression of this way of viewing revelation, though in several other works the same theory was expounded.

The other important feature of his view of revelation is reflected in a protracted controversy with one of his most formidable opponents, Johann Melchior Goeze, chief pastor of the Lutheran Church in Hamburg, and also in his *Nathan the Wise* (1778-9). Here the issue was between ethics and bibliolatry.

Lessing's importance for the modern conception of revelation consists, partly, as we have shown, in having injected into theology the scientific spirit. This importance is further augmented by his promotion of a new historical method, and by his advocacy of the ethical emphasis in conceiving revelation. There may be some overlapping in dealing with these various features, because, after all, Lessing's idea of historical relativism lies at the basis of both his anti-intellectualism and his polemic against what he considered an undue veneration of the Bible. Yet, for convenience of treatment, it will be better to deal with each separately.

The new view of the relation of religious truth to history is reflected in an introductory paragraph of the *Rejoinder*. Lessing's

opponent Röss had criticized the anonymously published "fragment" of Reimarus on the story of the resurrection. Lessing now replied in the *Rejoinder*. But before proceeding with his formal answer, he summarized in a preliminary fashion three possible views of the relation of religious belief and history.

My anonymous writer contends: we cannot believe in the resurrection of Christ because the Evangelists' accounts thereof are contradictory. I replied: the resurrection of Christ may still be quite true, even if the accounts of the Evangelists thereof are contradictory. Now a third person comes and says: We must positively believe the resurrection of Christ, since the accounts thereof by the Evangelists are not contradictory.¹

Analysis of this passage shows that the anonymous writer (Reimarus) and his critic (Röss), though they come to opposite conclusions, share the common premise that the validity of the belief in the resurrection of Christ depends directly upon the trustworthiness of the accounts of this purported occurrence. The one believes the evidence to be contradictory, and so the doctrine incredible; the other believes the evidence to be consistent, and the doctrine consequently credible. But Lessing professes an utter indifference to the historical evidence, at least as far as either establishing or invalidating the doctrine. His belief is that these two magnitudes have nothing to do with each other. This is the new conception of history.

Nowhere does he develop this line of thought more clearly than in one of his polemical writings against Herr Direktor Schumann of Hannover, *Concerning the demonstration of the Spirit and of power* (1777). Here he professes not to deny that Christ performed miracles. But he insists that in so far as we possess historical reports that these things have happened (and as trustworthy accounts as history can possibly pass on to us) we are going too far when we seek on the basis of these reports to establish truths of reason (*Vernunftwahrheiten*). This the Church in its confessions has done. For on the basis of the record of the resurrection of Christ from the dead, it teaches that He is the Son of God. This represents an unwarranted jump from historical truth to another totally different class of truths, namely the metaphysical.

But if the point is now raised that Christ Himself claimed to be of the same substance with the Father, and that He was the Son of God, Lessing replies, "All well and good! if only that which Christ said were not itself also no more certain than historic-

¹ G. E. Lessing, *Sämtliche Schriften*, edited by Karl Lachmann (Götschen, Leipzig, 3rd edition, 1897), Vol. XIII, p. 22.

ally". But if anyone now says, "Yes, but what Christ said is more than historically true, for the inspired authors of the history assure it, and they cannot err", then, says Lessing, "I will reply 'but indeed, even that is only historically sure—that these authors were inspired and could not err. That is the horrid broad ditch that I cannot get across as often and as earnestly I have attempted the jump.'" He expresses the gist of this reasoning in the famous canon that "chance truths of history cannot become proof for necessary truths of reason".

This is the new philosophy of history: that historical events have no meaning whatsoever beyond themselves; that they can at the most serve a didactic purpose only for the immediate actors in and witnesses of the event or events in question, but not for anyone who stands separated therefrom, be it ever so slightly. It was not only legitimate but perfectly natural that on the basis of the disciples' own experiences of the resurrection of Christ, and the latter's claim, they should believe Him to have been the Son of God. But both of these are truths of the same order. Both are historical truths: that the disciples believed Christ to have risen, and that they believed that He claimed to be the Son of God because of His resurrection. But there is all the difference in the world between miracles which I myself have experienced as actually taking place, and miracles concerning which I have the report that they were performed.²

Orthodoxy and Neology, much as they differ in their conclusions, make the common mistake of believing that historical events can serve as attestation for theological or metaphysical beliefs. In truth there does not and cannot exist such an inner relationship. Anyone's fundamental conceptions of God and the world are those which all the factors conditioning his individual life constrain him to hold. But no report coming from the hoary past, or even the recent past, unless it has been a concrete personal experience, can be constitutive of my world-view. Nor can untrustworthiness of past historical events in the least invalidate one's belief in truths which, though they may originally have been believed to have arisen from a historical source, are after all the natural products of man's reason.

