# 1

# The Rational Philosophical Consciousness

## *Introduction: True Religion, Desacralization, and Secularization*



Peter Brown has written, "The quality of a religious system depends less on its specific doctrine than on the choice of problems that it regards as important."[1] For the early Protestant Reformed thinkers engaged in the following pages, one issue identified and much debated was the role of material components in the practice and worship of true religion. Calvin elevated this issue into the company of the better known Protestant doctrine of *sola fide*, where the two are judged as the distinctives of Protestantism. Like many other Protestant leaders, Calvin viewed the Lutheran Reformation as leaving unfinished the work of reforming Christian worship. Moreover, much of the Reformed position on the practice of true religion echoed strongly in Zwingli's contention that nothing having to do with the senses could support a spiritual purpose. How the Reformed thinkers evaluated many traditional material components of Christian worship like ritual, icons, and religious art, among other devotional objects and practices, reflects and bears out a largely negative estimation of the value of material components in the practice of true religion.

Furthermore, among a variety of Protestant Reformers, a relationship seems evident in comparing their views of the Eucharist to the place of religious art in religious worship: a parallel pointing to material components of worship as the crucial problem identified in the practice of true religion. One of the more striking parallels to be found among early Protestant Reformers is that, without any significant exception known to me, a

1. Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 393.

Reformer with a "high" or "low" view of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist will affirm a correspondingly high or low view of the value of the material elements of religious devotion. One need only compare the views of Luther, Karlstadt, Zwingli, and Calvin to see this similarity, indicating that a common factor in both issues concerns what I refer to in this work as "materiality." Both the Eucharist and the aesthetic have components making or requiring use of the senses, matter, the physical, the tangible, and corroborate that materiality or sensual components have small place in this conception of true religion.[2]

I will compare the views of these sixteenth-century Reformed thinkers on "true religion" to the "philosophical consciousness," the latter a term coined by George Hegel, the nineteenth-century German philosopher. The term was used by Hegel to differentiate between it and a religious mindset or consciousness. For Hegel, religious consciousness and practice attaches to material things—ritual, sacred objects, statuary, art—while the philosophical consciousness frees itself from such things by transcending the need for them. The transition from the religious consciousness to the philosophical also reflects Hegel's view of positive advance in human history; religion is not lost in the philosophical consciousness, but rather realized or consummated by it.

My intent in appropriating Hegel's distinction and evaluation is to frame the arguments of some of the early Reformed theologians over the vexing problem of material components in Christian worship, while offering objections to both Hegel and the Reformed theologians. I will contend that the particulars of the notion of "true religion" by the Reformed theologians bear resemblance to Hegel's spiritualizing philosophical consciousness that impugns the value of religious practice tied to "things." I will argue that in this conception, the path of true religion turns devotees into rational philosophers of a sort, while also arguing that this denuding transformation is effected at significant spiritual expense to Christian worship.

2. Michalski, *Reformation*, 168: "Let us start from the end, from the statement that as a rule the opponents of the Real Presence of Christ in the sacrament were supporters of religious aniconism. During the Reformation this pattern was very clear: the views of Luther as a supporter, though moderate, of religious art and of the Real Presence collide here directly with the iconophobia of Karlstadt, Zwingli and Calvin, all of who denied (though in different ways) the Real Presence of Christ in the Host." Similarly, Aston, *England's Iconoclasts*, 7: "It was with natural consistency that those who were most extreme in denying transubstantiation also dealt most radically with images."

Most important to my argument is to indicate how particulars of the Reformed effort to live and practice true religion moved the devotee to work at appreciable distance from the human senses, in the desire for a kind of mental union with God. Mind has a larger role to carry when material components and practices are deemed largely unfit to carry spiritual purpose. By their attenuation or exclusion, a type of monism or mysticism could have resulted from this anthropological and theological shift, but oddly or not, neither came forth in the Reformed tradition, though I would contend, the former does with Hegel. What did follow in the Reformed tradition, nevertheless, comes close to the philosophical consciousness, while also moving the Western world of the sixteenth century closer to the rational modernity of subsequent, though largely secular, centuries.

In Edmund Morgan's book on John Winthrop, *The Puritan Dilemma*, Morgan identified the "dilemma" in his title as the Puritan desire to live in the world without in effect being part of it, because the ultimate calling of the Puritan was to God. The predicament of "true religion" spoken of in these pages, however, ensues by subjugating the senses and the material world in the course of a religious devotion straining to overcome the material components and practices of religious life by largely ignoring or ridding the religious life of them.

The secularization of the West, which in time followed the Reformation critique of the medieval and Catholic view of God and the world, had benefit of the earlier Protestant critique of false religion. The critique of false religion provided important historical impetus to the later, but more severe, secular critique of things religious. These streams of critique of things religious, though obviously different in origin, have prompted the consideration of perhaps a familial congruence between two apparently cultural opposites—one seeking to reestablish in correct form, true religion, and the other attempting to largely remove religion from culture.

A counterargument will insist upon an absolute dichotomy between the two by countering with strong denial of any such relationship between the religious Reformation and nascent modern secular rationalism. Such a contention has plausibility, for the overt conflict with Catholic medieval philosophy mounted by the early Protestant Reformers seems to strongly undermine the suggestion of possible alignment of shared principles between rational religious reformers and conspicuously secular rationalists. The hostility of the latter secularism against religion would seem to provide

little possible bridge to the prior historical Reformation effort at reforming wrong religion into right or true religion.

Putting the two in the same direction, however, might be conceivable by interpreting the Protestant Reformation as both slowing and propelling the later secular drift of modern culture. Moreover, in historical hindsight, we not infrequently observe the unintended consequences of an idea spawning unexpected, and even hostile, offspring. Not a few historians have argued for the only apparently odd parallel suggested here, while providing some cogent specifics of the Reformation changes capable of providing some links for a later secular culture that will find itself at odds with some of its Christian, but particularly, Reformed paternity.

As one example, Thomas Molnar, in his book *The Pagan Temptation*, reflects upon the promise, but in addition, the cost of desacrilization in Christianity. He writes, "The tremendous achievement of Christianity, but one that also involved great risks, was the revolutionary proposition of desacralizing the universe and the corresponding concentration of all that is sacred in God."[3] While Molnar attributes much of the impetus of desacralization to Protestantism, in *Sources of the Self*, Charles Taylor further locates some of the strongest push for desacralization within the Protestant Calvinist desire to foster true religion:

> But Protestants and particularly Calvinism classed it [sacralization] with idolatry and waged unconditional war on it. It is probable that the unremitting struggle to desacralize the world in the name of an undivided devotion to God waged by Calvin and his followers helped to destroy the sense that the creation was a locus of meanings in relation to which man had to define himself. Of course the aim of this exercise was very far from forging the self-defining subject, but rather that the believer depends alone on God. But with the waning of Protestant piety, the desacralized world helped to foster its correlative human subjectivity, which now reaped a harvest sown originally for its creator.[4]

As indicated by Taylor, the Reformed desacrilization of nature comes about in the effort at true religion, for in such conception, religious devotion must be jeasously guarded and deemed without competition from anything not God. The medieval grandeur of the things of God—so plentiful so as to be distracting—presented to Protestant critics something like clutter or

3. Molnar, *The Pagan Temptation*, 99.
4. Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 215.

spectacle while detracting from God: the rightful, sole object of worship. Many Protestants judged medieval worship and piety as so much shadow of real things that had already come, though unbeknownst to Catholics gazing as if expectant of something yet to be. In Protestant estimation, Catholic piety had buried the Christian Gospel underneath a suffocating and materialistic religion. Such things as material things were therefore subjected to varying but often severe critiques among Protestant antagonists until, under the severest criticism, few material things had much chance of permitted or continued usage.

