

Christoph Gellner:

Between reverence and revolt: Hesse and the two faces of religion

The year is 1921. Hermann Hesse has just turned 43, and has been living for two years in Tessin, where, after the failure of his second marriage, he plans to devote the rest of his life to writing. For Hesse, the sociocultural upheaval of WWI was, in a way unparalleled by virtually any other writer of the prewar generation, closely associated with a radical new beginning in both artistic terms and those of his own life history. Caught between war, inflation and depression, Germany was witnessing the culmination of a wave of enthusiasm for Asia and the Far East that had been gathering momentum since around the turn of century. Hesse, too, working on his Indian legend *Siddhartha*, had completely immersed himself in the religion and philosophy of India. Through the links between his parental home in Calw and the mission in India, Hesse's familiarity with Indian religions was, one might say, something he inherited while still in his pietistic cradle.

Buddhism - "a kind of Indian Reformation"

"My interest in India, which dates back almost twenty years," one reads with some amazement in Hesse's diary for the year 1921, "would now seem to have reached a new point in its development. Hitherto, my reading, searching and sense of empathy focused almost exclusively on the purely spiritual, the Vedantic and Buddhist side of Indianness, this world having revolved around the Upanishads and Buddha's discourses. Only now have I begun to get closer to the actual religious India of gods and temples," the traditional, folk-inspired world of gods and demons - one so rich in imagery - of Vishnu and Indra. "And now the whole of Buddhism increasingly appears to me to be a kind of Indian Reformation, an exact equivalent of the Christian one," which for Hesse could mean only one thing: having the same fatal consequences as in the case of Protestantism! "Both times, it begins with a spiritualization and internalization, the conscience of the individual becoming the supreme instance of authority. Out go the external trappings of cult, out go indulgences and the venality of grace, and out go magic and the cult of sacrifice; the influence of the priestly caste declines, the thoughts and conscience of the individual rise up against the authorities. In the same way as the Protestant Church, which, after just a few centuries, decays and becomes a degenerate, ossified cult, Buddhism gradually sinks back again as new cults and soul worlds from the old realm of deities gush forth again." Both times, in India as in Europe, he continues, the godless, apparently so much purer, more spiritual, Protestant religion failed to remain procreative as a religion. Why? "The reformed, puritan belief demands a surrendering of the self, something only few are capable of ... sacrificing my self, my wishes and urges, is something I am capable of only rarely, and only imperfectly; the sacrifice of offerings, of worshipping, of garlanding, of dancing and of genuflecting is, however, something I can perform at any time ... And thus it is that any religion coloured by Reformation teaches one to become part of an evil cult of inferiority complexes."

In writing that Buddhism and Protestantism both engage in a dangerous culture of inferiority complexes, Hesse certainly knew of what he was speaking. He was, after all, only too familiar with the neuroticizing consequences of such reformed puritan piety as that he was now discovering in Indian Buddhism, having experienced them at first hand through his own pietist Christian upbringing. "We lived under a very strict regime that took a very distrustful view of young people, of their natural inclinations, dispositions, needs and developments, and was in no way willing to promote our innate gifts, talents and peculiarities, let alone indulge them. The pietist Christian principle stated that human will is evil by both nature and essence, and that this will has to be

broken before a human being is able to attain salvation in God's love and the Christian community." "The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth" (Genesis, 8, 21) - in the world of Christianity, this verse from the Bible had shaped education for several centuries (and no less so in the Catholic Church, there being countless literary testimonies to this - hardly any fewer, in fact though these tend to be a little different to those in the Protestant camp). Especially well-known for his skill at breaking the will of the individual was August Hermann Francke (1663-1727), one of the fathers of pietism. With his purportedly Christian pedagogic of original sin, which saw the will of the individual as being little else than an expression of precisely that original sin, he had a lasting impact not only on pietist educational thought. If children were allowed to retain their "wantonness," and evil were not driven out of them, Francke stated, the "powers of older humans" shall grow stronger in them, the result being that, in the end, nor even force will help. Conversely, he added, the individual will is most easily broken in younger years since it has "as yet not grown strong."

