WAGNER

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Cover illustration: Eduard Ille (1823–1900), Design for a Temple of the Grail at Neuschwanstein, *1877. Watercolour and body colour over pen on paper laid on card, 52.4 x 39.5 cm. Ille's design, which was not realised, was inspired jointly by the description of the Temple of the Grail in Albrecht's* Der jüngere Titurel *of c1272 and by nineteenth-century illustrations of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople.*

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Books received

Borchmeyer, Dieter. *Das Tribschener Idyll.* Insel Verlag (Frankfurt am Main 1998). 103 pp. DM 19,80.

Mayer, Hans. *Richard Wagner*, ed. Wolfgang Hofer. Suhrkamp Verlag (Frankfurt am Main 1998). 620 pp. DM 68,-.

Niemeyer, Christian. *Nietzsches andere Vernunft: Psychologische Aspekte in Biographie und Werk.* Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft (Darmstadt 1998). 437 pp. DM 98,-.

Schneller, Daniel. *Richard Wagners "Parsifal" und die Erneuerung des Mysteriendramas in Bayreuth: Die Vision des Gesamtkunstwerks als Universalkultur der Zukunft.* Peter Lang (Berne 1997). 373 pp. DM 102,-.

Schostack, Renate. *Hinter Wahnfrieds Mauern. Gertrud Wagner: Ein Leben.* Hoffmann und Campe (Hamburg 1998). 446 pp. DM 49,80.

Wessling, Berndt W. *Wieland Wagner: Der Enkel.* P J Tonger Musikverlag (Köln-Rodenkirchen 1997). 447 pp. DM 64,80.

Zimmermann, Reiner. *Giacomo Meyerbeer: Eine Biografie nach Dokumenten.* Parthas Verlag (Berlin 1998). 376 pp. DM 79,-.

Anselm Kiefer
A Wagnerian painter

An analysis of three works on Wagnerian themes

I Introduction: Wagnerian painting

Wagner's influence in the field of painting is a subject that is often overlooked.[1] Some of the painters who have been inspired or influenced by Wagner include artists of the calibre of Gauguin, Van Gogh, Cézanne, Seurat,[2] de Chirico, Kokoschka, Dali and Kandinsky. In the case of Kandinsky,[3] listening to the Prelude to *Lohengrin* reinforced in him the belief that painting could have the same power on its audience as music.

Anselm Kiefer, one of the most significant German painters of the post-war generation, can be considered one of the most recent examples of painters influenced in some way by Wagner.

II Anselm Kiefer

(a) The background to the artist's work

As Mark Rosenthal pointed out in his catalogue to a major exhibition of Kiefer's work in 1987, "Kiefer expects his audience to be well versed in such areas as Norse myth, Wagnerian opera, Nazi war plans, theological and biblical history, and alchemy".[4] This is certainly the case with three works that Anselm Kiefer carried out between 1973 and 1975, namely, *Parsifal II* (1973), *Notung* (1973) and *Siegfried vergißt Brünhilde*[5] (1975). In order to penetrate the wealth of meaning in these paintings, the viewer must be familiar with the music dramas they portray, as well as with Kiefer's own background.

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1. There is a discussion of this in Michael Hall's article, "Wagner's impact on the visual arts", *The Wagner Compendium: A Guide to Wagner's Life and Music*, ed. Barry Millington (London 1992), 398-401.
2. Recent research conducted by Paul Smith and published in his article "Was Seurat's art Wagnerian?", *Apollo* (July 1991), 21-8 and more recently in his book *Seurat and the Avant-garde* (New Haven and London 1997) discusses the extent to which Seurat was influenced by Wagner. This extended not only to the technique of painting "theatrical" frames around his pictures but also to some of the themes and symbols in his works.
3. Kandinsky's *Rückblicke* is quoted by Donald Gordon, *Expressionism: Art and Idea* (London and New Haven 1987), 82: "The whole impact of the hour of dusk [...]. I saw all my colours in my mind's eye. Wild, almost insane lines drew themselves before me. I did not dare use the expression that Wagner has painted 'my hour' musically. But it became entirely clear to me that art in general is much more powerful than I had realized and that, on the other hand, painting can develop just as much power as music possesses."
4. Mark Rosenthal, *Anselm Kiefer* (Chicago 1987), 10.
5. Kiefer uses the form "Brünhilde", which is normally translated as Brunhilde by writers on Kiefer.

Parsifal. In fact he maintained that Wagner's music was so seductive and overwhelming that the composer was like a Cagliostro mesmerising his audience (and thus weakening their will and perhaps their defences or critical faculties).

Similar things have been said of Kiefer. Wieland Schmied has written that "Kiefer's art has repeatedly [...] been looked on as a drug, a drug which can numb, but also illuminate and lift us".[60] Interestingly, Charles Harrison and Paul Wood point out in their essay "Modernity and Modernism Reconsidered" that in Kiefer's work "it is as if its tendency toward the operatic is always poised to overpower the critical reservation it may prompt".[61] In both *Parsifal II* and *Notung*, Kiefer uses the hypnotic effect of the wood grain and the large scale of the works to overwhelm his audience.

Nietzsche also criticised Wagner for promoting "moral [...] absurdities",[62] especially in his final opera *Parsifal*, which he saw as containing a renunciatory message. Kiefer has been criticised for analogous reasons. As Harrison and Wood observe: "Kiefer's art can be seen as reinvesting the modern tradition with those very clichés of the spiritual and the profound which, at its most rigorous, Modernist art was concerned to evacuate".[63]

Finally, both artists shared the ambitious and perhaps arrogant view that their art can make a difference and that their work in particular could "offer hope if not salvation from the real evil that has existed throughout human history".[64] Kiefer's work has been said to rely "on the assumption that art can intervene in history".[65] Wagner, too, believed that his art could change the world, and part of the philosophy behind the *Ring* cycle is said to look "forward to a transformed world".[66] Whether or nor their audiences succumb to the spells woven by either of these artists, it is almost impossible not to admire their daring and the breadth of their vision.

Isabel Boldry

60. *German Art 1964–1994*, ed. Wieland Schmied and Peter Weiermar (note 47), 185.
61. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, "Modernity and Modernism Reconsidered", *Modernism in Dispute: Art since the Forties*, ed. Francis Frascina and Jonathan Harris (London and New Haven 1993), 259.
62. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Sämtliche Werke* (note 46), V,19; Engl. trans. from "The Case of Wagner" (note 46), 618.
63. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, "Modernity and Modernism Reconsidered" (note 61), 259.
64. Mark Rosenthal, *Anselm Kiefer* (note 4), 26.
65. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, "Modernity and Modernism Reconsidered" (note 61), 259.
66. Barry Millington, *Wagner* (note 15), 99.

The May *Wagner* will contain articles on *Die Feen* by Jane Schopf, on *Tannhäuser* by Peter Russell, on *Parsifal* by Robert R Gibson and on Delius's Nietzschean *Mass of Life* by David Huckvale.

Aesthetic Reformation

Wagner the Lutheran

Wagner was no Protestant. That, at least, was the view of an old friend of the composer's, a friend who, as the son of a Protestant clergyman, must have known what he was talking about. For a composer — especially a German composer — to dress up the music of *Parsifal* in the garb of cultic ritual was not in the spirit of the Reformation, and in the age of the *Kulturkampf* was tantamount to drawing support from the opposing denominational camp:

> This nunnish ogling, *Ave* leavening,
> this whole falsely ecstatic heaven overheavening?
> — Is this still German? —
> You still stand at the gate, perplexed?
> Think! What you hear is *Rome — Rome's faith without the text.*[1]

Wagner as a crypto-Catholic? This, at least, was the view of Wagner's former friend and later arch-enemy, Friedrich Nietzsche. But Nietzsche's malicious attempt to make a Catholic of Wagner was only one option in the puzzled search to define the composer's religious position. After all, Wagner hailed from a long line of Protestants and remained a Protestant throughout his life. One solution to the problem was proposed in 1901 by the Munich-born Wagnerite, Arthur Seidl, who later became professor of drama at Dessau: "For Wagner, both denominations are evenly matched and of equal status."[2] But no one who had read Wagner's writings, still less anyone who had heard him hold forth to his circle of intimates, could entertain this illusion: "To me all this Catholic rubbish is repugnant to the very depths of my soul,"[3] we read in the *Brown Book*, by no means an isolated entry on the subject. Wagner's admirer, Heinrich von Stein, adopted a subtler approach to this confessional mix of religion as cultic ritual and religion as the Word of God: "No book lies on the Grail altar,"[4] by which Stein evidently meant that Wagner was not a true Protestant either. Finally, it even became possible to locate Wagner outside Christianity altogether, with the "religion of the Grail" described as "an Indian religion that has turned out a little too Christian in its outward manifestations" — thus a critical voice in *Die christliche Welt* in 1892.[5] Certainly, Wagner made no secret of his admiration of Schopenhauer or of his high opinion of the Buddha, and so this

1. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe in 15 Einzelbänden*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Munich 1988), V,204; Engl. trans. from Walter Kaufmann, *Basic Writings of Nietzsche* (New York 1968), 388.
2. Arthur Seidl, *Wagneriana: Erlebte Ästhetik* (Berlin and Leipzig 1901), I,405.
3. Richard Wagner, *Das Braune Buch: Tagebuchaufzeichnungen 1865 bis 1882*, ed. Joachim Bergfeld (Zurich and Freiburg im Breisgau 1975), 75; translated into English by George Bird as *The Diary of Richard Wagner* (London 1980), 65.
4. Quoted in Curt von Westernhagen, *Richard Wagner: Sein Werk, sein Wesen, seine Welt* (Zurich 1956), 307.
5. M Allhin, "Bayreuth und die Religion des Grals", *Die christliche Welt*, vi (1892), 16-20 and 27-32, esp. col. 17.

last-mentioned view had a certain justification. But attempts to turn Wagner into a Buddhist remained controversial around the turn of the century, not least in the light of the repertory of unmistakably Christian motifs that is found in all his stage works. One suspects, rather, that Wagner's closeness to the Christian tradition forced the contributor to *Die christliche Welt* to draw an artificial distinction and to brand the composer anti-Christian. It is not until the years leading up to the outbreak of the First World War that we first find an approach to Wagner which, going beyond denominational bounds, saw religion in terms of mythology, thereby opening up the way to the ideological misappropriation of the composer: "Wagner's work [the *Ring*] was the first to show me what blood-myth is" — thus Wagner's works were annexed by the twenty-three-year-old Adolf Hitler.[6]

This *fin-de-siècle* debate at least still took Wagner's attitude to religion seriously.[7] In the twentieth century, by contrast, there appears to have been an increase in the number of voices for whom Wagner simply ceases to exist as a *homo religiosus*: in Martin Gregor-Dellin's major life of Wagner, the composer's works are reduced to a "theoretical system that [...] suffers from one disadvantage: it is a religion in disguise".[8] For Gregor-Dellin, this meant only one thing: a totalitarian ideology.[9] Moreover, the historical background of Christianity plays virtually no part in Gregor-Dellin's account. But not only has all mention of religion disappeared, so too has Wagner the Protestant, with the result that what, for Wagner, had been a self-evident aspect of his personality and work now has to be reintegrated into that picture.

Given the mountain of available material, we cannot retell the story of Wagner's life all over again, but nor is it possible to avoid a brief account of the principal stages in that life. Nor can we subject the whole of his output to a comprehensive rereading, but *Parsifal* may serve as *pars pro toto* and will be examined, therefore, in the second section of our essay. Thirdly, we shall consider

6. Ernst Hanisch, "Die politisch-ideologische Wirkung und 'Verwendung' Wagners", *Richard-Wagner-Handbuch*, ed. Ulrich Müller and Peter Wapnewski (Stuttgart 1986), 625-46, esp. 643; translated into English by Paul Knight as "The Political Influence and Appropriation of Wagner", *Wagner Handbook*, ed. John Deathridge (Cambridge, Mass, 1992), 186-201, esp. 199.

7. In spite of all that has been written on Wagner, the composer's religious views and church-going habits remain inadequately researched; yet to be systematically sifted in this context are Cosima's diaries (a by no means unproblematical source, for all their wealth of material), together with Wagner's letters and memoirs by his contemporaries. Among more recent writings, see Roger Hollinrake, "Religious beliefs", *The Wagner Compendium*, ed. Barry Millington (London 1992), 146-9 and Dieter David Scholz, *Richard Wagners Antisemitismus* (Würzburg 1993), 130-37 ("Exkurs über Wagners Religiosität"). On Wagner's "art religion" (a subject more copiously covered), see Adolf Nowak, "Wagners *Parsifal* und die Idee der Kunstreligion", *Richard Wagner: Werk und Wirkung*, ed. Carl Dahlhaus (Regensburg 1971), 161-74; Walter Beck's *Richard Wagner: Neue Dokumente zur Biographie — Die Spiritualität im Drama seines Lebens* (Tutzing 1988) makes no attempt to treat the subject systematically and largely ignores the Protestant context.

8. Martin Gregor-Dellin, *Richard Wagner: Sein Leben, sein Werk, sein Jahrhundert* (Munich 1980) 339; translated into English by J Maxwell Brownjohn as *Richard Wagner: His Life, His Work, His Century* (London 1983), 227.

9. op. cit., 343; Engl. trans. 228.

a few answers to the question of what has become of Wagner the Protestant. In this way we shall see emerging from the facts of Wagner's life a religious outlook in which Protestantism plays an important role as one aspect of bourgeois culture.

1 Stages in Wagner's life

Wagner's threescore years and ten began in 1813 in a Protestant milieu: he was baptised in the Thomaskirche at Leipzig, had close ties with men of the cloth, grew up conversant with the Lutheran tradition and was, of course, confirmed – all of which he openly admitted when looking back on his early life from the vantage point of 1865.[10] Especially impressive is his account of his first Communion, which he received while being confirmed at Easter 1827, when he particularly recalled the sound of the organ and singing: "The shudder of emotion with which I received the bread and wine remained so unforgettable that in order not to spoil this impression I never again went to Communion, which was easy for me because such participation is not compulsory among Protestants." This avoidance of Communion applies only up to the time that this passage in *Mein Leben* was dictated, in other words, the mid-1860s. Whether these remarks reflect the actual situation at this date is difficult to say for certain, but, as we shall see later, Wagner's practice had demonstrably changed by the 1870s. Following his confirmation, his religious beliefs remained stable for the next two decades, firmly anchored, as they were, within the framework of Protestant orthodoxy. This is clear from works such as *Das Liebesmahl der Apostel* of 1843 and from the prayer that Wagner placed in Rienzi's mouth in 1837/8:

> Allmächt'ger Vater, blick' herab!
> Hör' mich im Staube zu dir fleh'n!
> Mein Gott, der hohe Kraft mir gab,
> Erhöre mein tief-inbrünstig Fleh'n!
> (GS I,82)

[Almighty father, look down on me! Hear me entreat you in the dust! My God, who gave me such great strength, answer my deeply fervent prayer.]

Such texts can be shown to be part of the Protestant neology of the first half of the nineteenth century, a moderately rationalistic, pietistic movement that is also reflected in Wagner's political liberalism at this stage in his life.[11] That it does not emerge more clearly in Wagner's case is presumably bound up with the fact that it was fully integrated into bourgeois forms of existence and that its forms of worship were no longer so pronounced: bourgeois and religious practices were closely assimilated with each other.

10. Richard Wagner, *Mein Leben*, ed. Martin Gregor-Dellin (Munich 1976): baptism 9 (Engl. trans. 3); contact with clergymen 12-13 (Engl. trans. 6); Saxon and Thuringian homeland 14 (Engl. trans. 8-9) and confirmation 27-8 (Engl. trans. 21).

11. Wagner's surviving library from his years in Dresden between 1842 and 1849 contains none of the relevant neologistic literature: there is nothing by Dresden's rationalistic court preacher, Christoph Friedrich von Ammon (1766–1850) or by the widely-read Johann Heinrich Daniel Zschokke (1771–1848). Instead, his library was given over largely to historical and literary texts, the chief exception being Luther's translation of the New Testament. See Curt von Westernhagen, *Richard Wagners Dresdener Bibliothek 1842–1849* (Wiesbaden 1966), 105.