Consistent with this line of thought are the opening paragraphs of Lessing's notes appended to the "fragments". Here he warns his readers not to take his anonymous writer's admittedly un-

² *Über den Beweis des Geistes und der Kraft. An den Herrn Director Schumann, zu Hannover (1777), in Sämtliche Schriften (cf. n. 1), pp. 3-8.*

answerable theoretical arguments against the trustworthiness of Biblical accounts as equivalent to the destruction of Christianity.

The learned theologian might in the end be embarrassed thereby [by these arguments of Reimarus]. But need the Christian be? Certainly not he. . . . Of what concern are they to the Christian—this man's [Reimarus's] hypotheses, explanations and demonstrations? Is it not once for all there—that Christianity of which he has such a feeling of certainty, and in which he finds such blessedness? When the paralytic experiences the beneficial shocks of the electrical sparks; what concern is it of his whether Nollet or Franklin, or neither of them is right [in the theory proposed to explain the beneficial experience]?³

It is in the light of this new theory of historical relativism that we can understand how Lessing transcended both the dogmatic scepticism of deistic and neological free-thinkers and the orthodox confessionalism of his day. In opposition to the first class he became the advocate and defender of the age-old Christian beliefs of immortality, the Trinity, the Son's satisfaction, and even original sin.⁴ To be sure, he is no advocate of these doctrines in the orthodox sense (as truths explicitly taught by history), but as conceptions which the human mind would eventually have developed in the course of time. On the other hand, as antagonist of the second class, he preached the gospel of ultimate human self-sufficiency, under the disciplining experiences and vicissitudes of life, which would have compelled the emergence of these conceptions as truths of reason; thus making revelation but a crutch needed temporarily.

Let us apply this same key to an understanding of the relation which existed between Lessing's and Reimarus's thinking. It cannot be doubted that Lessing edited Reimarus's fragments because they made an assault upon the orthodox concept of revelation, and he rejoiced in the battle. Yet his views were not identical with those of his anonymous writer. As was pointed out earlier, he was at one with him in his negation: the rejection of the concept of revelation. But he was not at one with him in his positive views: in the complete rejection of objects of revelation. Reimarus had rejected these because they seemed to him to be contrary to reason. But Lessing held these objects of revelation as but truths

³ *Zusätze des Herausgebers zu den Fragmenten des Ungenannten*, paragraph 2; in G. E. Lessing (ed.), *Fragmente des Wolfenbüttelschen Ungenannten* (Sanders, Berlin, 4th edition, 1835), p. 410.

⁴ G. E. Lessing, *The Education of the Human Race*, E.T. by the Rev. Fred W. Robertson (Kegan Paul & Co., London, 3rd edition, 1881); see paragraphs 58-75 (cf. pp. 145 f. below).

of reason in antique form. He was no Naturalist, as Reimarus was, in spite of his enmity against revelation as traditionally understood. He continued to hold to significant parts of the traditional content of revelation. With the Naturalists he gave up the concept, but in distinction from them he still maintained his hold upon important traditional items.

This he did through a process of rationalizing. He interpreted these venerable truths as progressive levels of truths of reason. In this fashion there emerged a meaningful identity between reason and revelation. For there are no truths which are not destined eventually to become truths of reason, even if to start with they were not such.⁵ This is the key for the understanding of what is undoubtedly Lessing's clearest exposition of revelation, his *Education of the Human Race*. This is a small work, the first fifty-three paragraphs of which Lessing had appended to his notes on the fragments as early as 1777. He later completed it in a hundred paragraphs and published it as a separate work in 1780. It contains his philosophy of religion, which is at once also his philosophy of world-history. It was written in the style of Leibniz's theory of development, and was an application of the latter's system of a graded hierarchy of existences, according to the development of the monads.

The concept of revelation which Lessing desired particularly to transcend was that which viewed the content of revelation as something complete and absolute from the start, and divine because it possesses abstract perfection. Instead of this it was urged that revelation should be viewed as an educational process, conditioned by three principles: (1) an accommodation to the needs and stage of development of mankind; (2) a gradual progress, keeping pace with these needs; and (3) the final transcending of this stage of minority or childhood which requires a revelation, and the arrival of mature and independent manhood (age of reason).