Of the two faces of religions

Few are likely to associate the religious instruction of today with experiences such as those of Hermann Hesse: To be a good Christian, one had to have a guilty conscience. One had to feel guilty of being happy about one's salvation. Indeed, only by despising oneself could one find the much-coveted love of God, only by becoming small could one make oneself great, only by condemning oneself could one find goodness. This gave religion and morality a bad name, ultimately discrediting them entirely, since they appeared to be nothing but a means of suppressing desire and the will of the individual, making people incapable of being happy, preventing them from standing tall, and weighing down their conscience, their entire ability to feel and to experience, under the burden of constant feelings of guilt. Hesse's embittered summary is only too easy to understand: "These teachings fouled up my entire life, and I shall not be returning to them in a hurry!" This form of religious belief, one that plunges the individual into a state of angst and illness could, with reference to Tilman Moser's book of the same name ("Gottesvergiftung") be termed "god poisoning." Moser prefaced his book with the telling motto: "Happy are those whose god was friendlier."

However, Calw-born missionary son Hermann Hesse, for whom "the Christian path to God," was quite literally "obstructed" by the rigidly pietist traditionalism of his parental home, by no means failed to advance beyond this point. For Hesse, a critique of religion, Christianity and the church did not constitute a wholesale rejection of religion and Christianity! Although he had rebelled against the severely moralizing upbringing in his parental home at an early age, renouncing the pious belief in God shared by his relatives, he remained in search of religious alternatives throughout his life, searching for a form of religion he considered suited to himself. Perceptive as he was, Hesse saw the two-faced nature of the phenomenon of religion in other religions, too. Indeed, his fascination with India in no way made him blind to the two faces of all religions. While "the Christian truth had been thrust upon me in inappropriate manner in my youth," as one reads in a letter Hesse wrote about himself during these years, the process had, he noted, been precisely the opposite in the case of the Indian Sundarm Singh. "What was thrust upon him was Indian teaching, and he found the wonderful old religion in India to have been twisted and distorted, as I find Christianity to have been here, and he chose Christianity; that is to say, he did not choose but was simply convinced, fulfilled and overwhelmed by the notion of the love of Jesus, as I was by the Indians' concept of oneness. For other people, other paths lead to God, to the centre of the world.

"Yet the actual experience itself," he continues "is always the same." Hesse's conclusion? "I believe that one religion is pretty much as good as the next one. There are none in which it is impossible to become a sage, and none that one could not also practise as the most inane form of idolatry." There is no question that religions have, in the negative, devastatingly debilitating sense

of the term, caused an infinite amount of suffering, and in part continue to do so by preventing people from developing their human identity and individuality, i.e. from becoming actual human beings. Conversely, however, religions can, in the positive, healing and life-promoting sense, achieve an infinite amount, and have also done so by making a major contribution to the successful thriving and blossoming of human existence, to the discovery of the self, and thus to an ability to cope with life in both the personal and social sphere. The healing and the debilitating, true and perverted religion, are often so tightly interwoven as to be mistaken for one another. Whatever the case, Hermann Hesse, the son of a Swabian pietist, became aware of these two faces of religion at an early age, and spent the rest of his life grappling and wrestling with them.

Banished knowledge

Yet the majority of readers are, as a rule, far too unaware of the time it took for Hesse to liberate himself from the traumatic stamp religion had left on him, and to give literary expression to its devastating and debilitating mechanisms in a “warts and all” account. With all their denials and refusals of his childhood and youth, Hesse’s dreamily neo-romantic early works in particular put nothing short of a transfiguring gloss on events, albeit one that is unmistakably edged with a darker border of sorrow. “My entire youth,” he wrote in *Inseltraum*, for example, one of those early, barely disguised autotherapeutic texts from Hesse’s first volume of prose, *Eine Stunde hinter Mitternacht* (1899), “my entire youth saw me sadly through the eyes of an abused child.” Indeed, an awareness of the frighteningly oppressive darker side of his boyhood is by no means completely absent from Hesse’s earliest prose work, *Meine Kindheit* (1895/96). Yet apart from hard, accusatory words on his schooldays, Hesse’s guilt-laden self-censorship initially prevented any disclosure of the history of conflict. It is little or no accident that this early story breaks off precisely at that turning point which is to be numbered among the most serious and far-reaching watersheds in Hesse’s life: right before he is admitted to the famous evangelical theological seminary in the former Cistercian monastery of Maulbronn. In terms of his efforts to get to grips with his unholy Christian upbringing, even *Unterm Rad*, published ten years later (1906), is fairly harmless. Hesse does, admittedly, take the first steps towards engaging in a major literary settling of scores with the authoritarian teachers and priests, who did everything within their power to suppress the personal development of the individual in order to raise hard-working, pious, and dutiful subjects. Anyone failing to submit to this drill was crushed “beneath the wheels”! (*Translator’s note*: This is a straight translation of the German title of the work, *Unterm Rad*, which is generally called “*The Prodigy*” in English.) And yet in this story, church and religion are considered only as part of society’s repressive education system. As such, Hesse remained firmly within the confines of contemporary criticism of the school and education system under the Wilhelminian regime.