But such texts are no longer found after mid-century. Their disappearance reflects a profound break in Wagner's life that has often been marginalised by Wagner scholars and by the Wagner community in general: these were Wagner's years of atheism, a period in his life triggered by his reading of Ludwig Feuerbach, to whom he subsequently dedicated *The Art-Work of the Future* "in grateful admiration".[12] In embracing Young Hegelian ideas, Wagner was following a well-worn path which, in the wake of their loss of religious beliefs, many other nineteenth-century intellectuals were to take. Relevant remarks from this period could hardly be more unequivocal, and Wagner made no attempt to censor them when preparing his collected writings for publication in the 1870s: "Religion and legend are the pregnant products of the folk's insight into the nature of objects and people" (GS II,123; PW VII,266) or "This heavenly father [...] will be none other than the social wisdom of mankind, which takes nature and her plentitude for the common weal of all" (GS III,33; PW I,57). Religion is a form of projection, with the anthropologisation of theology bringing with it the emancipation of humankind, while the assimilation of metaphysics betokens the regaining of man's dispossessed nature. God, finally, is a symbol of nature, which has been pawned to the common good. All this is pure Feuerbach or at least Feuerbach barely diluted. The depth of Wagner's atheism is perhaps most strikingly illustrated by his abandonment of a practice that not even non-denominational circles were generally disposed to eschew, namely, the practice of celebrating Christmas. In the Wagner household in 1851, presents were not exchanged until New Year's Eve: "In other words, we've cancelled Christmas."[13]

It was these years, too, that witnessed the publication of Wagner's most notorious anti-Jewish essay, "Judaism in Music", in which he suggested that the Jews could be redeemed only by denying their Jewishness: "Join unreservedly in this self-destructive and bloody battle, and we shall all be united and indivisible! But bear in mind that one thing alone can redeem you from the curse that weighs upon you, *the redemption of Ahasuerus: Destruction!*"[14]

Whether Wagner's anti-Jewish position became less extreme towards the end of his life, whether he finally espoused racist anti-Semitism or whether he rejected or revised such an attitude is the subject of an extraordinarily contentious debate that cannot be reexamined here.[15] All that needs to be noted is that Wagner continued to harbour highly ambiguous feelings towards the Jews right up to the end of his life and that there was no place for the Old Testament in his own particular view of Christianity. "That is the curse of Christianity, all this clinging to the Old Testament," he told Cosima on 13 November 1878. That this was no mere theorising is all too abundantly clear. As the first performance of *Parsifal* drew ever closer, he told his intimate circle in 1880 that the planned conductor, Hermann Levi, would first have to convert to Christianity: "I cannot allow him to conduct *Parsifal* unbaptised" (CT, 28 April 1880). And a good six months later, "altogether very agitated, he says in a conversation with Levi that he — as a Jew — has merely to learn to die, but Levi shows understanding" (CT, 12 November 1880).

But let us return to Feuerbach and the 1850s. It was not long before Wagner turned his back on Feuerbach's atheism. Indeed, his reconversion can be dated with some accuracy: it must have taken place in late September or early October 1854. Wagner's mentor was Arthur Schopenhauer.[16] On receiving a copy of *The World as Will and Representation*, he claims to have read it four times in succession,[17] recognising its "immeasurable importance"[18] and admitting that "only Schopenhauer's philosophy could entirely suit me and influence me".[19] Even more important: it was Schopenhauer who showed him the way back to Christianity. A quarter of a century later, Cosima noted down her husband's admission: "Yes, it was Schopenhauer who revealed Christianity to me" (CT, 19 February 1879). This may strike us as odd today, at a time when Schopenhauer is seen as the writer who introduced Buddhist ideas into intellectual circles in Western Europe, but Schopenhauer regarded himself as a syncretist who reconciled the great Asiatic religions and Christianity: "The same fundamental wisdom [constitutes] the basic idea of Brahmanism and Buddhism and indeed of true Christianity."[20]

From now on, Wagner was guided by Schopenhauer, and the latter's influence cannot be overstated. Throughout this period, Wagner looked at some of the basic positions of Christian theology through Schopenhauerian spectacles. Reincarnation,

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12. SS XII,284; see also commentary on p. 427. The complete text of *The Art-Work of the Future* appears in GS III,42-177; PW I,67-213. Here Wagner is concerned less with an aesthetic *Gesamtkunstwerk* (although that term occurs here) than with the links between life, science and art.
13. SB IV,244-5 (letter to Theodor Uhlig of 1 January 1852).
14. Richard Wagner, *Die Kunst und die Revolution, Das Judentum in der Musik, Was ist deutsch?*, ed. Tibor Kneif (Munich 1975), 77; the revised version of *Das Judenthum in der Musik* may be found in GS V,66-85; PW III,75-100.
15. Invariably bound up with this debate is the question of Wagner's and his legacy's responsibility for the anti-Semitism of the Third Reich, so that insight and interest are often analytically indistinguishable. Among more recent writings on the subject, see Hartmut Zelinsky, "Rettung ins Ungenaue: Zu Martin Gregor-Dellins Wagner-Biographie", *Musik-Konzepte*, Vol. XXV (Munich 1982), 74-115 (Zelinsky seeks to show how Wagner's hostility to the Jews has been suppressed in writings on Wagner); Dieter David Scholz, *Richard Wagners Antisemitismus* (note 7) (Scholz tends to draw a dividing line between Wagner and racist anti-Semitism); Micha Brumlik, *Die Gnostiker: Der Traum von der Selbsterlösung des Menschen* (Frankfurt am Main 1995), 210-28 (Brumlik interprets Wagner's tendency to force redemption on others as the correlate of Gnostic ideas of self-redemption); and Annette Hein, *Es ist viel "Hitler" in Wagner: Rassismus und antisemitische Deutschtumsideologie in den Bayreuther Blättern* (Tübingen 1996) (Hein clarifies the tradition and draws attention to the way in which Wagner's ideas became even more extreme in the hands of his supporters, while also considering Wagner's willingness to engage in questions concerning anti-Semitic views).
16. On Wagner's reception of Schopenhauer, see Hartmut Reinhardt, "Richard Wagner und Schopenhauer", *Richard-Wagner-Handbuch* (note 6), 101-113; translated into English by Erika and Martin Swales as "Wagner and Schopenhauer", *Wagner Handbook* (note 6), 287-96; see also Bryan Magee, *The Philosophy of Schopenhauer*, revised edn. (Oxford 1997), esp. 350-402.
17. ML 523; Engl. trans. 510.
18. SB VI,347 (letter to August Röckel of 5 November 1855).
19. loc. cit.
20. Arthur Schopenhauer, "Parerga und Paralipomena", *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Arthur Hübscher, 7 vols. (Wiesbaden 1972), V,40; translated into English by E F J Payne, 2 vols. (Oxford 1974), I,35.

for example, now became a key to redemption, as he told Mathilde Wesendonck in August 1860:

> Only a profound acceptance of the doctrine of metempsychosis has been able to console me by revealing the point at which all things finally converge at the same level of redemption, after the various individual existences — which run alongside each other in time — have come together in a meaningful way outside time.[21]

And on the Feast of the Epiphany in 1875 Wagner equated the Christian Trinity of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost with the Schopenhauerian triality of "will, idea, and world" (CT, 6 January 1875). Although we may argue over the extent to which such notions are related to classical Christian theologies, there is no doubt that with another aspect of his reading of Schopenhauer, Wagner went straight to the heart of Christianity. "God", he announced towards the end of his life, was "truth through compassion" (CT, 13 July 1879). In other words, God was no guarantor of morality, no remote and victorious ruler of the world (as He was widely held to be in the nineteenth century), but a sympathetic figure close to each and every one of us. Wagner sought a kenotic Christology in the concepts of theology,[22] opposing triumphalism with a motif which, taken from the writings of the New Testament, involved criticism of the world. Through Schopenhauer, Wagner learnt that Christianity amounted to more than mere affirmation of the world in anticipation of the "Kingdom of God" and that it took account of the painful disjunctures in our lives.

Through Schopenhauer, Wagner also came into contact with Buddhist thinking. This is not the place to discuss whether Wagner really understood Buddhism and grasped its otherness and whether there was ever any possibility of his gaining access to genuine Buddhism.[23] What is important is that he got to know Buddhism through Schopenhauer and in particular learnt to value the quality of compassion. The fact that he approached Buddhism from the standpoint of the philosophy of religion rather than from a theological angle in no way affects Buddhism's normative role.

But Wagner's espousal of Schopenhauer, like that of Feuerbach before him, was not fated to remain unaffected by change. In 1856, at the height of his veneration of Schopenhauer, Wagner rewrote the ending of the *Ring*, the poem of which he had published three years earlier. The previous apotheosis of love was now replaced by a passage proclaiming release from reincarnation:

21. *Richard Wagner an Mathilde Wesendonk: Tagebuchblätter und Briefe 1853–1871*, ed. Wolfgang Golther (Leipzig 1914), 285; Engl. trans. from *Selected Letters of Richard Wagner*, ed. Stewart Spencer and Barry Millington (London 1987), 499. For more on Wagner's view of metempsychosis, see the relevant chapter in my forthcoming study *Reinkarnation: Geschichte der Seelenwanderungsvorstellung in Europa*.

22. On the complex of structural and material Christian references in Schopenhauer's thinking, see Josef Wohlmuth, "Das christliche Dogma von der Erlösung", *Schopenhauer-Jahrbuch*, lxxiv (1993), 151-68.

23. The systematic exploration of Asiatic sources is a process that admittedly began in the eighteenth century, but it was not until towards the end of the nineteenth century that a wider range of sources became more easily accessible; see Klaus-Josef Notz, *Der Buddhismus in Deutschland in seinen Selbstdarstellungen: Eine religionswissenschaftliche Untersuchung zur religiösen Akkulturationsproblematik* (Frankfurt am Main 1984) and Martin Baumann, *Deutsche Buddhisten: Geschichte und Gemeinschaften* (Marburg 1993).