It will be necessary to have Lessing's argument in his own words.⁶

That which education is to the individual, revelation is to the race. Education is revelation coming to the individual man; and revelation is education which has come, and is yet coming, to the human race (1 and 2). Education gives to man nothing which he might not educe out of himself; it gives him that which he might

⁵ *The Education of the Human Race*, paragraph 76.

⁶ The selected paragraphs from the *Education*, or parts of them, as here reproduced are from the E.T. The actual text is given, not summaries merely (cf. n. 4).

educe out of himself, only quicker and more easily. In the same way, too, revelation gives nothing to the human species, which the human reason left to itself might not attain; only it has given, and still gives to it, the most important of these things earlier. And just as in education, it is not a matter of indifference in what order the powers of man are developed, as it cannot impart to a man all at once; so was God also necessitated to maintain a certain order and a certain measure in his revelation (4 and 5).

Even if the first man were furnished at once with a conception of the One God; yet it was not possible that this conception, imported, and not gained by thought, should subsist long in its clearness. Hence arose polytheism and idolatry. And who can say how many millions of years human reason would have been bewildered in these errors, even though in all places and times there were individual men who recognized them as errors, had it not pleased God to afford it a better direction by means of a new impulse? (6 and 7). But when he neither could nor would reveal himself any more to each individual man, he selected an individual people for his special education; and that exactly the most rude and the most unruly, in order to begin with it from the very commencement. This was the Hebrew people (8 and 9).

But of what kind of moral education was a people so raw, so incapable of abstract thoughts, and so entirely in their childhood capable? Of none other but such as is adapted to the age of children, an education by rewards and punishments addressed to the senses. They knew of no immortality of the soul; they yearned after no life to come. But now to reveal these things to one whose reason had as yet so little growth, what would it have been but the same fault in the divine rule to hurry his pupil too rapidly, and boast of his progress, rather than thoroughly ground him? (16 and 17).

While God guided his chosen people through all the degrees of a childlike education, the other nations of the earth had gone on by the light of reason. The most part had remained far behind the chosen people. Only a few had got before them. And this too, takes place with children, who are allowed to grow up left to themselves: many remain quite raw, some educate themselves even to an astonishing degree. But as these more fortunate few prove nothing against the use and the necessity of education, so the few heathen nations, who even appear to have made a start in the knowledge of God before the chosen people, prove nothing against a revelation. The child of education begins with slow yet sure footsteps; it is late in overtaking many a more happily organized child of nature; but it does overtake it; and thenceforth can never be distanced by it again (20 and 21).

[So] the absence of those doctrines [unity of God and immortality] in the writings of the Old Testament proves nothing against their divinity. A primer for children may fairly pass over in silence this or that important piece of the knowledge or art which it expounds, respecting which the teacher judged that it is not yet fitted for the capacities of the children for whom he was writing (23 and 26).

As yet the Jewish people had revered in their Jehovah rather

the mightiest than the wisest of all Gods; as yet they had rather feared him as a jealous God than loved him: a proof this too, that the conceptions which they had of their eternal One God were not exactly the right conceptions which we should have of God. However, now the time was come that these conceptions of theirs were to be expanded, ennobled, rectified, to accomplish which God availed himself of a quite natural means, a better and more correct measure, by which it got the opportunity of appreciating him (34).

Instead of, as hitherto, appreciating him in contrast with the miserable idols of the small neighbouring peoples, with whom they lived in constant rivalry, they began, in captivity under the wise Persians, to measure him against the "Being of all Beings" such as a more disciplined reason recognized and revered. Revelation had guided their reason, and now, all at once, reason gave clearness to their revelation. This was the first reciprocal influence which these two (reason and revelation) exercised on one another (35-37).

The child, sent abroad, saw other children who knew more, who lived more becomingly, and asked itself, in confusion "Why do I not know that too?" Thus enlightened respecting the treasures which they had possessed without knowing it they returned [from exile] and became quite another people. Doubtless the Jews were made more acquainted with the doctrine of immortality among the Chaldeans and Persians. They became more familiar with it, too, in the schools of the Greek philosophers in Egypt (38, 40, and 42).