Yet Hesse’s early crisis of belief after his flight from Maulbronn - undertaken when the barely 15-year-old became entangled in a mesh of spiritual, intellectual and psychiatric compulsions - again remains excluded from the narrative of *Unterm Rad*. No, it was not until the private and political crisis of the first world war, not until the collapse of the bourgeois culture of authority, and, above all, not until the encounter with psychoanalysis, that Hesse was able to set about giving literary expression to the fatal mechanisms of his unholy Christian upbringing. In his novel *Demian*, that point is finally reached. For the first time, Hesse dares to take a no-holds-barred “peek into the chaos” of all those dark, mysterious feelings, contradictions and chasms in the depths of the human soul, which his rigid upbringing had anxiously sought to deny, denouncing them to be evil, depraved, and forbidden. Indeed, it is in the image of the two-faced god Abraxas that the neuroticizing division of reality into “two worlds” - the bright, pure, “divinely official,” with its firm standards on the one hand, and on the other the dark, mysterious “shadowy, satanic” world of adventures, of dangers, and of uncontrolled thoughts - is to be resolved and reconciled. Everything Hesse’s Christian upbringing had ripped asunder into good and evil, sinful and permissible, guilt and innocence, God and Satan, and the cracks torn in his soul by the pietist, sin-focused Christian

morality of his parental home, together with the denunciations it had pronounced, the fissures it had rent - all of these elements were to now be reconciled in the figure of that Abraxas god, who was good and evil, light and dark, the holiest and the most repugnant in one single figure. The radicalization of the God problematic in the *Demian* novel is, as such, also the literary expression of Hesse's own psychotherapy experience, which first and foremost taught him to accept for himself the evil in man, which had been hitherto denied and proscribed as amoral.

Hardly any less revolutionary than this Abraxas god are Demian's subversive Bible exegeses conducted in the spirit of Friedrich Nietzsche and the Nietzschean moral critique of religion and Christianity. Cain was no longer to be seen as the wickedly cowardly murderer of his brother. Not as a criminal but as a man of courage and character, a courageous loner who dared to be what he actually was in reality ("People of character like to come off badly in Bible stories!"). Cain as humankind's first rebel, someone revolting against the life-poisoning process of neuroticization through religion. Cain, the first to rebel against the authoritarian father god, who has boldly broken with the repressive morality of commandments and proscriptions of the house of his father, the mendacious bogus morality of bourgeois Christian decency and virtuousness, and had thus taken the gamble of a dangerous, lonely individuation - these really were no longer "insipidly sentimental tract-like stories," for which Max Demian had nothing but scorn and derision, and not some edifying "pious moral tales" that "were sugary and unconvincing." Nowhere did Hesse examine in such minute detail the damage an unholy, angst-ridden upbringing, and the associated "god- and relationship-poisoning," are able to wreak in the soul of a young child, than he did in the novella *Kinderseele* (1918), which appeared right after *Demian* and was written while still under the immediate impression of his eighteen months spent in psychotherapy. With remarkable sensitivity, Hesse describes the feelings of an 11-year-old boy who has stolen some figs from the room of his beloved father merely in order to have close to him something that belonged to the father. He is tormented in his loneliness by scrupulous feelings of guilt, angst, and inferiority; the child feels deprived, evil, and rejected. Feelings of respect and rebellion against the father vie with one another in his heart. There is talk of hate, and even of repressed murder fantasies. In one of his daydreams, the boy then also revolts against the cruel God of such a severely pious upbringing, who punished the slightest trace of any emotion, individuality, sensuality, and creativity. "Once I had been executed and was dead and came to face the Last Judgement in heaven," Hesse has the boy fantasize, "there was no way I was going to bow and scrape before him. Oh no, and even if he were surrounded by all the angelic hosts, and radiated nothing but brightness and dignity. Let him damn and condemn me, let him have me boiled in bitumen. I would not apologize and humiliate myself, beg him for mercy, would regret nothing ... I detest you, I spit in front of your feet, God. You have tormented and maltreated me, you have made laws that no one can abide by, you have incited adults to screw up the lives of we young folk."