> nach dem wunsch- und wahnlos
> heiligsten Wahlland,
> der Welt-Wanderung Ziel,
> von Wiedergeburt erlös't,
> zieht nun die Wissende hin.[24]

[From the holiest chosen land, free from desire and delusion, the goal of the world's migration, the enlightened woman now goes.]

But in the final version of the *Ring*, completed in 1874, the idea of reincarnation has again been cut and the gods simply perish. That Wagner's decision to distance himself from this Schopenhauerian ending was due to the influence of his second wife, whose Christianity was more pronounced than his own, is as likely as it is difficult to demonstrate with the requisite brevity. Even so, Schopenhauer remained a seminal experience in terms of Wagner's Christian outlook, not only at the time of his mid-life crisis during the 1850s but later, too, remaining a lifelong authority on matters of the philosophy of religion. Of this there can be no doubt, given Schopenhauer's ubiquitous presence in Cosima's diary entries for the final years of her husband's life.

It seems that Wagner's religious convictions became consolidated in the 1860s. Six aspects of these beliefs are of special importance here. All remained essentially the same until his death in 1883:

(i) the privileged position of Christianity, which finds paradigmatic expression in Wagner's belief in the divinity of Christ (see CT, 1 July 1880 and 9 May 1880), a divinity often contrasted with the Buddha's human nature (e.g., GS X,212-13; PW VI,214). The notion of Christ's divine nature is presumably rooted in Wagner's Protestant childhood, but it is Schopenhauer who helped him to justify Christological elements such as the idea of sinlessness that is derived from that view: the "Saviour" can be described as "sinless" only "because the Will must have been completely broken within him even before he was born, so that he was no longer capable of suffering but only of feeling the sufferings of others" (GS X,216; PW VI,218);

(ii) Schopenhauer, who remained an undisputed authority in Wagner's interpretation of Christianity;

(iii) the idea of a "pure gospel" (CT,1 July 1880), meaning not only rejection of the Old Testament in keeping with Wagner's anti-Jewish standpoint but also a critique of Christianity's tradition of theological reflection. Wagner wanted "the spirit of Christianity [...] freed of all sectarianism" (CT, 30 January 1880). Here there is clearly a large vestige of Wagner's Feuerbachian past, as well as what one assumes is a large dose of Ernest Renan[25] and a number of unquantifiable affinities with at least one aspect of the non-denominational scene of the mid-nineteenth century, including sectarian German Catholics and the so-called Friends of Enlightenment.[26] Above all, however, these ideas are part of the mainstream neological tradition of Protestantism;

24. GS VI,255-6; see also Otto Strobel, "Zur Entstehungsgeschichte der *Götterdämmerung*: Unbekannte Dokumente aus Wagners Dichterwerkstatt", *Die Musik*, xxv (1933), 336-41, esp. 341.

25. Although Cosima Wagner's diaries contain numerous references to Renan, these still await a proper biographical assessment.

26. Thus the no doubt accurate surmise on the part of Dieter David Scholz (note 7), 133-4.

(iv) Lutheran Protestanism; for Wagner, the one true form of Christianity was Protestantism and, more especially, Lutheranism. His starting point was the anti-Catholic Luther who was critical of dogma and whom Wagner held in high regard as a reformer, preferring to read the New Testament in Luther's translation rather than in Greek.[27] Towards the end of his life, he also read Luther's *Smaller Catechism* (CT, 22 September 1880) and repeatedly returned to his letter *To the Aristocracy of the German Nation* (CT, 21-5 October 1878). Luther was "the greatest patriot of all" (CT, 21 September 1880) and regularly toasted at table.[28] Wagner adopted a missionary position in promoting the Lutheran Church: it was under his influence that both Cosima and his friend and admirer, the Bayreuth banker Friedrich Feustel, converted to Lutheranism, the latter after a brief flirtation with traditional Catholicism,[29] and not even his father-in-law, Franz Liszt —known throughout Europe as the becassocked Abbé Liszt — was spared his proselytising zeal: "I'll make a Lutheran out of you yet" (CT, 23 September 1880). We shall later have more to say about his lecturing the freethinking Wagnerian Malwida von Meysenbug on the subject of religion. None the less, "the misfortune of Protestantism", Wagner believed, was "theology" (CT, 22 October 1878), a freethinking belief that also gave him pause for thought in the context of his own church, too;

(v) practical religion; church services and rituals were a regular part of religious life in the Wagner household, at least during the final decade of Wagner's life. Wagner and Cosima were married in church and their children, of course, were baptised and confirmed. Cosima and the children presumably attended church in Bayreuth on a fairly regular basis,[30] and the family was on friendly terms with the local Lutheran dean. (Bayreuth had embraced the Lutheran Reformation.) After the Feuerbach-inspired intermezzo of the early 1850s, Christmas was once again celebrated at Wahnfried, albeit without any religious service.[31] During Holy Week, Cosima and the children always attended service on Good Friday, and although we may be right in assuming that they also went to church on Maundy Thursday (a service which, according to Cosima's diary for 6 April 1882, lasted four hours) and Easter Sunday, these services are only rarely mentioned. Liszt must have attended the Bayreuth Catholic church on a much more frequent basis.[32]

It is difficult to tell to what extent Wagner himself partook of these activities. We shall have more to say later about his taking Holy Communion. Cosima herself has little to say on the subject, one of the few exceptions being an entry on his attendance at the Maundy Thursday service in 1878 (see below), but he is said to

27. Carl Friedrich Glasenapp, *Das Leben Richard Wagners*, 4th edn., 6 vols. (Leipzig 1905–12), VI,95.
28. op. cit., V,320 and VI,599.
29. See Wolfgang Schwabe, *Richard Wagner und die Kirche* (diss., U. of Leipzig 1963), 93-4.
30. Cosima does not report these visits with any regularity, but her entries of 8, 22 and 29 March 1874 suggest a continuous practice.
31. See Cosima's diary entries for 24 December, which make it clear that the family gave presents and erected a tree every year.
32. Attested, for example, on Palm Sunday (25 March) 1877; Liszt's role in Bayreuth was always something of an embarrassment, and as a Catholic he was in any case an outsider.

have been a regular attender at the Good Friday services.[33] There is no doubt, however, that he observed important feast days, although with what regularity is unclear. On Good Friday (12 April) 1879, for example, he read religious literature by Ernest Renan and thought of the Crucifixion, perhaps inspired to do so by pictures (which repeatedly turn up in the context of his remarks on Christ and suggest a visual and aesthetic basis to his Christology[34]). Arthur Seidl, finally, reports that Wagner "expressed himself more particularly on the incomparable merits of the simple Protestant service that contained within itself every opportunity for religious contemplation";[35]

(vi) religion as a real experience; assuming that he is not guilty of projecting later ideas on to early experiences, this is something already found in Wagner's experience of Communion at his confirmation. It was an experience of religion which, even at this early date, was already associated with music. We shall have more to say about this particular type of religious experience in Part Three of our essay.

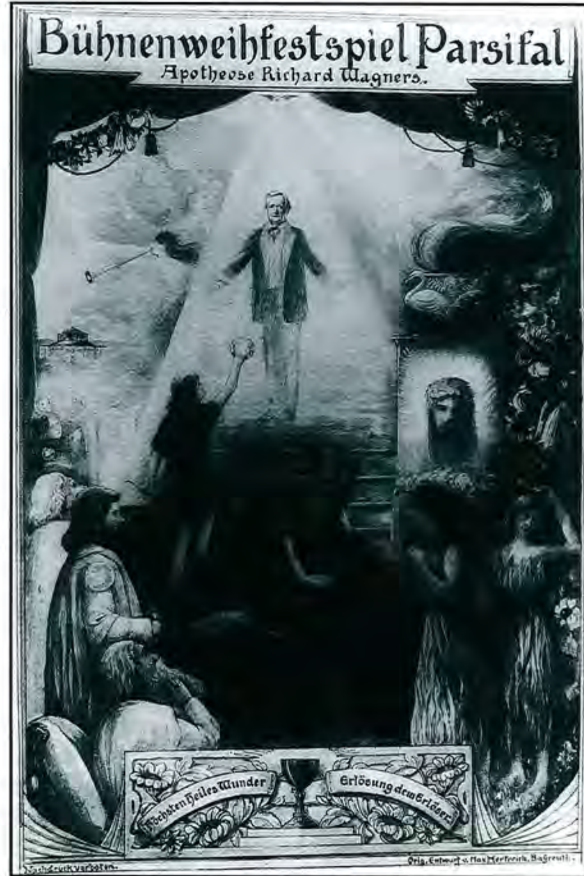
2 *Parsifal*

Parsifal is Wagner's life's work. It was the "last and most sacred" of his works and one, moreover, in which "the most sublime mysteries of the Christian faith are openly presented on stage".[36] The subject had interested Wagner since 1845, when he was still only thirty-two years old, and it was to be his last completed work for the theatre. The first prose draft was written in 1865, the second complete draft of the music finished by April 1879 and the full score by January 1882, just over a year before his death in February 1883. In terms of both its music and its philosophy, it represents a summation of Wagner's life.