This mountain of Protestant critique of medieval Catholic piety has been laboriously studied—though not exhaustively—and so it is far from new to judge the Protestant transformation of religious life and worship as not issuing in great part from a Protestant rational critique of that piety. But paired with the common observation of rationalism inhering in the Protestant critique, it is also common—though less argued than assumed—to believe, along with this, that the strong experiential emphasis in Protestantism diffuses the propensity for rationalism. However, noticeably lacking is an attempt to delineate the blending of these elements. Thus, there is a largely unspecified framework for mapping the rationalist constraints of a Protestant piety insistent on the proper, that is to say, personal or subjective relationship to God. Though this uneasiness between rationalism and the trademark experientialism of Protestantism has been noted by various scholars—some of whose work I will engage in the following pages—few have significantly detailed the nature of this uneasy piety.

My approach in this work is decidedly exploratory with reference to this issue; it is meant to open this issue and subject to new interpretations, rather than cover the subject in any definitive way. My contention, however, is that the aversion to things material is the rudder for understanding much Protestant rational critique of "false religion."

## The Self and God

In the more strenuous Protestant forms of the search for true religion, there may be strong resistance to ritual and form in religious worship because of the belief that the human subject must stand by his own subjective understanding in order to truly commune with the object of objective or true worship: God. Religious objects will require good reason for inclusion in this very guarded religious devotion, with the end result often being that

the only "helps" for the individual are those the individual commands. That is, the requirement of spiritual authenticity or truthfulness may preclude or separate even the most basic staples of Protestant worship from the worshipper, for a required subjective truthfulness is requisite to their proper use. Evelyn Underhill has perceptively observed as a rigorous example of this notion of authenticity, that in Quakerism, "Here the intense Puritan suspicion of form and demand for a personal religious sincerity [is] so drastic that no word may be said or sung which is not true for each individual worshipper, is pushed to its logical consequence; in the rejection of any kind of organized or premeditated service, even the use of hymns, as likely to involve the violation of 'sensitive truthfulness,' in those who sing but may not always mean them."[5]

This conception of true religion fixes upon the requirement of understanding by the devotee and views that understanding as being impeded, or at least, not advanced by elements of material worship, with communal worship presenting the most difficulty for personal truthfulness. In that context, a worshipper may simply be going along with the crowd when he is one among many in the arena or in the congregation. Therefore, the effort for true worship may drive the communicant into a corner or a closet. Now the focus will be on God and the self, with matter out of the way, though perhaps hardly noticed in its absence.

The paradox of this religious situation is that though beginning with a serious desire to be worshipping God alone and having scoured and rid the path of devotion of impediments, it has as a consequence given pointed attention to the worshipping subject's fittedness for worship. Because of this situation, the subject can now on occasion occupy center stage in the effort to prepare for the worship of God. Thus, for example, it is no accident that the Reformed Puritans, largely critical of the value of art for religious advancement, should be the ones to write, and in fact largely founded, the literary genre of the spiritual autobiography. The aspiring religious subject, however unintended, may now begin to interfere in the desire to not have interfering or distracting material objects, but only God at the center. However, because it is easier to see the self than God, particularly with all "obstacles" removed, the self may be looming larger than ever. In trying to see something other than itself by removing all but the self and the intended God, the subject may see only the self. The bare physical walls of houses of worship, though intended for purposes of "undivided devotion to God,"

5. Underhill, *Worship*, 308.

may have the effect of throwing the individual by default upon himself and what resources he commands as his own. This, at least in part, is because the only permitted resource for this finite spirit is the desensualized mind suspicious of material components in spiritual worship.

We might observe that in this effort at "true religion," the focus intended for the object of proper worship, God, turns rather toward a Cartesian-like "turn to the subject" of the next century. Whereas the later secularism of modernity beyond the believing Descartes would argue for independence and autonomy with reference to persons, by contrast, in the Reformed perspective, focus is in earnest directed to God by clearing the required vacancy between God and the worshipper of superfluous things. In this conception, religious concentration is impeded by clutter, or worse, idolatrous clutter. But in the clearing of the space between subject and object to provide enhanced attention and focus toward the object, and in order to "depend on God alone," the objects cleared away in the space between object and subject—and in my study these are material objects—are deemed to serve little to no favorable purpose for religious devotion. This has the radical effect, however, and again, of throwing the worshipper on himself.

However, resistance to negotiating the path to God through any human inventions—as frequently charged by the Reformed thinkers—seems a fundamental resistance toward humanness in the path toward God. In this conception, the human may be anthropologically remade in the likeness of the rational philosopher in order to truly worship God. Meanwhile, the resistance toward humanness ironically causes the human subject to creep to the front, as this aspiring seed for looming modern subjectivity remains firmly planted because the proper spiritual disposition for the subject person is so insisted upon, that in modernity the subject may attract more attention than the sought-for object or God who is deemed no longer there. Yet the reverse was the intention. How could this happen within the Reformed tradition? By way of answer, Killian McConnell has given some indication:

> For Calvin God is always a subject and never an object. In resisting idolatry he is also resisting the attempt to impersonalize or objectify faith, always a danger where religious activity is bound up with things. Personalism is of the essence of the Gospel and without it there is no true faith and no true fellowship with Christ. True knowledge of God is itself personal because persons, God and man, are involved; it is experience because the involvement

> is not just intellectual or aesthetic apprehension of an abstraction. True knowledge of God demands and presupposes commitment.[6]

When McConnell makes reference to the Reformed resistance to "impersonalize or objectify faith," he means an undesirable conception of religious objectivity such that the unredeemed subject could utilize it, thus, the necessity of the requirement of "personalism." To exercise faith without the required and pronounced personal relationship to God prominent in Protestantism is illicit. If a religious object provides power to subjects independently of themselves or their subjective state, in the same way, for example, that an inoculation is effective irrespective of the subjective state of the inoculated, then faith can be exercised in the same objective manner, though wrongly. As we will note later, this is one of the primary arguments of prophetic religion against sacramental religion: the religious subject or person in sacramentalism may operate outside of and not within the constraints of the sacramental power of the object that the devotee or subject nonetheless uses and therefore abuses. The subject may use the object without coming to terms with the conditions of rightful object use. Relatedly, the religious subject is oftentimes perceived in Protestantism to derive only as much religious benefit as the subject can understand or negotiate; thus, the *Latin* mass is as unintelligible to the religious subject as the mass itself is idolatrous. According to Rudolf Otto, this shift to a subject-predominated religious life occurs when "The conceptual and doctrinal—the ideal of orthodoxy—began to preponderate over the inexpressible, *whose only life is in the conscious mental attitude of the devout soul*."[7] The importance of the material components of worship are sidelined for the elevated mind lifted above matter.