Being religious is nothing but a matter of trust

Yet once liberated from the nightmare of all these religious guilt complexes and bourgeois moral conventions that had been drilled and instilled into him, Hesse gradually also managed to appreciate the Christian belief in God that had so thoroughly ruined the years of his youth. "Being religious is nothing but a matter of trust," he was now able to write. "Trust is something a simple, healthy, harmless human being, or a child or savage has. The likes of us, who were neither simple nor harmless, had to discover this trust by a circuitous route. Trusting yourself is the beginning of the process. Yet it is not through the settling of scores, guilt, and an evil conscience, and not by means of self-castigation and sacrifices, that belief is attained. All of these efforts are directed at gods that dwell outside of us. The god we have to believe in dwells within us. Anyone saying no to themselves is unable to say yes to God." These words were written in Hesse's 1918 piece entitled *Kapelle*, which I consider to be a key text in terms of religious theology. Hesse published it together with other writings, poems and watercolours in 1920 in the volume *Wanderung*. "Anyone from a

pious protestant home,” he added, has a long way to go before coming to this realization. “They know the hell of conscience, they know the deathly sting of being at odds with themselves, they have experienced dissension, torment, and desperation of the most multifarious kinds. Towards the end of their path, they are amazed to realize how childlike and natural the bliss that they have been seeking on such thorny paths really is. The road to piety may be a different one for everyone. For me, it led through many blunders and great suffering, through a great deal of self-torment, through tremendous foolishness, jungles full of foolishness. I was a liberal spirit and knew that sanctimonious piety was an illness of the soul. I was an ascetic and drove nails into my flesh. I didn’t know that being religious meant health and cheerfulness.” Religion which, in other words, is not a straitjacket, heteronomy, and a crippling of the soul, but religion understood as being angst-free trust, as a source of mental health, of ego strength and inner balance, personal maturity, inner growth, and the ability to love. What Hesse found so fascinating about the major spiritual traditions of Asia and, increasingly, those of Christianity, was thus primarily the therapeutically experiential dimension of religion. Religion understood as a source of healing for human beings seeking to realize their self, their oneness, and their humanity. It is the discovery that religion does not have to be a source of angst but is both able and willing to provide precisely that power required to overcome the fear by promising a final and most profound basis of trust - indeed, what one may call a state of being unconditionally affirmed and accepted above and beyond all moral efforts and strivings. Hesse termed this “breaking on through to a state of grace and redemption ... or, in brief, to belief,” “the third pillar of becoming human and discovering the self,” which he “found expressed everywhere in analogous symbols,” also among Indians, Christians and Chinese. The Indian says atman, the Chinese Tao, the Christian grace, and each Christian who has “grown beyond the domain of mere Christian experiences” will “infallibly find, reflected among the believers of other religions, but expressed in other types of metaphorical language, all these fundamental experiences of the soul.” In narrative terms, Hesse expressed this most vividly in his Indian legend *Siddhartha*. Hesse rightly saw it as an attempt to reformulate “for our age and in our language” the meditative Indian ideal of life and the ancient Asian teaching of the divine unity of all things, the core tenet of all eastern life teachings and wisdoms. The effort to use meditation and contemplation to progress towards the holistic oneness of life, which is both the primary and the final and ultimate foundation underpinning all reality, to break on through to a domain that leaves all individual and ego-related elements, and all consciousness of differences, far behind one - these are the things that have, right up to the present day, constituted the special fascination of eastern self-awareness and meditation methods such as Zen and yoga here in the western world. In *Siddhartha*, Hesse linked this Asian notion of oneness to another thought, that of the love of all things and creatures, a linking of thoughts that is at most only hinted at in the ancient Indian writings. Siddhartha’s friend Govinda in fact immediately discovers the contradiction to the world-transcending teaching of Buddha. And, indeed, Hesse’s *Siddhartha* is ultimately shaped neither by Buddhist renunciation of the world nor a Hindu weltanschauung (world=maya=illusory appearance), nor in surrender to the Taoist polarity of life, but in more Christian terms.