[But because] as yet there had been only previous exercisings, hints, and allusions, the faith in the immortality of the soul could naturally never be the faith of the entire people. In such previous exercitations, allusions, hints, consists the positive perfection of a primer; just as the above-mentioned peculiarity of not throwing difficulties or hindrances in the way to the suppressed truth, constitutes the negative perfection of such a book. [So] then you have all the properties of excellence which belongs to a primer for a childlike people, as well as for children (43, 47, and 50).

But every primer is only for a certain age. To delay the child, that has outgrown it, longer in it than it was intended for, is hurtful. For to be able to do this in a way in any sort profitable, you must insert into it more than there is really in it, and extract from it more than it can contain. You must look for and make too much of allusions and hints; squeeze allegories too closely; interpret examples too circumstantially; press too much upon words. This gives the child a petty, crooked, hairsplitting understanding: it makes him full of mysteries, superstitions; full of contempt for all that is comprehensible and easy. The very way in which the Rabbins handled their sacred books! The very character which they thereby imparted to the character of their people! A better instructor must come and tear the exhausted primer from the child's hands. Christ came! That portion of the human race which God had willed to comprehend in one educational plan, was ripe for the second step of education (51-54).

And so Christ was the first certain practical teacher of the immortality of the soul. The first practical teacher. For it is one thing to conjecture, to wish, and to believe the immortality of the soul,

as a philosophic speculation: quite another thing to direct the inner and outer acts by it (58 and 60).

[The New Testament Scriptures] for seventeen hundred years past . . . have exercised human reason more than all other books, and enlightened it more were it only through the light which the human reason itself threw into them. It was also highly necessary that each people for a period should hold this book as the 'ne plus ultra' of their knowledge. For the youth must consider his primer as the first of all books, that the impatience to finish this book may not hurry him on to things for which he has, as yet, laid no basis. And one thing is also of the greatest importance even now. Thou abler spirit, who art fretting and restless over the last page of the primer, beware! Beware of letting thy weaker fellow-scholars mark what thou perceivest afar, or what thou art beginning to see! (65, 67, and 68).

For instance, the doctrine of the trinity. How if this doctrine should at last, after endless errors, right and left, only bring men on the road to recognize that God cannot possibly be One in the sense in which finite things are one, that even his unity must be a transcendental unity, which does not exclude a sort of plurality? And the doctrine of original sin. How, if at last everything were to convince us, that man standing on the first and lowest step of his humanity, is not so entirely master of his actions as to be able to obey moral laws! And the doctrine of the Son's satisfaction. Now, if at last, all compelled us to assume that God, in spite of that original incapacity of man, chose rather to give him moral laws, and forgive him all transgressions in consideration of his Son, i.e. in consideration of the self-existent total of all his own perfections, compared with which, and in which, all imperfections of the individual disappear, than not to give him those laws, and then to exclude him from all moral blessedness, which cannot be conceived of without moral laws? the cultivation of revealed truths into truths of reason is absolutely necessary if the human race is to be assisted by them. When they were revealed they were certainly no truths of reason, but they were revealed in order to become such (73, 74, and 76).

Education has its goal, in the race, no less than in the individual. That which is educated is educated for something. Or, is the human species never to arrive at this highest step of illumination and purity? Never? It will come! it will assuredly come! the time of the perfecting, when man, the more convinced his understand feels itself of an ever better future, will nevertheless not be necessitated to borrow motives of action from this future; for he will do the right because it is right, not because arbitrary rewards are annexed thereto, which formerly were intended simply to fix and strengthen this unsteady gaze in recognizing the inner, better rewards of well-doing. It will assuredly come! the time of a new eternal gospel, which is promised us in the primer of the New Testament itself (81, 82, 85, and 86)!

The very same way by which the race reaches its perfection, must every individual man—one sooner, another later—have travelled over. Have travelled over in one and the same life? Surely not

that! But why should not every individual man have existed more than once upon this world? Why should I not come back as often as I am capable of acquiring fresh knowledge, fresh expertness? Do I bring away so much from one, that there is nothing to repay the trouble of coming back? (93, 94, and 98).

There are two views which struggle in this writing.⁷ And the real question is where Lessing means to lay the main emphasis—where he intends the main stress of the discourse to fall. The content of revelation is throughout human, historical, subject to development, not absolute, but finite. Yet the form, on the contrary, is supernatural: a special and particular arrangement superintended by God.