Another understanding of Reformed Protestant reticence toward the material and sensual elements of religion locates the Reformed judgment of the value of sensual media as an aid in worship, in terms of a genealogy and theology rooted in the prior Hebrew prophetic religious tradition.[8] This is

6. McConnell, *John Calvin*, 118.

7. Otto, *Idea of the Holy*, 108. (Italics mine.)

8. Max Weber is a good example. In *The Protestant Ethic*, 105, he writes: "That great historic process in the development of religions, the elimination of magic from the world which had begun with the old Hebrew prophets and, in conjunction with Hellenistic scientific thought, had repudiated all magical means to salvation as superstition and sin, came here to its logical conclusion. The genuine Puritan even rejected all signs of religious ceremony . . . There was not only no magical means of attaining the grace of God . . . Combined with the harsh doctrines of the absolute transcendentality of God and

done with good reason. Calvin, for example, in his essay "The Necessity of Reforming the Church," makes a strong tie between his sixteenth-century reforms for true religion with the Hebrew prophetic religious tradition:

> In regard to doctrine, I maintain that we make common cause with the prophets. For, next to idolatry, there is nothing for which they rebuke the people more sharply than for falsely imagining that the worship of God consisted in external show. For what is the sum of their declarations? That God dwells not, and sets no value on ceremonies considered only in themselves, that he looks to the faith and truth of the heart, and that the only end for which he commanded, and for which he approves them, is, that they may be pure exercises of faith, and prayer, and praise. The writings of all the prophets are full of attestations to this effect. Nor, as I have observed, was there anything for which they laboured more. Now, it cannot, without effrontery, be denied, that when our Reformers appeared, the world was more than ever smitten with this blindness. It was therefore absolutely necessary to urge men with these prophetical rebukes, and draw them off, as by force, from that infatuation, that they might no longer imagine that God was satisfied with naked ceremonies, as children are with shows.[9]

Calvin thus sees his reform indebted to his prophetic predecessors. Particularly, he is emphatic that worshippers not presume their whole duty to God accomphlished in "naked ceremonies," but Calvin rarely concedes much value in ceremonies. Like other Reformed thinkers, Calvin presumes that truth is optimally encountered for the worshipper in its barest or "naked" form. Ceremonies weaken and dilute the perception of being in the presence of truth, and therefore afford the worshipper chance to exchange his duty to God in true worship for the motions and glitter of ceremony.

The modern rationalist tradition of the West rising after the Reformation—though of course with mounting secular inclinations—not infrequently concurred to a great degree about the presumed but largely mistaken need for the material world for spiritual purpose. Typical of this viewpoint is a notable passage from Immanuel Kant's 1790 *Critique of Judgement*:

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the corruption of everything pertaining to the flesh this inner isolation of the individual contains, on the one hand, the reason for the entirely negative attitude of Puritanism to all the sensuous and emotional elements in culture and in religion, because they are of no use toward salvation and promote sentimental illusions and idolatrous superstitions. Thus it provides a basis for a fundamental antagonism to sensuous culture of all kinds."

9. Calvin, *NRE* 6: 477/Beveridge, *Tracts and Treatises*, Vol. I: 151.

> Perhaps there is no sublimer passage in the Jewish Law than the command, "Thou shalt not make to thyself any graven image, nor the likeness of anything which is in heaven or in earth or under the earth," etc. This commandment alone can explain the enthusiasm that the Jewish people in their moral period felt for their religion, when they compared themselves with other peoples, or explain the pride which Mohammedanism inspires. The same is true of the moral law and of the tendency of morality in us . . . It is quite erroneous to fear that if we deprive this [tendency] of all that can recommend it to sense, it will only involve a cold, lifeless assent and no moving force or emotion. It is quite the other way; for where the senses see nothing more before them, and the unmistakable and indelible idea of morality remains, it would be rather necessary to moderate the impetus of an unbounded imagination, to prevent it from rising to enthusiasm, than through fear of the powerlessness of these ideas to seek aid for them in images and childish ritual.[10]

This passage from Kant, the modern rational moralist, minimizes the role of the sensual element of religion while tolerating religious practice for the moral element. At the same time, he argues that the moral element is capable of standing alone without material support or resonance. He makes essentially unhelpful or even irrelevant, similar to Calvin, a viable connection of support between the material and the moral. For Calvin, the connection between the two is judged to be so fraught with dangers, moreover, that the contention for their severance is frequently positioned within a central argument that one is removed to preserve the health of the other. In other words, the aid to devotion is discarded so as to preserve true devotion.

This devotion, however, will result in the elimination of significant material components, for, *de facto*, cerebral resources of the individual. This is a virtually inevitable outcome given the charge that the sensual and material element is detrimental to the true or moral element of religion. From this perspective, the sensual element is easily conceived of as not only libelous, but manifestly unnecessary, as we see here in Kant.[11]

10. Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, 115.

11. This reflects the intertwining of rationalism and Protestant religion. Alexander, "Afterword on Ritual," 220, writes, "The characteristics of ritual rejected by early biblical studies—its bodily, experiential, experimental, and unpredictable qualities—are precisely those features that are of chief interest to Ritual Studies. Early biblical studies could not reconcile these features of ritual with the dualistic perspective of its Protestant and Enlightenment commitments."

The example of Kant, the modern rationalist thinker, though certainly differently religious than thinkers of prior medieval centuries, nonetheless bears some resemblance to the moral emphasis of the prophetic religious tradition with which Calvin identifies his own Protestant reform. Moreover, the emerging rationalism among Reformed Protestant thinkers, as well as modern moralists, seems to inherit some of this impetus from the past Hebraic prophetic tradition. Thus, as frequently pointed out, some Western secular traditions are indebted to significant influence from prior religious beliefs, however adamant growing secular traditions might desire to separate themselves from religion in the present, particularly if it bears unwanted relics of the religious past.

## Protestant Doctrine and Protestant Devotion

Within the theological battles fought with Catholicism in the sixteenth century, Protestantism often faulted the weighty and onerous medieval sacramental system for depriving the devotee of access to the mediation of grace in Christ. This failure occurred in Protestant perspective due to an ineffectual conglomerate of specious mediators and erroneous theological understandings present in Catholicism; to Protestants, many of these material objects and practices could never convey and much less absolve the aspirant of his lack of righteousness before God. Moreover, one impetus of Protestantism was to expedite the way to reconciliation with God by removing elements and dubious mediators, evaluated as unnecessary and hence impediments to that goal, such as the quotation from Calvin strongly suggests. But Protestantism has hardly been reductionistic—as is often claimed—for the mere sake of minimalism, however much later Protestantism may have fallen prey to the practice of identifying economy of worship with true worship.