Amfortas, the Grail King, has received from his father Titurel the chalice from which Jesus drank at the Last Supper and into which His blood flowed at the Crucifixion. Together with this chalice, Amfortas was also entrusted with the spear that wounded Christ as He hung on the Cross but which he — Amfortas — has lost to a renegade knight of the Grail, Klingsor. Amfortas now suffers from an incurable wound in his side, his sufferings only briefly assuaged by the balsam brought by Kundry — a "wild woman" in Klingsor's service — and by the sight of the Grail. True deliverance will come from one man alone: "Made wise through pity, / the blameless fool, / wait for him, / the one I chose" (GS X,333). This blameless fool is assumed to be Parsifal, who enters in Act One as a mysterious, guileless stranger.

In Act Two, Parsifal arrives at Klingsor's castle, where he resists Kundry's attempts to seduce him and recovers the spear. At the same time, we discover more

33. Thus Bernd Mayer, "Auch R. in der Kirche, tiefe Ergriffenheit", *Nordbayerischer Kurier* (19 August 1993), 12.
34. Cosima's diaries contain a remarkable number of such references: see CT, 17 June 1878; 19 September 1878; 19 August 1879; 27 June 1880; 1 July 1880; 25 April 1882; 27 September 1882; and 6 February 1883.
35. See Arthur Seidl, *Wagneriana* (note 2), I,405.
36. *König Ludwig II. und Richard Wagner: Briefwechsel*, ed. Otto Strobel, 5 vols. (Karlsruhe 1936–9), III,182; Engl. trans. from *Selected Letters of Richard Wagner* (note 21), 903.



Max Herterich, *The Apotheosis of Richard Wagner*

about Kundry's past, including her previous incarnations as Herodias and Gundryggia.

Act Three takes place many years later and leads to the work's soteriological climax. Amfortas is still suffering from his incurable wound and longs to die, but the sight of the Grail prevents him from doing so. Parsifal returns with the sacred spear and is anointed king. His first office under his new title is to baptise Kundry, who is converted to Christianity. He then cures Amfortas by placing the point of the spear on his festering wound. As the new king, Parsifal removes the Grail from its feretory and the chorus sings the enigmatic final words: "Miracle of supreme salvation: / redemption to the redeemer!" (GS X,375).

These delphic lines, on which our whole understanding of *Parsifal* hangs, have provoked a veritable brouhaha of rival interpretations, with possible readings ranging from an ethical statement of the Buddhist belief in compassion to the idea

of Christ's redemption from his Jewish past[37] and from the need for Christianity to be deconfessionalised to the universalisation of salvation and even to Wagner's own redemption.[38] There is much to be said for the argument that these lines refer to Parsifal first and foremost.[39]

Parsifal is undoubtedly a profoundly religious piece. Wagner described it, quite consciously, as a *Bühnenweihfestspiel* – a festival drama for consecrating the Bayreuth stage. In his refusal to allow it to be performed outside Bayreuth, he defined the Festspielhaus as a temple of art. Although he did not discourage applause altogether, he insisted that it should be confined to the end of the piece.[40] Last but not least is the clearly religious subject, with Wagner retelling the story of an act of redemption based in turn upon the story of the Last Supper and Crucifixion and with the motivic repertory of the medieval Grail legend invested with mythic status, thereby allowing redemption to be represented on stage as an aesthetic, even tangible experience. *Parsifal* is perhaps the most concentrated expression of the "religion of art" (GS III,63; PW I,90) that Wagner had been proclaiming since the 1850s. This point should become clearer in a moment.

3 Protestant conditions

From an early date questions were asked whether it makes any sense to interpret *Parsifal*—and, indeed, Wagner's works in general—within the context of Christianity. Attempts to impose a "Buddhist" interpretation on the piece have followed Schopenhauer and, in particular, have latched on to the description of Parsifal as a "blameless fool made wise by pity". In the context of Wagner's life, such an approach is inseparable from his Schopenhauerian Buddhism and there is no doubt that, on this basis, the whole work could be described as Buddhist or Schopenhauerian.[41] But a single reference, however important, is not sufficient to provide a complete interpretative framework, and I have in any case no wish to become involved in any mock battle over the relative merits of a Buddhist or Christian interpretation. Recent writers on the subject are more or less agreed that not only important elements in the work's motivic repertory but also its interpretative superstructure are borrowed from the Christian tradition. This, however, does not invalidate the Schopenhauerian element: the Sage of Frankfurt remains the source

37. Peter Wapnewski, "Die Oper Richard Wagners als Dichtung", *Richard-Wagner-Handbuch* (note 6), 223-352, esp. 339-46; translated into English by Peter Palmer as "The Operas as Literary Works", *Wagner Handbook* (note 6), 3-95; see also Hartmut Zelinsky, "Rettung ins Ungenaue" (note 15), 98-115.

38. Dieter Borchmeyer, *Das Theater Richard Wagners* (Stuttgart 1982), 301; translated into English by Stewart Spencer as *Richard Wagner: Theory and Theatre* (Oxford 1991), 387-8.

39. See Wapnewski's argumentation, "Die Oper Richard Wagners als Dichtung" (note 6), 339-46; Engl. trans. (note 6), 89-95.

40. See op. cit., 333-4 (Engl. trans. 85-6); also Martin Gregor-Dellin, *Richard Wagner* (note 8), 821-2; Engl. trans. (note 8), 506.

41. See, for example, Ulrich Kienzle's Schopenhauerian reading of *Parsifal*, *Das Weltüberwindungswerk: Wagners "Parsifal" — ein szenisch-musikalisches Gleichnis der Philosophie Arthur Schopenhauers* (Laaber 1992), which contains a large number of compelling references.

of an essential religious component — the compassionate redeemer — that became accessible to Wagner only through Schopenhauer and the latter's response to Buddhist philosophy.

The controversy surrounding Wagner's philosophical standpoint and the world view proposed by his works in general and by *Parsifal* in particular, including any "Protestant" dimension, will now be discussed from an angle that has received scant attention hitherto, yet which represents a decisive point of intersection between the individual and his works, namely, Wagner's private view of religion.

3.1 *Parsifal* and the church calendar

If we correlate two superficially disparate factors — the calendar of Christian feasts and Wagner's work on *Parsifal* — we shall find a number of striking correspondences. He completed the first fair copy of the verse draft of Act One on Maundy Thursday (29 March) 1877, and two years later — also on Maundy Thursday — passages from *Parsifal*, including the Good Friday scenes, were played at Wahnfried (CT, 10 April 1879). Within the opera itself, the final uncovering of the Grail takes place on a Good Friday. This association with Good Friday culminates in Wagner's claim that he conceived the definitive form of the work on Good Friday 1857 (ML 561; Engl. trans. 547). That Wagner was guilty of perpetrating a myth concerning the work's inspiration has been known at least since the publication of Cosima's diary: "In fact it is all as far-fetched as my love affairs, for it was not Good Friday at all — just a pleasant mood in Nature which made me think, 'This is how a Good Friday ought to be'" (CT, 22 April 1879).[42]

Wagner's remarks were duly minuted by Cosima. Exceptionally, the fiction is more revealing than the truth on this occasion, since it shows that, chronological niceties notwithstanding, Wagner wanted *Parsifal* to be interpreted as a piece about Good Friday.

3.2 Liturgical compensation

At the time that *Parsifal* received its first performance in 1882, criticism of the sermon-based service had become increasingly vocal in Protestant churches in Germany. "Protestantism's sermon-based service means leaving the congregation undernourished," Friedrich Rittelmeyer explained his reasons for leaving the Protestant Church a few years after Wagner's death.[43] By the time of the First World War, Hermann Priebe felt that

> the traditional order of the divine service no longer meets the needs of today's congregations. On this point, there is widespread agreement. The demand on the part of parishioners for a service that satisfies heart, mind, will and eye has made itself felt in the present turbulent age with greater force than ever before and is one of the most gratifying signs of an awakening awareness of the Church. This yearning helps to explain the widespread sympathy for the elaborate liturgical forms of the Catholic service.[44]

42. Peter Wapnewski, "Die Oper Richard Wagners als Dichtung" (note 6), 331; Engl. trans. (note 6), 84.

43. Friedrich Rittelmeyer, *Aus meinem Leben 1932–1937* (Stuttgart 1986), 245.

44. Hermann Priebe, *Kirchliches Handbuch für die evangelische Gemeinde unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Evangelischen Kirche der altpreußischen Union*, 3rd edn. (Berlin 1929), 189.