Yet it soon becomes obvious that this externally supernatural form is quite empty and superfluous when the content is so entirely human and conditioned by human needs and human receptivity for education. The concept of revelation, even though it is allowed to remain standing externally, has been internally hollowed out. In place of the perfect revelation we get a perfectible one. This amounts to nothing less than the surrender of the traditional concept of revelation. For, as Lessing developed it, history, because it is a progress from lower to higher levels of truth, has no need of that concept of revelation which still thinks in terms of an intrusion into the human sphere of a super-historical or supra-rational truth. Everything is rational because that is the driving force of reality.

Because revelation, viewed from the standpoint of content, is not an activity which brings to mankind an absolute, eternally-valid body of truth, but is rather an educational process which accommodates itself to the powers of apprehension and comprehension of a child-like humanity—how superfluous any externally supernatural contrivance by God is seen to be. God educates mankind wholly from within out. It takes place through the heart and spirit of mankind as man reacts to his world. The reaction contains the revelation.

As Leibniz had also done, Lessing still asserts the *supra naturam* in distinction from the *contra naturam*, but locates the meaning of the supernatural arrangement of things in the temporal anticipation, in the acceleration of the spiritual process of development. Nothing is revealed to mankind to which it might not have attained through natural development. But with the help of revelation it comes earlier and more easily.

⁷ Cf. Carl Schwarz, *Lessing als Theologe* (Pfeffer, Halle, 1854), pp. 202-210.

Nevertheless, this means of acceleration, according to Lessing's own statement, shows itself to be very impracticable, and hence is in reality superfluous. For those peoples who are left to themselves at many points far out-distance the Hebrew people who have revelation. Indeed, it is only when, during the exile, they came into contact with the Chaldeans and Persians that the Jews became really educated. For now they come into possession of the idea of immortality. They construct their monotheism in its purity. Now, for the first time, they come to understand their own primer, and come to the insight that these people really know much more than they do and live much more intelligently than they. In this fashion it becomes obvious that for Lessing a superhistorical revelation in the older sense of the term has been discarded.

In the comments attached to the fragments, in which it might have appeared that he raised himself up as the protector of Orthodoxy, his real concern was only to ward off the hatred and mockery which free-thinking radicals were directing against all organized religions. His concern was not to demonstrate the supernatural origin of religions, and of Christianity in particular. His real concern there, as in the *Education*, was to vindicate a conception of the divine education of mankind and the gradual progress of mankind, guided by an immanent providence. The special choice, however, of a special people—this particularism of the *Education* was the "hypothesis" concerning which he said " 'that he projects it only to have the satisfaction of again withdrawing it' " ⁸

Mendelssohn, Lessing's most intimate friend, is quoted as having said:

Lessing's dependence upon natural religion has gone so far, that because of his enthusiasm therefor, he can tolerate no revealed religion. He believed that he was able to blow out all the lights, in order to let the full illumination stream forth undivided from the light of reason.⁹

There exists an unfinished essay which the Lessing philologists assign to the period previous to 1760, thus antedating the *Education* by about twenty years, entitled *Concerning the Origin of Revealed Religion*.¹⁰ This work leaves us in no doubt about Lessing's aver-

⁸ Quoted by Schwarz, *op. cit.*, p. 205, from Lessing's correspondence, in a letter under date of April 6, 1778.

⁹ Quoted by Schwarz, *op. cit.*, pp. 205-6.

¹⁰ *Über die Entstehung der geoffenbarten Religion*, in *Lessings Werke* (Bongs Goldene Klassikerbibliothek, Deutsches Verlagshaus Bong & Co., Berlin, 1925), Vol. 23, p. 194.

sion against organized religions as bearers of revealed truth, or rather his patience with them as necessary stages in man's education, but as crutches eventually to be left behind. The essence of religion he here tells us is to acknowledge a God, to seek to form the most worthy concepts of Him, and to have regard for these most worthy concepts in all our actions and thoughts (1). Every person possesses a natural predisposition toward and duty to develop this religion (2). Hence religion is "natural". But since the capacities of individuals predisposing them to the acknowledgement of religion and to activity in accordance therewith vary, the connection of religion with the state demands that the disadvantage accruing from this diversity be obviated (3). In this way, through an agreement on certain matters and concepts there arose a community religion, and in the interest of its authority the same character that natural religion had as an intrinsic possession of necessity had to be conferred upon it (4). This took place through the claim of the founders of historical religions that the conventional features of those religions as well as those of natural religion, had their source in God. Only it was said that this proceeded by the indirect or mediating pathway of the founder himself, whereas one's natural religion came to be directly shared by everyone in the possession of the faculty of reason (6). Hence the organized religions received their sanction through being represented as revealed. And so, in the end, revealed religions present themselves as but expedients: they are modifications of natural religion in accordance with the natural or accidental constitution of the given State. Religion's inner truth consists in its indispensable character, and this is as prominent in one organized religion as in another (7). But objectively all organized religions are equally false, for they rest upon an historical "claim", they weaken and suppress the essential, namely the religion of reason. There is therefore not an essential difference between one organized religion and another. The best organized religion is the one which contains the fewest conventional additions to natural religion, and checks least its good effects, namely its exercise of the function of reason (8-11).