In the final theological analysis, the classical Protestant Reformers felt their justification for the dispute with Catholicism was not only or simply a matter of the immorality of clergy, or other clerical abuses, or even that the Catholic way to God was hopelessly cluttered with wrong things, and perhaps simply wrong for having things—though this is my topic through these pages—but that the Catholic Church embodied wrong doctrine, that is to say, theological errors in the way that it thought about the relationship between God and humans. In the words of Eugene Rice, "Protestants

reproached the clergy not so much for living badly as for believing badly, for teaching false and dangerous things."[12]

Many Protestants, moreover, emphasized the vulnerabilities of a ritualistic and materialistic religion that could provide opportunity to negate and substitute the moral requirement of God for ritual niceties and mechanical routine or beautiful aesthetics. Protestants also claimed that absent in much medieval and luxurious ritual was the possibility for a true understanding of the required grace of God necessary for helpless and guilty humans to reach and receive the only hope they have, that is, Christ. What was at particular theological issue for Protestants was a concern for the truth about God and by extension, humans' relationship to God. The moral emphasis and influence of prophetic religion upon Protestantism insisted that God as moral or holy required the human to be no less, and much of Protestantism, following this conviction, insisted that no ritual, no form—nothing but Christ—could meet this otherwise impossible requirement. This is part of the point of Calvin: ritual in and of itself is nothing if it does not serve the proper service. It may on occasion accompany true religion, but will more often imperil it. Hence, one chief suspicion of ritual centers on how it easily unhinges from real religious devotion, thus falling into unknowing ignorance and blasphemous idolatry. Moreover, because a true understanding of God reveals God's exceedingly moral nature, much Protestant understanding of the reconciliation of God and humans advocated the sloughing off of older Catholic practices that Protestants deemed as having buried Christ the Redeemer in mounds of stifling traditions. The Protestant Reformers therefore frequently—and often in droves—took leave of many of the "encumbrances" that they contended made it nearly impossible to see Christ in material worship. Among other versions of Protestant reform, as, for example, the Anabaptists, the eclipse of attention to ritual and the materialistic character of older Christian religious devotion, was oftentimes matched by a fervent moral emphasis, perhaps gaining attention as rituals and the like succumbed to less attention.

William Alston has thus contended that, "we might speculate that the progressive moralization of religion is achieved at the expense of ritual preoccupations."[13] This change, to the degree that it is actually historical, perhaps parallels the most strident route of modern secular thought with insistence on human moral autonomy for proper moral undertaking,

12. Rice, *Early Modern Europe,* 125.

13. Alston, "Religion," 144.

as in Kant. The initial religious faith plays a decreasing role in moral decision-making as morality becomes secularized, where one consequence of this kind of religious "progression" may be the reduction of religion to morality, as it often is in some modern forms of Christianity, where it may be referenced as mere moralism by opponents. Between it and secular morality, there may be only a small difference.

The distinction between the two, moreover, is a distinction with a real and large difference. That is, the reduction of religion to morality has been largely the result of a branch of secular thought respectful enough of religion to respect birthright, but at the same time, reduce and define the essence of religion as morality. A more severe secular ethic, however, will make extra effort to disassociate religious belief entirely from morality so as to achieve "true morality." The orthodox Christian attempt in modernity to keep moral beliefs bound to religious beliefs will confront the more strident secular attempt to take the religious "garb" off morality, with religious morality being evaluated as false morality.

In contrast to the historical and cumulative association of the material element with religion in the form of rituals and other material components, the progression of a moral emphasis within religion, or secular religion, seems to elicit the disciplining of material elements. It is not difficult to envision that in a conception of reformist "true religion," or secular "true morality," religious or moral clarity and understanding may be judged as impeded, or at the very least not expedited or advanced by elements of matter deemed to diffuse the goal of the worshipper seeking moral or godly direction. Coupled with such goals, there may be a push by both toward intellection and away from the senses, given the suspicion toward the material components of religious or moral devotion.[14]

14. However, in contrast to the early modern penchant for rationalism, other thinkers have been less applauding than Kant over the effects. As a contrasting example to Kant, Freud leveled severe criticism over the resulting consequences to a religion that spurns the value of the sensual and material. Freud's judgment is noticeably and virtually opposite that of Calvin and Kant. Without implying agreement with Freud's notoriously negative views of anything religious, he writes in *Moses and Monotheism*, 177–79, "Among the precepts of Mosaic religion is one that has more significance than is at first obvious. It is the prohibition against making an image of God, which means the compulsion to worship an invisible God. I surmise that in this point Moses surpassed the Aton religion in strictness. Perhaps he meant to be consistent; his God was to have neither a name nor a countenance. The prohibition was perhaps a fresh precaution against magic malpractices. If this prohibition was accepted, however, it was bound to exercise a profound influence. For it signified subordinating sense perception to an abstract idea; it was

In many of these changes for assuming proper religious or moral devotion, little notice may be extended toward the human need for symbolism. For example, in Kant, this may even be virtually ignored. For others, moreover, the truth in the ritual, as another example, must be shorn of the circuitous and convoluted form so as to be effectively seen as the truth, for ritual in this criticism is judged as a veil to be removed so as to expose the Real. The Real may be deemed sufficient so as to require no symbolism or resonance with material components because the symbol is judged as less than the reality symbolized or figured by the symbols of faith, for example. With such a path of perceived emancipation taken, religious devotion will become increasingly bare and attentive to the "spiritual" at the expense of the material, or to the inner life as opposed to exterior life, or to the mental over the material.

With the diminishing of such accompaniments to worship like ritual, many early Protestants undoubtedly felt immense and perhaps virtually instantaneous relief, but such freedom in the beginning may exercise too little restraint in what it removes for the future. Indeed, rather than helping or indeed directing the worshipper outside of himself and to God in the displacement of such aid, the devotee is perhaps at risk of losing his way without them. A. N. Whitehead credits both the Reformation and the Scientific Revolution as a time in which "Men tried to dispense with symbols as 'fond things, vainly invented,' and concentrated on their direct apprehension of the ultimate facts."[15]

However, in his chapter on images from the *Institutes*, Calvin, as the central Reformed thinker of the sixteenth century, contends that the voracious human appetite for images, for example, is because "Not contented



a triumph of spirituality over the senses; more precisely, an instinctual renunciation accompanied by its psychologically necessary consequence. . . There opened then the new realm of spirituality where conceptions, memories, and deductions became of decisive importance, in contrast to the lower psychical activity which concerned itself with the immediate perceptions of the sense organs. It was certainly one of the most important stages on the way to becoming human."