When the High Church movement institutionalised these needs in the wake of the First World War, it was simply ratifying a process that had been going on for a long time and that was in fact already further advanced among Germany's European neighbours.

In the Wagner household, too, we may assume that there was a perceived problem with the Protestant liturgy. Returning from the Easter Day service in 1873, for example, Cosima sighed: "The sermon remains a misery!" (CT, 30 March 1873). And on attending the Maundy Thursday service five years later we find her commenting: "Not a proper service, Communion only for a few, in the silence of the empty church I read Tauler's sermons with great edification" (CT, 18 April 1878). Thus the undisputed head of the Wagner community. Perhaps Cosima's status as a convert made her unusually sensitive to this sort of thing, but there are grounds for suspecting that Wagner thought along similar lines. On Maundy Thursday 1880 he attended a service in Naples, where he and his family were staying: "He says he wishes to go to the church to hear the *Miserere*" — the first polyphonic setting in the classic Maundy Thursday service. But the service had only just started when they arrived, leaving Wagner with an hour to kill, an hour that he spent with the Duke of Bagnara and various members of the Naples Conservatory. "He returns, and in the darkness the choir begins to sing. — 'What an awesomely noble impression the music makes!' says R.; then, 'This is true music, which makes everything else look like child's play.' [...] We think of *Parsifal*!" They then drove home (CT, 25 March 1880).

This idea of a conceptual link between a church service and *Parsifal* is more revealing than many an analytical staging of the work in showing that the musico-aesthetic element of the service plays an important compensatory role for Wagner (as in Protestant services generally). This, however, does not turn *Parsifal* into an expression of Roman Catholicism, as Nietzsche thought. Rather, it revitalises on a "consecrated" stage an aesthetic element in the service, a structural element which, in the eyes of many people, had lost ground in the Lutheran sermon-based service and which had become Catholic in the eyes of contemporaries. Yet, with the help of a hermeneutical sleight of hand, Nietzsche was right after all in claiming that *Parsifal* embodied "Rome's faith without the text": he turned the underlying High Church aesthetic (which was by no means exclusively Catholic) into a material Catholic denominationalism and, drawing on the spectre of a "Roman" aesthetic, discredited any possible Protestant interpretation. This has an important implication for the relationship between *Parsifal* and Protestantism inasmuch as the work can be read as an attempt on Wagner's part to compensate for shortcomings in the way in which religion was put across from an aesthetic point of view in one section of the educated Protestant public.

3.3 The aesthetics of Holy Communion

The compensatory role of aesthetics in *Parsifal* culminates in a motif in which theatrical staging and church ritual overlap: the Grail. Wagner gives the Grail a twofold function: it is both the vessel used at the Last Supper and the cup that caught Christ's blood as He hung on the Cross. In this way, the story of the Grail is reworked as a narrative, not to say as a myth, and seen as synonymous with the history of the

impact of the Last Supper and the Crucifixion. Or, to put it in ecclesiastical terms: it becomes a reenactment of the Holy Week liturgy and, more specifically, of the Good Friday liturgy, central to which are the two elements of Holy Communion and the commemoration of the Crucifixion.[45]

Here, too, the link between the theatrical theme of the Grail and the ecclesiastical theology of Holy Communion has a basis — arguably a decisive basis — in Wagner's own life. When judged by turn-of-the-century standards, his attitude to the Blessed Sacrament cannot be described as in any way remote.[46] We know from Cosima Wagner's diaries that he went to Holy Communion on several occasions during the 1870s and 1880s, notably on the occasion of their wedding in 1870,[47] for her conversion to Protestantism on 31 October 1872, almost certainly every Good Friday[48] and possibly on other occasions, too.[49] This would suggest that Wagner received Communion at least with a frequency that was then quite normal in Protestant circles and possibly with even greater frequency than the average.[50]

These devotional exercises on Wagner's part and his partaking of Holy Communion are remarkable not least in that they attest to Wagner's Lutheran credentials in what one can only call an arcane area of Christian ritual, and they become even more so when we recall that it was not merely a formal, "ritualistic" involvement but one that presupposed a considerable emotional investment. A few examples will suffice: in 1880 Wagner described Communion as "the unique sacrament of the Christian faith" (and in this context, it may be added, as a kind of sacrament of vegetarianism) (GS X,230; PW VI,231). Friedrich Feustel, who, it will be recalled, had converted to Protestantism at Wagner's prompting, reports a conversation with Wagner at his country house, in the course of which the latter instructed him in the rudiments of Holy Communion in the manner of a catechism. Glasenapp recalls how

> once, as dusk was gilding the surrounding countryside, he [i.e., Feustel] had sat there with the Master and how the latter, himself deeply moved and searching through the deepest recesses of his distant memory, explained to him in intimate tones and in that incomparably unique way of his the mysteries of the Christian sacrament and the difference between the genuinely Germanic and Lutheran 'that is' and the 'that signifies', a difference profoundly consonant with the German character.[51]

45. In fact, the actual commemoration of the Last Supper takes place at the service on Maundy Thursday, not Good Friday.

46. See the list of references in Schwabe, *Wagner und die Kirche* (note 29), 23-6 and 91-5. There remains the need for a more detailed study of Wagner's attendance at Communion and its implications for his operas. For an attempt to apply Wagner's ideas to the Lutheran service, see D Fiebig, "Das Abendmahl bei Richard Wagner", *Bayreuther Blätter*, lvi (1933), 124-35.

47. Dieter Borchmeyer, *Das Theater Richard Wagners* (note 38), 299; Engl. trans. (note 38), 386.

48. Thus Bernd Mayer, "Auch R. in der Kirche" (note 33), although this practice is not attested in Cosima's diaries.

49. See Arthur Seidl, *Wagneriana* (note 2), I,405.

50. Wagner's relatively infrequent attendance at Communion may reflect contemporary practice, but it may also have been bound up with his fear of publicity; cf. the situation on Maundy Thursday 1880, when "the people hiss at us" (CT, 25 March 1880).

51. See Carl Friedrich Glasenapp, *Das Leben Richard Wagners* (note 27), V,12-13; Glasenapp's account may be based on a specific question put to Feustel.

When, on another occasion, the freethinking Malwida von Meysenbug made it clear to Wagner that she had no intention of having her ward baptised, Wagner objected:

> This was not right, he said, not everyone could fashion his religion for himself, and particularly in childhood one must have a feeling of cohesion. Nor should one be left to choose; rather, it should be possible to say, "You have been christened, you belong through baptism to Christ, now unite yourself once more with him through Holy Communion." Christening and Communion are indispensable, he said. No amount of knowledge can ever approach the effect of the latter (CT, 12 December 1873).

It is clear from remarks such as these that Wagner felt a traditional affinity with the theology of the Lutheran Communion. But there is more to it than that.

This profoundly emotional bond, which recalls Wagner's moving account of his first Communion, was presumably shared by his children and stepchildren. When Cosima and Daniela — one of her daughters from her first marriage with Hans von Bülow — attended their first Lutheran Communion on Good Friday 1875, Daniela was "very moved, without my having to say much to her" (CT, 26 March 1875). And when Cosima herself converted to Protestantism in 1872 and took Communion in the vestry of the Bayreuth parish church, she described her husband as "profoundly affected" (CT, 31 October 1872). Wagner himself is elsewhere reported to have remarked, deeply moved: "How beautiful it was within the narrow confines of the sacristy! How powerfully the tones of the Dean's voice rang out! What else could take the place of that which stirs within one at the unspeakably affecting words: 'This is my body'."[52] But it is clear from her account that Cosima's attitude to Holy Communion was at least as emotionally charged as her husband's: "For me it has seemed more significant almost to have gone with R. to Communion than to the marriage altar — oh, how kind Fate has been to me! How could I ever have deserved it?" (CT, 31 October 1872). When we recall that in 1865 Wagner had said that he had stopped receiving Communion,[53] we may well conclude that his decision to start again was influenced by Cosima, who, as an erstwhile Catholic, had been in the habit of attending Communion with rather greater frequency.