Asian hermeneutics of Christianity

Yet on what is Siddhartha’s surprising profession of love founded? It is founded on the all-transforming deeply felt experience of an ultimate identity of individual and universal self, as pronounced by that “big word” in the Upanishads: tat twam asi (“thou art that”). It is precisely for this reason that Siddhartha is able to profess love for all things and creatures - because he perceives the ten thousands of things in the world of appearances as being his own kith and kin. “That is what makes them so lovable and venerable: they are of the same nature as myself. That is why I can love them.” For Hesse, this being at one with the divine unity has nothing to do with passive quietism. Rather, it is a precondition for the chance to be liberated from within - free of all outside controls and heteronomy - in order to develop a love for oneself, the world, and one’s fellow men and women. Once freed of all obsessive having-to-do, freed of all moral striving for perfection, and of

the ultimately desperate bid to need to assert their own will, humans are first and foremost accorded that love and composure from which the correct course of action ensues as if by itself, spontaneously, without any externally imposed commands or prohibitions - and simply issuing from the fact that each fellow human being and all things are of my own nature. Love, in other words, which springs from the intuitive realization of the undivided unity of all being. Does one have to spend a long time explaining why, for Hesse, the Christian commandment to love - "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Lev., 19, 18; Matth. 22, 39) - suddenly took on a whole new plausibility once he no longer saw it as being a prescriptive ordinance imposed from without? "If one does not take the verses of the New Testament as being commandments," as externally imposed moral orders and imperatives, "but as expressions of an extraordinary awareness of the secrets of our soul," Hesse wrote in the *Kurgast* diary (1923), "then the wisest word ever spoken ... is that word 'Love thy neighbour as thyself.'" For Hesse, this constituted the "epitome of the art of living and teachings of happiness." Why? In "Asian," terms, i.e. in the sense of a mystical Indian concept of oneness, this verse from the Bible can be taken to mean: "Love thy neighbour, for thy neighbour is you, a Christian rendering of 'tat twam asi.'"

Of this Hesse was deeply convinced. The innermost core of each soul, which the Indians call atman, the immanent self of each human being, "is the same in all people." And those who discover this self "the model of all being" is "on the path of Buddha, or of the Vedas, or of Lao Tsu, or Christ, is bonded in his innermost being to the universe, to God, and is acting on the basis of a covenant with God." As such, it is a more mystical than ecclesiastical Christianity that Hesse now embraces. A religion outside, between, and above confessions, and one profoundly permeated by the recognition that the major religious currents and systems known to humankind ultimately have their roots in the same mystically meditative basic experience. "Viewed in Indian terms," the 70-year-old Hesse wrote in reply to a reader, "my neighbour is not only 'someone as myself' but actually is me, is at one with me, for the division between him and me, between I and you, is a deception, is maya. In keeping with this form of interpretation, the ethical sense of neighbourly love is fully explained, for those who have realized that the world is a oneness will readily appreciate that it is pointless for the individual parts and links in this wholeness to do one another harm." Hesse's commitment to the task of combating hatred, hostility and war between peoples is also rooted in the experience "that God, the One, is dwelling within each of us, that each patch of earth is our home, that each human being is related to us, is our brother, that an awareness of this divine unity reveals all divisions into races, peoples, into rich and poor, into confessions and parties, to be nothing but spectre and illusion."

A truly protestant trait

If there is a basic underlying wisdom in the thoughts and writings of Hermann Hesse, then it is the realization that the sole truth able to bring the seeker closer to his goal is truth which has been experienced, not taught. "You have reached the highest goal by your own seeking, in your own way ... you have learned nothing through teachings ... nobody finds salvation through teachings," says Hesse's Siddhartha in response to Buddha Gotama. "That is why I am going on my way - not to seek another and better doctrine, for I know there is none, but to leave all doctrines and their teachers, and to reach my goal alone." "The fact that my Siddhartha gives pride of place not to awareness but to love, that he rejects dogma, and makes the unity of experience the central element," Hesse later admits, "may be interpreted as a return to Christianity, indeed as a truly protestant trait." And, indeed, when it comes to this uncompromising rejection of each and every form of external control or tutelage, Gotama Buddha really was "a protestant." In actual fact, Gotama Buddha was one of humankind's greatest teachers. And yet his teaching is at the same time a non-teaching, being one that guides the individual towards a continuing process of breaking free: of a thirst for life and of all forms of selfish clinging to existence, breaking free of greed, hatred and blindness, of possessions and knowledge, and even of all images and ideas in one's mind. The aim