15. Whitehead, *Symbolism*, 35. Note again the words of Weber, in note 8, concerning the prophetic responsibility for the demise of ritual "in conjunction with Hellenistic scientific thought." In a more recent work by Auksi, *Christian Plain Style,* the author contends that the plain style ceased when scientific description adopted this type of style for the clarity required in scientific writing. Robert Merton, in his famous work, *Science, Technology and Society*, tried to show that the Puritan type of religiosity, in the attempt to be void of everything but simplicity, served as a natural bridge to modern science and scientific explanation.

with spiritual understanding, they thought that images would give them a surer and nearer impression."[16] In contrast to Calvin, John of Damascus of the Greek tradition of Eastern Christianity, in his ninth-century work, *On the Divine Images*, contends that "Just as words speak to the ear, so the image speaks to the sight. It brings understanding."[17] But for Calvin, the problem is that the sight seeks for an image when it should seek or hear a word. Has God then made any provision for the appetite of sight, or is that appetite simply a thirst for idolatry? According to Calvin's general answer, men have fabricated idols of images because they lacked sufficient spiritual eyes to judge the request ill founded. Speaking of Calvin on this point, David Willis-Watkins has observed,

> One could well expect the argument [God's accommodation] to extend to images: that they are ways God uses to render the Word, preached and celebrated in the sacrament and written, all the more powerfully reinforced through other senses. Calvin's view of accommodation appears in so many dimensions of his thought throughout that his not applying it to images is all the more striking. That is the real heart of the matter for Calvin: the ordinary means consecrated by the Word so intensely grip and sharply affect us that we do not seek other images.[18]

This view, however, would seem to burden any spiritual devotion not so found. That is, guarding worship to such an extent prods the worshipper to nourish himself spiritually from essentially one appetite. In fairness to Calvin and the larger Protestantism, it is apparent on even a cursory reading of Protestant theology, that the experiential element in religious devotion

16. Calvin, *ICR* 31: 133/Beveridge, *Institutes,* Book I: 98.

17. John of Damascus, *Divine Images*, 25. Daly, in *God's Altar*, 7, attempts to defend the Puritans against the charge that they had no art, while he nonetheless admits, "To be sure, they were hostile to some forms of art." He concedes, 44, that "They may very well have found their psysic needs overpowering their intellectual prohibitions: that process may well have been the root cause of their art." Interestingly, in speaking of Richard Baxter, perhaps the most famous of the Puritans, Daly comments, 72, on Baxter's famous work, *The Saints Everlasting Rest*, published in 1662, "Where before he had recognized the dangers of idolatry, Baxter now noted the dangers of dealing only in religious abstractions: 'Go to them: When thou settest thyself to meditate on the Joys above, think on them boldly as Scripture hath expressed them: Bring down thy conceiving to the reach of sense . . . Both Love and Joy are promoted by familiar acquaintance: When we go to think of God and Glory in proper conceiving without these spectacles, we are lost and have nothing to fix our thoughts upon.'"

18. Willis-Watkins, "Reform," 48.

is deemed absolutely essential as noted earlier. The question, however, is whether a view that distances the human senses from spiritual engagement amplifies or encumbers communion with God for the human.[19] Moreover, from Calvin's point of view, one might judge that true religion is in perpetual peril due to human anthropology. In the individual's propensity to desire God—not of course an evil desire for Calvin—the person compensates for a presumption of absence and the need for presence by making visual gods that fail, while providing an idolatrous and illusory sense of the presence of God. Idolatrous propensities proceed to fill the religious life with things which will fill life but will not fulfill, as idolatry increases. The question, however, is whether putting the devotee on a unitary track for communion with God need meet with more than human minds in human lives.

The rationalist propensity for a predominant use of the verbal sensibility is thereby strengthened in such religious culture, in part because the invisible spirit is perceived best articulated and identified with words. Traditionally, of course, in Protestantism, God has been present in His Word. But the original meaning of the Word of God may now largely and literally mean words so as to avoid idolatry elsewhere; much of the desire of the historic Protestant reform of religious practice in the sixteenth century was to remove perceived unnecessary and idolatrous mediations poised between God and persons. However, the purging of the material from religious worship also truncated the levels on which one could appropriate religious truth to a singular and often solitary level of the intellect. With sensuous mediums now spurned or condemned, the communion with God must increasingly turn to the intellect and its chief mediums, words and language. This historical state roughly corresponds to Hegel's famous sentence from his *Introduction to Aesthetics*: "Yet, precisely, at this highest stage, art now transcends itself, in that it forsakes the element of a reconciled embodiment of the spirit in sensuous form and passes over from the poetry of the imagination to the prose of thought."[20]

Notably, the odyssey of the human finite spirit in search of communion with the materially invisible Spirit or God begins to resemble the

19. Partee, *Calvin and Classical Philosophy*, 51, ventures that "Calvin's view of man is perhaps more indebted to the insights of the philosophers than any other area of his thought." He goes on to write, 64, "It might be argued that Calvin 'had a spiritualizing tendency' and that Luther was more sensitive to the Biblical antithesis of flesh and spirit as distinct from body and soul . . . Perhaps Calvin over-reacts to the Anabaptists, Osiander, Servetus, and Socinus, but he firmly believes that both soul and body are from God."

20. Hegel, *Introduction to Aesthetics*, 89.

progressive realization of Spirit in history in Hegel's philosophy. The attenuation of physical components as having only temporal parts to play Hegel applauds as historical progression, because in the realization of their limitation, the philosophical consciousness begins to work in independence from material entities. Material things turn out to be paltry spiritual companions by comparison to spiritual things. However, for the person not desirous of the elevation to the cerebral satisfactions of the philosopher, nor possessing a perennial penchant for the things of the mind to the virtual exclusion of the things of the senses, the Christian God may seem captive to the god of the philosophers under a philosopher's regimen.[21]

However, in Hegel's historical assessment of such a change of consciousness and cultural history, philosophical consciousness shows the weakness of the prior need for the pictorial and imagistic cognition of art and religion as the philosophical consciousness approaches the highest mode of knowing and being.[22] Any difficulty created by the absent material components and rituals in the worship and understanding of God is in Hegel's conception a necessary and higher movement, prompting the devotee to take his knowledge to a higher level.[23] For Hegel, the finite spirit is diminishing not only the distance between itself and the Infinite, but the difference, by a receding of the sensual in deference to the spiritual.[24] In Hegel's mind, this is an advance over the practice of sacramental religion. There the human was and still is moved "backwards" to the sensual and

21. An excessive or exclusive use of the verbal sensibility, however, can perhaps contribute to lowering the conception of the transcendence and majesty of God—Calvin's concern against the use of sensual images—because the ease of the medium contributes to a complacent familiarity with the object of the medium. C. S. Lewis makes a similar point in regard to the Evangelical tradition in Protestantism in his *Letters to Malcolm*, 13, "I think the 'low' church *milieu* that I grew up in did tend to be too cosily at ease in Zion. My grandfather, I'm told, used to say that he 'looked forward to having some very interesting conversations with St. Paul when he got to heaven.' Two clerical gentlemen talking at ease in a club! It never seemed to cross his mind that an encounter with St. Paul might be rather an overwhelming experience even for an Evangelical clergyman of good family. But when Dante saw the great apostles in heaven they affected him like *mountains*." (Italics in the original.)

22. As example, Hegel writes in his *Introduction to the Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, 62, "But, strictly speaking, philosophy's topic is God alone, or its aim is to know God. This topic it has in common with religion but with this difference, namely that religion treats the subject pictorially while philosophy thinks and comprehends it."

23. Ibid., 166, "All err who assume that the unity of spirit with nature is the most excellent mode of consciousness. On the contrary, this stage is the lowest, the least true . . ."

24. On this point Hegel is far different from the Reformed thinkers.

to material reality, whereas philosophical consciousness propels the finite spirit forward by moving away from the material to the infinite Spirit. The religious consciousness, however, can get stuck in time and matter, and, consequently, not move forward to the spiritual satisfactions of the philosophical consciousness.