Last but not least, there is an indirect but revealing pointer to the emotional scope of Wagner's Communicative piety. When he confessed his clandestine love for Judith Gautier, an erotic beauty from *fin-de-siècle* Paris known simply as "the Whirlwind",[54] sensual passion and devotional formulas became interchangeable. In the autumn of 1877 Wagner wrote to her, asking her to send him some sachets of her perfume "so I can place them between my *linge de matin*",[55] while on another occasion he ordered for his chaise longue "a very beautiful and exceptional cover" that he would call "Judith".[56] Shortly afterwards he sent her a setting of the words

52. Quoted by Richard Graf Du Moulin Eckart, *Cosima Wagner: Ein Lebens- und Charakterbild*, 2 vols. (Munich and Berlin 1929–31), I,633; translated into English by Catherine Alison Phillips (New York 1930), 547.

53. See note 10.

54. Peter Wapnewski, "Die Oper Richard Wagners als Dichtung" (note 6), 342; Engl. trans. (note 6), 91-2.

55. *Richard et Cosima Wagner: Lettres à Judith Gautier*, ed. Léon Guichard (Paris 1964), 60 (letter of 1 October 1877).

56. op. cit., 65 (letter of [22 November 1877]).

of the Communion in *Parsifal*: "Take this my blood, take this my body, for the sake of our love!"[57] The devotional words of the Communion are transformed into an expression of sexual transference — a kind of erotic transubstantiation.

It is tempting to suppose that in the story of the Grail Wagner not only found a devotional topos central to the history of Christianity but that he also treated of his own spirituality, which he proceeded to act out on stage. His now infrequent visits to church to take Communion — visits which, perhaps because of their ecclesiastical ritualisation, left him feeling emotionally isolated and even alienated, but at all events cut off inasmuch as they occupied (too) little space in his individual Lutheran faith — could now find a new place to take root in his "Sacred Festival Drama", emotionally highly charged, enacted on sacred ground and with a ritualised performing practice, but more accessible and as part of a religious superstructure which, in the form of Wagner's private mythology, had removed the barriers of his institutionalised Christianity between Schopenhauer, Buddha and Christ. Perhaps Wagner had now found a new way of obtaining aesthetically what he was unable to grasp conceptually. Certainly, many of those who have heard *Parsifal* in the theatre have been affected by the work in this way: the Protestant psychologist Alfred E Hoche, for example, spoke of the "rapturous thrill associated with Holy Communion, on whose power Richard Wagner built the impact of his *Parsifal*".[58]

4 Wagner's creed: "Religion and Art"

Wagner also reflected on religion and religious views in a more theoretical form. Needless to say, it was not a creed in the classical sense: this, after all, was the late nineteenth century, an age when dogma was viewed with critical eyes and when, in the various apostolic controversies, Protestants tended to question the value of traditional creeds rather than to confirm them. Be that as it may, Wagner summed up his convictions as though they were the most natural thing in the world and in that sense he may be said to have invested them with symbolic status. In keeping with contemporary taste, he chose a literary genre, penning a philosophical treatise to which he gave the title "Religion and Art" and which he published in the *Bayreuther Blätter* in 1880 as a commentary on *Parsifal* and on the theory of religion.[59]

"Religion and Art" deals with the "regeneration" of religion, a theme that chimes with Wagner's obsession with "degeneration" (275) and which thereby indicates the main thrust of the text in terms of the history of philosophy. In view of the "decline" of all great religions (223; 225) and the "degeneration of the human race" (236; 237), the theory of "constant progress" (236; 237) — a belief held by perhaps the majority of Wagner's contemporaries but which he himself regarded as heretical — is effectively discredited. Among the manifestations that justify such

57. See facsimile in *Die Briefe Richard Wagners an Judith Gautier*, ed. Willi Schuh (Zurich and Leipzig [1936]), facing p. 152.

58. Alfred E Hoche, *Jahresringe: Innenansicht eines Menschen* (Munich 1934), 268.

59. The essays in question are "Religion and Art" and its two supplements, "Know Yourself" and "Heroism and Christianity", quoted here from GS and PW. (Where only one figure appears, the page number is the same in both original and translation.)

Parsifal, Act 3, Scene 2. Bayreuth Festival 1882

pessimism are the increasing dogmatism and superficiality of religion (211-12; 213-14), the violence that finds expression in wars (233; 234), the social question (240-41) and, finally, the "commingling" of the "races" (271). Here, the central problem for Wagner is "the Jew" (270). If we translate the term "regeneration" (the solution to the above crisis) as "rebirth", we arrive at a classical Christian terminology that finds explicit expression in Wagner's text when he speaks of "life reborn" (247). That this rebirth is understood in the Christian sense is clear from every page, most notably from Wagner's assertion concerning the divinity of Christianity (212; 213) and its founder (213; 214). That this divinity is Protestant in its inspiration follows logically from Wagner's anti-Catholic stance: the "priests" of the Roman "Semitic-Latin Church" (280), for example, are said to have trivialised what Wagner describes at the outset as the "kernel of religion" (211; 213). This kernel, in turn, is "simple" and ultimately universal (212; 213), very much in the spirit of Wagner's moderate Protestant rationalism. And it is this that he is resolved to "salvage" (211; 213).

In explaining this "simple" core, however, Wagner becomes involved in a complex reflection on the *loci classici* and themes of Christian dogma. At its heart is the Christology of "Jesus Christ the Redeemer" (233) and His death on the Cross, which Wagner interprets with the help of Schopenhauer: "The 'Son of God' had offered himself on the Cross to redeem the world from deceit and sin. [...] It was the body of the quintessence of all-pitying love, stretched out upon the Cross of pain and suffering" (215; 217). The "Saviour suffering upon the Cross [...] overcame all self-will through pity" (279). Key concepts of Schopenhauerian thought are thus integral to Wagner's Christology.

The "sinfulness of mankind" (224; 225) — the anthropological correlate of Christology — is used by Wagner to interpret the existential world around him. On

its most basic level, sin consists in denying the "unity of all living things" (224; 226): to disregard that unity is to invoke the machinery of killing and ultimately explains all wars (232-3; 233-4). In the sin that gives rise to violence we also find the seeds of degeneration, with which Wagner's line of argument comes full circle.

Everything else is applied theory. Wagner's anti-Semitic critique of the Old Testament, for example, is justified by reference to the problem of violence: the Bible of the Jews is said to justify violence, and the Roman popes would have done well, therefore, to have withheld the whole Bible from the people. Wagner is, of course, aware that such surprising praise of his denominational adversary calls into question his essay's Protestant principles. "We must almost regard it as a grave misfortune that Luther had no other weapon of authority against the degenerate Roman Church than merely the whole of this Bible", and it was in sheer "despair" that he clutched at it (258; 257-8). At heart, Wagner was a Marcionite who would have been happiest abolishing the Old Testament, a point he shared with many prominent Protestants of his day, including Adolf Harnack. Certainly, he would like to have replaced the Old Testament commandments with the "trinity" of "love, faith and hope" (259). A further topic — the justification of miracles as a reversal of the laws of nature, with the "greatest" of all miracles interpreted in a Schopenhauerian light as the "reversal of the Will" (214; 215) — he deals with almost in passing, and the same is true of the "revelation" of the kingdom of God as of a "superhuman power" (214; 215) and the virginal status of the Mother of God (216; 217-18). Nor does Wagner have any difficulty in effecting the transition to ethical praxis: "vegetarians", for example, had "seen to the very heart of the question of man's regeneration" by interrupting the cycle of killing (239). Finally, Wagner solves even problems of race — problems of his own devising —, notably in the case of his anti-Semitic theory of degeneration, according to which the races have "commingled" as a result of the "astonishing racial consistency" of the Jews (271). Wagner adopts a Christological standpoint in arguing that the races would achieve "complete equality" by "partaking of the blood of Jesus, as symbolised in the only true sacrament of the Christian religion". In this way, even "the very lowest races" might be raised "to the purity of gods" (283)[60] — an idea that can clearly be applied to the theology of the Communion in *Parsifal*.

But Wagner's views on art go beyond such points of detail and are integrated into his text in the form of generalised reflections. To art, which shares "certain mutual affinities" with religion (219; 221), is reserved the task of "preserving the kernel of religion" (211; 213), an aim that it achieves "by recognising the figurative value of the symbols which religion would have us believe in a literal sense and by revealing their deep and hidden truth by means of their ideal presentation" (211; 213). This avoids dogmatisation in general and the superficiality of Catholic allegory in particular. For Wagner, art is a valid depiction of the simple "inner kernel" of

60. This example shows how problematical it is to describe Wagner as anti-Semitic or anti-Jewish. His talk of "races" suggests a biological approach to ethnic identity, whereas the possibility of eliminating a racial "defect" (as evidenced by his reference to the expiatory function of Christ's sacrifice or by his remark that Levi would have to convert to Christianity before he could conduct *Parsifal*) is part and parcel of the classic stock of arguments associated with anti-Jewish thinking.

religion and of its "ineffably divine truth" (212; 213). Music, of course, has a special role to play here: "strictly speaking", it is "the only art that is uniquely suited to the Christian faith", in that it subsumes within itself verbalised dogmatic ideas and transforms them into "rapt emotion" (221; 223), thereby freeing them from the spell of "Jesuitical casuistry or rationalistic pettifogging" (222; 224). Music finds its supreme spiritual expression in a function that Wagner borrows from the liturgical texts associated with the Communion. For Wagner, dogma and, ultimately, language are tantamount to "'that signifies'. But music says 'That is' — because it puts an end to all strife between concept and emotion" (222; 224). Music is thus a transubstantiated, metamorphosed form of the real presence.