is to become free for a life in goodness, selflessness, equanimity, and all-embracing compassion, for a life in meditative withdrawal from the world and retreat into the self. It is no accident that the name of Buddhism in Sanskrit, the holy language of Asia, is *yana*. This is generally translated as “vehicle,” though more precisely it means “ferryboat” or “ferry.” And this is the way Buddha understood the term when he asked his disciples: “Would a man be wise to keep a raft because it rescued him? To take it on his back and carry it inland with him?” “No,” say the disciples, “it should be committed to the river that lies behind one.” - “And that,” Buddha concluded, “is the way it is with teachings, which should be cast off, not clung to.” Buddha goes on to describe a path of experience that each individual has to travel for himself. It is pointless to cite the wisdoms of Buddha if one knows these only as words and formulas. As a teacher, Buddha is ultimately only able to make us aware of the “hidden teacher” within each of us.

The fact that wisdom cannot be taught, this basic thought of such central importance to Hesse, is also to be encountered in prominent form in *Glasperlenspiel* (1943): “There is truth,” the Music Master advises the young Knecht when they meet for the first time, “but the ‘doctrine’ that you desire, the absolute, perfect dogma that alone provides wisdom does not exist. Nor should you long for a perfect doctrine, my friend. Rather, you should long for the perfection of yourself. The deity is within *you*, not in ideas and books. Truth is lived, not taught.” Hesse’s *Glasperlenspiel* is thus once again about the revolt of the individual who finds his own truth far away from all collectives, and far away from all confessions or religions. “For the majority of people, it is very good to belong to a church and a belief. Those able to break free of this,” wrote the 83-year-old Hesse, “will initially encounter loneliness, with many soon longing for a chance to return to the former community. Only at the end of their path will they discover that they have entered a new and great but invisible community that encompasses all peoples and religions. They will become poorer in terms of dogmas and national concerns, and will become richer through the brotherhood with spirits and minds of all ages, nations, and languages.”

The two poles

Notwithstanding this, Hesse’s *Glasperlenspiel*, this work of all-embracing west-eastern synthesis, is, as was the case with *Morgenlandfahrt*, a book in which entirely new key ethical and aesthetic terms - reverence, piety, a desire to serve - quite unmistakably rooted in pietist Christianity first made an appearance. In these works, Hesse counters both glibness and exaggerated western individualism with a new canon of values consisting of orderliness and commitment, composure and self-possession, a wisdom-filled ethos of obliging and self-sacrificing global responsibility arising out of meditative, contemplative experience, deeply inspired by Christian convictions and attitudes, and the praxis pietatis valued so especially highly in Swabian pietism. “The fact that people see their life as something held in fee from God, and seek to live it not through egoistic urges but as a service and sacrifice to God,” Hesse writes with an eye to his parents and grandparents, “this greatest experience and heritage of my childhood had a major impact on my life.” “Its form of Christianity, one not preached but lived, was the strongest of the powers that shaped and moulded me.”

This is, one could say, characteristic of Hesse’s own very special brand of religiousness - critique and belief, reverence and revolt, self-will and dedication, individuation and a merging into the transpersonal whole. Indeed, it is between these two poles that Hesse’s entire life, thoughts and writings oscillate. And it is these two poles that are the defining feature of Hesse’s lifelong attempt to explore and analyse the phenomenon of religion, the two faces of which he became acquainted with at an early age. The religious heritage of his pietist Christian upbringing, which he rubbed up against until he was sore from an early age, and against which he rebelled while still young - it really was only “via the roundabout route of a radical break with tradition” (W. Müller-Seidel) that Hesse was able to appropriate this heritage and ultimately, through his lifelong interest in the

religions of India and China, to transform it into a very particular type of cross-religious and cross-cultural east-western synthesis. It is thus that Hesse is able to show us what it means, after having taken leave of the God of one's childhood - who for him continued to be synonymous with scrupulous self-denial, annihilation of the ego, with life-impairing feelings of guilt and inferiority - to be religious in a new and transformed manner, one that can barely be comprehended in the categories of traditional Christianity and membership of the church. It is perhaps here, more than anywhere else, that we of later generations are able to recognize how contemporary Hesse continues to be today.

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