I am contending that the effort expended toward true religion within Reformed Protestantism provides at least a rough example of a religion poised toward the philosophical consciousness in Hegel's schema. Moreover, the disappearance of the sensual from religious practice and devotion, I regard as mistaken, though such exclusions seem commensurate with Hegel's scheme of the progressive historical transition from religious materialism to philosophical conceptualization. However, incommensurate with the Protestant perspective is Hegel's proclivity toward monism, despite his own affirmation of Protestantism. More compatibility between Hegel and the Reformed thinkers is evidenced in their mutual aversion to mysticism. The most compatibility between them, therefore, is in their notion that the sensible material world serves the spiritual world and devotion most when the latter takes leave of the former. For both, the material seems to constitute an obstacle to the spiritual.

## The Flesh and the Spirit

Many of the theological issues associated with materiality in Protestantism arise over the "means of mediation." (In Puritanism, the terminology would be "means of grace.") Any suggestion of some "thing" possibly perceived as a mediator besides Christ was rejected as idolatrously displacing Christ as the sole mediator between God and persons. Thus, there arises the suspicion of anything that could possibly be seen as another competitor to Christ. Typical of this caution is a passage in Howard L. Rice's *Reformed Spirituality*: "The Reformed tradition has always been deeply concerned about the dangers of idolatry. Efforts to achieve special experiences for ourselves easily fall into the trap of being idolatrous. People can get caught up in the desperate need to imagine a god of their own and strive to make sure they have sensations that will reinforce their images. People who are overeager to seek out the unusual may miss the God of the ordinary."[25]

This insistence, however, almost dispenses with the "God of the ordinary." Indeed, the worshipping subject may object that by removal of such aids to devotion, he inherits the risk of feeling further away from Christ than

25. Rice, *Reformed Spirituality*, 37.

before. Hence, the Christ with whom one is to experience reconciliation with God by redemption may actually seem more distant by ushering God too quickly onto the metaphysical plane. But at this juncture, the objection may be raised that one does not fabricate or reformulate his theology on the basis of the senses. However, the point is that with this exclusion, and others like it, the devotee must begin to negotiate his religion rather in the manner of the stereotypical philosopher notorious for living in his head.[26]

The goal perhaps is to aspire to an imageless truth, and not a mere image, for images, like symbols, intervene or mediate between ourselves and the "Real," and thus are for that reason objectionable.[27] But with all images removed, one can feel rather at a loss than a gain. With great irony, the imageless truth may begin to look dimmer than the image. This is not, however, because the imageless truth is weak, but because *we* are.

The details in this conception of true religion, however, are noticeably not those of accommodation to human weaknesses, but the presupposition that our sufficiency is in the strength of the only true Mediator, that is, Christ. But if the judgment of this kind of religious experience as inordinately straining the communicant is essentially correct for some of the reasons here suggested, then at least some of the sensual mediations employed in religious practice appear not simply as Gregory the Great intimated about images—only concessions to the unlearned—but helps needed perhaps by the learned as well.[28] Their exclusion is manifest in



26. Hegel writes in his *Introduction to the Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, 28: "Art and religion are the modes in which the Absolute Idea is present for non-philosophical people, creatures of feeling, perception, pictorial thinking." Adding to this, 31, he writes: "But this form, whereby the absolutely universal content belongs to philosophy alone, is the form of thinking, the form of the universal itself. But in religion this content is given (through art) to the direct vision of things outside, and then to pictorial thinking and feeling." A typical passage in which Hegel articulates the movement to the "naked truth" of philosophy is the following, 35–36: "The eternal reason, as logos, as declaring, expressing, and revealing itself, does reveal itself, therefore, in our soul and ideas, and only for that reason to our soul and ideas, to our sensitive consciousness, reflecting naively on what it receives. Further and more abstract reflection begins to regard this shape and mode of thinking as a veil behind which the truth is supposed to be hidden and concealed, and then tries to strip this veil away from what lay behind it and to bring out the truth, pure, naked, as it genuinely and really is."

27. This goal is predicated on assuming we can have a pure, naked spirituality. Farrer, in his *Rebirth of Images*, 81, writes, ". . . it is a mistake to suppose that spirituality came naked into the world, or could exist without the images that condition it."

28. Pope Gregory the Great's famous statement that "Images are the books of the unlearned" set an important precedent for the use of images in Medieval Catholicism,

the existential ramification of excluding portions of human sensibility for nearly complete insistence upon the verbal sensibility. The Protestant belief in the Augustinian doctrine of human depravity finds itself ironically in league with an elevated view of the human capability for spiritual devotion. With a minimum of or exclusion of material components for spiritual purpose, and serious disciplining of the human senses, one may have to fall back on oneself for spiritual advance. That self will be a mind or a spirit.

The *locus classicus* of the contention that true religion occurs within the spirituality of worship was often the biblical reference arising from the response of Christ on the question of the "place" of worship to the Samaritan woman at the well: "An hour will be coming, and now is, when true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for such are the people the Father desires as worshippers. God is spirit and those worshipping Him must worship in spirit and truth."[29] This passage Hegel quotes frequently in his writings. The use of this verse, also prominent in iconoclastic circles during the Iconoclastic Controversy of the eighth century, necessitates that one scrutinize where the preference for "spiritual" as opposed to material worship more precisely lies in Protestantism.

The Platonic aversion to the physical may provide some undercurrent of resistance to the material, and Plato's incorporation into early Christian anthropology was due, among other reasons, to a metaphysic that viewed the human as a soul in the prison of a material, and thankfully for platonists, a mortal body. This view was historically treated with more comparisons than contrasts to Christian anthropology and theology in the Medieval period, and up to the present it continues to influence Christian thinking. However, though the aversion to the "flesh" in Plato has reference to the real corporeal body as the vehicle which can enslave and subdue the spirit or soul for its own fleshly purposes, Christians sometimes used Plato's contrasts as if they were identical in meaning with their own. However, the deliverance of the soul or salvation for Plato can never be ultimately resolved as long as the two are in union. Platonism and "spiritual" Christianity thus have a very uneasy relationship—appearances to the contrary.



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though one heavily criticized by the Protestant Reformers in general. However, for however much Gregory's statement sanctioned the use of images and art for religious devotion, he can also be seen as perhaps circumscribing physical symbols as merely temporal needs of the unlearned, and thus in a sense tying these devotional aids to a pre-literate stage of human culture.

29. Gospel of John 4:3–4, my translation.

In Christian and New Testament theology, the "flesh" there denounced as inimical to the progress of the spiritual life is not Plato's physical and material "flesh." The flesh in the New Testament is a metaphor for the evil nature of the fallen human being in his decrepit and helpless human nature perhaps aspiring but failing to follow Christ. Moreover, in the Christian religion, the Incarnation of Christ is one instance—though a very powerful one—of decisively displacing the Platonic estimation of the central problem of the human predicament. Plato could never be a sacramentalist with his view of the physical world. Many Protestants, to avoid too much closeness to something like sacramentalism, at least of the medieval sort, have courted their religious practice close to the Platonic conception, but with some jeopardy to their Christian beliefs.