Wagner develops a Lutheran theology that can be decoded as such through the dogmatic ideas that it expounds and that can even be described as neologistic, but which steadfastly avoids the term "Protestantism" — instead, he speaks of "Christianity". That he adopts a Schopenhauerian approach is as true of Wagner as it is of Wilhelm Busch, while not turning him into a Buddhist. "Religion and Art" is not a profession of faith in the classical sense of a creed, but there is no doubt that it can be interpreted as a literary and philosophical confession.

5 Reconstruction of religion

Wagner's scheme for a "religion of the future" is couched in terms of a programme of reformational change. What this meant, in fact, was not only reforming or continuing the Lutheran (and Christian) tradition by way of compensation but introducing new elements into it. Whether Wagner was aware of the differences between the various ecclesiastical traditions and the problems of reconciling them need not detain us here.

Replenishing the religious tradition affected, first, the manner in which the new religion was to be depicted, namely, myth.[61] To "salvage the kernel of religion" meant liberating the "mythic symbols" by "recognising their figurative value and revealing their deep and hidden truth by means of their ideal presentation" (GS X,211; PW VI,213). By conceiving of *Parsifal* as a mythic narrative, Wagner overturned the Judaeo-Christian tradition's fundamental decision to replace myth by the Word or at least to allow myth to be interpreted through the Word. In turn, this meant dehistoricising *Parsifal* and its Christian motifs: the historical fact of the Last Supper became a poetical symbol.

This had consequences that point to the nineteenth century as the most quintessential context for this problematical construct. One such consequence was the wish to distinguish between the existential world and the way in which that world was interpreted. In myth, by contrast, we see "the great multiplicity of phenomena" as "one great whole" — thus Wagner, writing in the wake of the Romantics' discussion of myth (GS IV,31; PW II,153). In other words, the pluralisation of the interpretative models of reality, which was seen as a sign of the breakdown of tradition, was now reversed. This, however, was more than Romantic mythology:

61. See Petra-Hildegard Wilberg, *Richard Wagners mythische Welt: Versuche wider den Historismus* (Freiburg im Breisgau 1996).

with its monistic claims, it was central to the classical programme of philosophical beliefs formulated in the decades around 1900.[62]

There is another way in which Wagner's anti-historicist programme may be seen to culminate in myth: the alienation of myth's religious origins, which were located in historical writings and, as such, only accessible in their "essence" through literary criticism (thus Adolf Harnack) or else simply disputed (by religious critics), was rescinded by being represented in myth. The aim was to make the "essence" or "kernel" of Christianity tangible and depictable once again. In Wagner's view, myth and, more especially, the dramatic enactment of myth salvaged the immediacy of religion: "the image must therefore be one answering to the phenomena in such a way that instinctive feeling may accept it without a struggle and not first be challenged to explain it" (GS IV,82; PW II,213-14).[63] In short, the "rescue" of religion in the Grail myth avails itself of an epistemological — or perhaps one should say an empirically theological — argument in its desire to turn religious feeling, as something mediated, into a direct experience. The fact that this is difficult to square with the traditional element in Wagner's own mythology, which admits of "immediacy" only within the cultural perspective of the nineteenth century and that, as a form of hermeneutics, the idea of "immediate experience" has something of Baron Münchhausen about it may be mentioned merely in passing. What is important in the context of Wagner's conception of myth is that it articulates his desire for religious spontaneity and immediacy of experience. From this angle, *Parsifal* is an attempt to reestablish the lost innocence of an undistanced feeling of God. In the years around 1900, this was called mysticism.[64]

This has an important consequence for Wagner's Protestantism, inasmuch as he no longer sees the Holy Writ as the only source of religious insight but extends the *sola scriptura* principle to include religious experience shored up by myth.

This brings us back to the question raised by nineteenth-century commentators: to what extent is *Parsifal* a Christian work? In terms of its motivic tradition and of Wagner's own particular religious views, the answer is very much. Although most writers on Wagner would agree on this point, it is a point, none the less, that requires qualification. *Parsifal* is inconceivable without Schopenhauer, just as it is inconceivable without Wagner's conviction that he was integrating into his work the fundamental concerns of Buddhist philosophy; these traditions cannot simply be filed away as "Christianity in Wagner". Of particular significance here is the fact that the idea of metempsychosis is by no means eliminated from *Parsifal* but merely marginalised in the figure of Kundry and that even while he was completing *Parsifal*, Wagner still nurtured an old dream of completing a drama on the subject of Buddhist reincarnation, *Die Sieger*,[65] (at the same time admitting: "Since conceiving *Parsifal*, I have altogether

62. On the wider context, see *Vom Weltbildwandel zur Weltanschauungsanalyse: Krisenwahrnehmung und Krisenbewältigung um 1900*, ed. Volker Drehsen and Walter Sparn (Berlin 1996) and *Kultur und Kulturwissenschaften um 1900*, ed. Rüdiger vom Bruch and others (Stuttgart 1989).

63. This, admittedly, is taken from one of Wagner's earlier essays and deals specifically with his rejection of the "dogmatic miracle", a point on which he follows Feuerbach.

64. See *Mystik, Mystizismus und Moderne in Deutschland um 1900* [working title], ed. H Châtellier and Moritz Baßler (Strasbourg 1998).

65. See the references in Cosima Wagner's diaries, which are easily identified from the index.

abandoned this Buddhist project — which is related to the former only in a weaker sense —, and since that time have given no further thought to elaborating the sketch"[66]). Also, Wagner was not a systematic thinker who can be reduced to a particular philosophical or theological concept; his comment to Cosima, "I really must write down my theology one day",[67] remained a programme, flagging a problem, but never becoming a reality. Wagner was a volatile religious syncretist, a do-it-yourself enthusiast who on many points could not have cared less about whether or not he agreed with ecclesiastical tradition, however orthodox he may have been in other areas. And yet, beyond the material building blocks of his religious views, there is a formal element that remained a constant throughout his life, except, that is, for his atheistic phase and possibly also the early stages of his enthusiasm for Schopenhauer: this hermeneutic key to understanding Wagner is Christianity, the only religion to which he imputed a divine founder and in contrast to which he was inclined to treat Schopenhauer's ideas and Buddhism as branches of philosophy rather than as religions. The fact that he practised his Protestant beliefs gave this theoretical orientation a life of its own in the world at large.

In this, Wagner was a not untypical representative of the educated Protestant middle classes of the nineteenth century: firmly if obscurely anchored in the Reformational tradition, while open to new currents in religion, which he made no attempt to conceal. His goal in life was to salvage religion, an aim he pursued with an almost divinatory self-awareness, not least when he speaks of "figures such as Jesus of N[azareth] or a great creative genius" — under which heading he presumably also included himself — as supernatural beings (CT, 11 June 1878). Wagner was a Lutheran pastor, a Protestant reformer and the founder of a Christian religion all rolled into one. As a free Christian, he jettisoned what he regarded as much of the ballast of the Old Testament and dogmatic Christianity, rectifying what he saw as the greatest drawback of the Lutheran tradition and reforming the Lutheran sermon-based service by expanding it along aesthetic lines. Many liberal Protestants naturally saw this differently. In *Die christliche Welt*, for example, we read the reproach that Bayreuth was "just another Oberammergau".[68] Perhaps we must conclude, after all, that it *was* "Rome's faith without the text".

Helmut Zander

66. Richard Wagner, *Briefe: Die Sammlung Burrell*, ed. John N Burk (Frankfurt am Main 1953), 816-17; Engl. trans. from *Selected Letters of Richard Wagner* (note 21), 923-4 (letter to Otto Lessmann of 10 July 1882).

67. See Bernd Mayer, "Auch R. in der Kirche", (note 33), 12.

68. M Allhin, "Bayreuth und die Religion des Grals" (note 5), 32. I am grateful to Brigitte Gensch for pointing out that the comparison with Oberammergau was first proposed by Eduard Hanslick in his review of the Bayreuth première of *Parsifal* in 1882; quoted by Susanna Großmann-Vendrey, *Bayreuth in der deutschen Presse: Dokumentenband 2* (Regensburg 1977), 99.