In this way Lessing removed the hostility against religion which was so wide-spread among the free-thinkers of the eighteenth-century. He did not look upon religion, as most of them did, as having arisen from purely political motives, and as having been foisted upon the masses for political advantage. Instead of deliberate trickery having been exercised, each founder burned

with enthusiasm for this or that aspect of spiritual truth. The religion of each of these founders has done something to idealize common existence, to strengthen the sacred claims of duty. There is a divinely ordered necessity in the progress of mankind, and it is this which saves Lessing from pure Naturalism. The divine is the subjective tendency in all things, expressing itself in human progress, which is the divine education of the race.

But, as is obvious, the supernatural character of revelation is mere appearance. Lessing speaks of it in exoteric fashion. What the *Education* describes under the figure of revelation, we must understand as immanent rational development upon a more primitive level, since man still entertained the erroneous conception of special divine intrusions. And yet, though Lessing was one with his predecessors in his views of the pure rational content of the concept of revelation, he went beyond them in stating it in the traditional way. And for this reason he was in the real sense of the term a Rationalist.

This conception had not been reached by the English Deists nor the German Neologues. The common practice of using the terms *Aufklärung* and "Rationalism" as synonymous is justified only if we speak in a loose sense. For by Rationalism, in the strict sense of the term, we ought to understand only the third period of the Enlightenment—after Wolffianism and Neology. And English and French Deism, which antedated the *Aufklärung*, is more properly classified as Naturalism. With Lessing, however, the last phase of the Enlightenment had its fertile beginning. If we do not prefer to think of him as the founder of Rationalism, we may nevertheless call him the first Rationalist. For with him began the movement finally to exterminate that Aristotelian concept of revelation which looked upon the supernatural which is mediated as a transcendent and superhistorical reality. The method whereby it was done was, as we saw, by completely transforming these transcendently-conceived Christian traditions into truths of reason, while in name they were allowed to stand.

Lessing's importance for our modern problem of revelation ought to be clear, at least in two of its phases: for its advocacy of the scientific spirit, in opposition to dogmatism, and for the new sense of the historical and its revelatory significance. In Lippmann and Dewey we discovered the modern predisposition to find revelation, if it exists at all, in immanent world-processes rather than looking for it, even in its ultimate reference, to some extramundane Being or reality. It has been the purpose of this chapter so far to show how in Lessing's thought life there were epitomized

all the elements of the reaction against such a conception of the supernatural and its attendant revelation concept as dominated not only the medieval, but also the early Protestant world-view. Here we have the fountain head of modern theological thought.

The critical problem, bequeathed to us by Lessing, is whether revelation of the deity can be spoken of at all when, under his lead, men now frankly confine their conceptions of deity and his self-disclosure to the immanent processes of nature and their effect upon man's reason in this stream of history. Is this the way God presents Himself? And if so how? Let us remember that there can be no talk of revelation without keeping inviolate the divine content which is to be mediated.

Hence, there are two questions which Lessing left us as the result of his revolutionary view of history. When he selected "the healthy reason", taught by the discipline of history as the bearer of revelation, he raised the epistemological problem in its modern form: how can reason serve as the channel of revelation? And since the reason can by definition contain or entertain only a human content, he also unavoidably raised the modern form of the ontological problem: in what sense, if any, can the human reason serve as the locus of the divine?

We would go astray in seeking from Lessing himself an answer to these questions. It was he who raised them. But they have ever since constituted the central problem of Protestant thinkers. We are still in the throes of that struggle precipitated in the eighteenth century. Our present object has been to show how the problem in its present dimensions began to emerge back here in Lessing's thought.

(To be concluded)

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