Plato's vision of the relationship between the human soul and body clearly bears out the significant difference with the Christian conception. Plato might fittingly be described as a loose and recalcitrant dualist, for he aspires toward a monistic spirit metaphysic and a spiritualized human anthropology. This means that he believes the human is a soul and a body, but he resents the presence of the body for its numerous and negative impacts upon the soul. Therefore, there is a grave hostility between the two in Plato's conception, best exemplified in his description of the body as the prison of the soul. The relationship between the two, therefore in principle, is antagonistic, for the soul, encumbered as it is with the afflictions of the body, must assert its mastery over the powerful but temporary prison, though from considerable disadvantage to the prisoner while the body lives, for the embodied prison binds the hapless soul to itself. At its worst, the consequential desires of the body blind the unseeing soul to the point that the body so overwhelms the subjugated and weakened soul, that the human may eventually cease to recognize the presence or even the existence of a soul because it has been so effectively muted or silenced by a domineering mastery of the human by the body.

As similar as this conception of Plato may seem at points to the Christian conception of the warfare of flesh and spirit, the two conceptions are in fact only distantly related, though they are often conflated by Christians of various historical epochs and various communions and confessions. The absolute difference is perhaps best highlighted in noting the dignity that the Christian conception of the human person gives to the body, in contrast to Plato's punitive conception that the body is a prison. Still greater, however, is the dignity that the Christian conception of the material world

conveys upon that world at large: a material world that Plato finds offensive to spiritual purpose. The attitude of Plato toward the material world shows that indeed the rivalry between flesh and spirit is irresolvably that, for he conceives of the two as in principle impossibly opposed, whereas in Christianity, again, the conflict of flesh and spirit depicts the antagonism between good and evil found in the embattled human person. In other words, in Christianity, the defining human problem is not that we have flesh or a body made of matter, but what we have done with our flesh and our body—as well as our soul or spirit. The sins of each evidence that our culpability to fail on both fronts is formidable. But our real problem is not simply eliminated by eliminating the body, because the presence of the body is not the ultimate fount or source of our human problem or predicament. Sin issues not from matter, *qua matter*, and thus we are not sinful because matter is sinful as matter; therefore, we can hardly claim exemption from sin by exempting ourselves from matter.

Indeed, the falling away of the body at physical death creates almost insuperable difficulties for the Christian conception of the human person, in contrast to Plato, for whom the Christian resolution of the reunion of the two would in his mind, simple repeat the besetting problem. That is, the disunion of the soul and the body at bodily death creates a catastrophe for the Christian conception of the human person, for the human person is a union of body and soul. The separation between them precipitated by bodily death, therefore, is in a sense as unnatural as it is real, for it breaks the human person into two parts that are meant to be conjoined and united, not separated, as they are by the physical death of the body. The Platonic conception of the human person, however, has no such quandary, calamity, or grief over bodily death, for the source of the human problem dies with the material body; for Christians, however, this "solution" is no gain, but a grievous loss. It would come as a contradiction to the Christian conception. Plato's lowly estimation of the body and the material world that God created is noticeably different from the Christian estimation.

In short, Christians are taking Plato as a dubious consort in devaluing the material form in which God found it fit to make humans and which God, in Christ, took upon himself. Indeed, the resurrected human person after death is restored to the union of soul, and this time, an imperishable body. In other words, the Christian resurrection of the body attests to that part of us as a rightful part of us, such that a restoration of the body to the widowed and floundering and famished soul apart from the human body

is necessary for the full complimentary nature of the human—as a soul and a body. Thus, we are truly fearfully and wonderfully made, but in physical death we are unmade by the parting of our material body. In Platonism, however, effort is made in trying to pry apart in life what will be apart when the solo spirit reveals the real person in a permanent condition of absence from the body. But in Christianity, God in Christ reunites the two in the resurrection of the body; thus, it would be disparaging to God to try to separate what God rejoins together after death, but also seamed together in life. Despite protest against the incorporation of formal philosophy into theology at the time of the Reformation, Protestantism has had at times its own subtle—and sometimes not so subtle—undercurrent and sometimes floodwaters of Platonism fueling grievances and opposition to the material.

## Human Nature and Protestant Devotion

Patrick Henry has made the point that two fundamentally different religious anthropologies are in disagreement over what constitutes proper religious worship for true religion, particularly with regard to the appropriateness of material components in that worship:

> For both the Iconoclast and the Iconodule, worship is an activity in which man gets closer to the divine. The iconoclast believes that in order to do that, it is necessary to relegate humanity to the background. We can be assured of our kinship with God only insofar as we leave our humanity behind. The Iconodule, on the contrary, believes that our approach to God is specifically through our humanity. Man was made in the image and likeness of God; not the soul (psyche) or the mind (nous) but man (anthropos). Worship is the activity not of the man who has transcended his humanity, but of the man whose humanity is restored. The paradigm for worship in spirit and in truth is not the angels in heaven, but Adam and Eve in paradise . . . The Iconoclasts imply that all you need for proper worship is a pure mind.[30]

This contrast prompts the question that must be raised at some point about the feasibility of, in effect, disrobing God and the devotee down to spirits for proper religious devotion and worship. Is this not perhaps a fantastic notion—that is, an idealized or utopic conception—where only

30. Henry, "Iconoclastic Controversy," 27–28.

perfected worshippers in the correct frame of mind could uphold this kind of worship? Accordingly, Margaret Aston writes:

> Were those who tried so hard to break this 'crust of formality' attempting the impossible? Could worshippers really find 'all comfort' in the bare communion of the word? Was it true, as Calvin asserted, that 'most ceremonies have no other use than to numb the people rather than to teach them'? Or that faith, as Milton claimed, had no need of 'the weak, and fallible office of the senses as ushers, or interpreters, of heavenly mysteries' except in the sacraments? Were believers, like God, really best pleased with the worship that had the least admixture of human aids?[31]

On this very question, Steven Ozment has speculated about some possible reasons for the "failure" of the Reformation: "Its failure rather lay in its original attempt to ennoble people beyond their capacities—not as medieval theologians and Renaissance philosophers had done, by encouraging them to imitate saints and angels, but by demanding that they live simple, sober lives, prey not to presumption, superstition, or indulgence, but merely as human beings. This proved a truly impossible ideal; the Reformation foundered on man's indomitable credulity."[32]

This analysis stumbles over identifying what is needful for the "human." That is, one may agree that sectors of the Protestant Reformation asked religious practitioners to exercise what would seem to amount to a philosophical as opposed to a religious consciousness—by making little use of the components of material religion. If this were the failure of the Reformation, then failure is hardly to be judged as due to "man's indomitable credulity." Furthermore, if it proved to be a "truly impossible ideal" to live "merely as human beings," then the nature of human beings is up for question. That is, is it a failure of human nature or a failure of religious practice that ignores human nature that provides the reason for the failure of the Reformation?

Interestingly, in another work, Ozment concedes something of this point:

> The limited appeal of Protestantism, existentially and intellectually, is not difficult to explain and should have been expected. Traditional Catholic piety and folk beliefs are far older and richer religious systems. They are arguably more emotionally involving

31. Aston, *England's Iconoclasts*, 12–13.

32. Ozment, *Age of Reform*, 438.

> for their adherents. They also accommodate human frailty and folly more conscientiously and with greater enterprise than their Protestant counterparts. The devotion to the continuity of the world of the living with that of the dead, the predictable cycle of sin and forgiveness, the breathtaking shrines and sparkling festivals, the sensuous, tangible piety—all these things make traditional religion more enticing for the devout layperson and curious ethnographer alike. Protestant faith by comparison has seemed all too simple and austere a religion, the spiritual equivalent of a sobering cold bath.[33]

That the results following a denuded devotional model "should have been expected" seems a legitimate and fair complaint against blindness or utopianism of perhaps the most strident Protestant Reformers. However, the presumption in Ozment's prior analysis seems to be that image use, pilgrimages, and use of relics, as examples, are indeed signs of human weakness or credulity (as in Zwingli, Calvin, and Hegel), while nonetheless claiming that the Reformation asked persons to live "merely as human beings." The issue is that the Reformed conception, as an example, delimits creaturely aids for devotion, which, in Ozment's words, describes people living "merely as human beings." However, the Reformed conception of true religion seems to prod religious devotion to stretch outside the mold of the human being, while making a way toward God as bodiless spiritual beings, as noted by Henry. These humans live not "merely as human beings," but as another kind of being, and not as a restored Adam or Eve. However, this presupposes that for proper religious devotion, humans must take on the modality of the spiritual God—to accommodate themselves to something like the "god of the philosophers." God in history, however, in the Incarnate Christ, took on the modality of the human being.

The fate of the point of Ozment is somewhat like Bertrand Russell's quip that if one formulates an ethic that ignores human nature, then chances are that human nature will ignore that ethic. One can of course blame either term in the equation for the failure. Generally speaking, moreover, one might suggest that Catholicism blames the failure of Protestantism on ignoring human nature, while Protestantism blames the failure of Catholicism on capitulating to a flawed human nature. Either way raises the question not just of the nature of human nature, but of the role and *legitimacy* of human nature in Christian religious life and worship. The seeming

33. Ozment, *Protestantism*, 215.

assumption in the argument of Ozment is that there is a weakness in human nature that made the success of the Reformation attempt at riddance of images, rituals, pilgrimages, etc., virtually impossible. With this is the suggestion of an inflated idealism in a Reformation call for the impossible. And yet, according to Ozment, the Reformation call was to live "merely as human beings." On the other hand comes the suggestion that people cannot simply or stoically bear the separation from all they threw out as refuse or unnecessary clutter. The central problem is compounded, moreover, when worshippers are being called to worship as elevated spiritual beings, when they are in human form with bodies and souls.

From the perspective of this writer, it seems fair to ask if it is an affront to God to reinvent ourselves as bodiless beings while also devising a spiritual ladder for our spirit for communion with God. The necessity for grace is clearly understood in the primary salvific doctrines of Reformation Protestantism, but on the issue of "the rest," many sectors of Protestantism hesitate, feeling the threat of compromise to the Protestant doctrine of salvation.

There is, moreover, sometimes, and paradoxically, a tempting spiritual pride derived from the apparent emancipation from material and other devotional aids unneeded by the spiritually mature who concede little place for matter in spiritual worship. Ozment speaks of the double-sidedness of this truncated Protestant devotion:

> Many found themselves relieved of much burdensome conventional piety. But the Reformation also posed a new and different spiritual threat for the laity. Although Protestantism had simpler religious rituals, each had suddenly become absolute, its importance enhanced by the reduction of religion to a claimed vital core. This raised the stakes spiritually for devout believers. The slack had gone out of religion, but with it went also, as the passage of time confirmed, some of the familiarity and comfort. The reformers in the end created a version of what they had originally vehemently opposed: an elite religion . . . It was a religion for any and all who could forego the sweet deceits of traditional piety.[34]

This, of course, is the Protestant living "merely as a human being." The liability of such a position, however, will be in construing human beings, not as material beings but as aspiring disembodied spirits, while faulted and scorned religious practices may nevertheless reflect some real but

34. Ibid., 216.

stringently resisted human desires that Christian religious devotion may dismiss too quickly. This may occur when religious devotion begins to finesse religious understanding at too much distance from material elements for material beings following Christ.

The Reformed perspective has thus perhaps accurately been described as a "purely intelligible affair to the exclusion of the senses."[35] In many ways, this requires something of an application of Ockham's razor applied to the devotional religious life. Horton Davies, commenting upon the later Reformed Puritans' religious worship writes, "There were no processions, bowings, crossings, or other gestures; no responses to keep attention during the longer prayers. In short, there was hardly any concession made to human psychology or to the delight of the ear or the eye. This was the most economical simplicity imaginable . . . It was a highly vertebral worship . . ."[36]

Margaret R. Miles, in speaking of Calvin has written the following:

> But his short discussion of private ascetic practice in the Institutes 4.12 gives no indication that Calvin recognized the value of "exercises" involving the body to collect psychic energy. Even the insight of Augustine—with which Calvin was familiar—that physical asceticism directly transfer to the preparation of a particular state of soul has not outweighed in his mind the more immediate antagonism he felt toward the traditional ascetic practices advocated by the Roman church. The only value he acknowledges in the two practices he mentions—fasting and sexual abstinence—is their usefulness for aiding public and private prayer by a "disencumbered" mind. Predictably, Calvin emphasizes that public repentance requires and depends on "a feeling of the mind" which precedes and naturally results in "external manifestations." . . . For Calvin the capacity of the soul to affect the body is not matched by any capacity of the body to affect the soul. The body remains "motion devoid of essence."[37]

Notably, Calvin sees in the first five centuries of Christianity a commendable refrain from his perception of the later excesses of art, icons, and sensibility by the Church. This viewpoint is confirmed by Miles' statement in her *Fullness of Life: Historical Foundations for a New Asceticism*: "By the sixth century, people were no longer fascinated by the orderly and trustworthy hierarchical arrangement of human being and cosmos, but rather

35. Miles, *Image as Insight*, 87.
36. Davies, *American Puritans*, 274–75.
37. Miles, "Calvin on the Body," 318.

by the way in which the incarnation acted as a model of the activity of God in the sensible world."[38] However, the shift of religious devotion from the sensible to the transcendent that "demanded that spiritual reality be sought *above* the things of this earth, not *in* them"[39] found its home too often in a kind of Platonic rationalism. True religion, in this shift, however, may with more historical time become predominantly, if not exclusively ethics—as it does in many modern liberal Christian communities—and in so doing, provides some parallel to the movement of modern Western history. In that historical advance, religion is increasingly subsumed into morality—thus largely reversing the relationship of the two from the Christian medieval conception. The Christian religion in the modern period may be equated with morality and nothing more. However, it may move even further afield by contending that the Christian religion has no message at all for modern man, or at least not one that cannot be supplied in essential import by secularism.



38. Miles, *Fullness*, 82.
39. Eire, *War*, 44.