

***Ressentiment* in Nietzsche's Critique of Christianity**

by

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Abstract

Nietzsche is famous for his critique of Christianity and the declaration that “God is dead.” His aversion for the Christian religion has generated scholarly debates as to what might be the key issue Nietzsche has with Christianity. In this work, I argue that the key problem Nietzsche finds with Christianity is that he takes it to be a religion of *ressentiment*. I therefore maintain that *ressentiment* provides the key to unlocking Nietzsche’s celebrated critique of Christianity, for every issue Nietzsche has with Christianity may rightly be subsumed under the term, *ressentiment*. To support this claim, I establish *ressentiment* as the originating-force of Christianity and its strongest expression of the Will-to-power, from Nietzsche’s “genealogical” standpoint. All through the work, I sustain a discussion aimed at explaining, on Nietzsche’s view, the various dimensions of Christian theory and practice in terms of *ressentiment* – morality, doctrine, and the practical aspects of Christian life.

Dedicated to

Fabian & Sussy Ude

And

Tony & Nkese Umoren

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Table of Contents

General Introduction	1
Chapter One: Nietzsche and “Genealogy”	8
1.1. Nietzsche’s “Genealogical” Approach: An Overview	8
1.2. “Genealogy” and Critique	13
Chapter Two: <i>Ressentiment</i> and Christian Morality	18
2.1. Delineating the Contours of Christian <i>Ressentiment</i> in Nietzsche	19
2.2. <i>Ressentiment</i> and the “Genealogy” of Christian Morality	27
Chapter Three: Nietzsche’s “Genealogical” Account of the Role of <i>Ressentiment</i> in Christian Eschatology, Christology and Soteriology	36
3.1. <i>Ressentiment</i> and Christian Eschatology: Judgement, Immortality, Resurrection and the Afterlife	37
3.2. <i>Ressentiment</i> in Christology: Accounting for the “Psychological Type of the Redeemer”	46
3.3. <i>Ressentiment</i> and Christian Soteriology: Salvation, Cross and Sacrifice	51
Chapter Four: Other Faces of <i>Ressentiment</i> in Christian Theory and Practice	59
4.1. The Ascetic Dimension of Christian <i>Ressentiment</i>	59
4.2. Christian Love, Pity and Guilt: Exploring their <i>Ressentiment</i> Foundations	67
Chapter Five: Evaluations and General Conclusion	76
5.1. Evaluations	77
5.2. General Conclusion	87
 Bibliography	 90

General Introduction

Nietzsche does not hide his misgivings, suspicion and downright dislike for the Christian religion. He indicts Christianity, referring to it as a “great curse,” “an immortal blot on humanity” (AC, §62).

In the light of the above indictment, the following questions become inevitable: What, according to Nietzsche, is the originating-force that may plausibly explain all the obnoxious features he identifies in Christianity? How might we characterize this force operative in Christianity? What is its correlation with Christian life and tenets? In what specific ways does this force shape and impact Christian values? This study has set out to elaborately address the above questions and cognate ones.

In his celebrated work, *The Shadow of the Anti-Christ*, a work wholly dedicated to Nietzsche’s critique of Christianity, Stephen Williams notes that “Christianity is anti-life” and claims: “If there is a nub to Nietzsche’s critique of Christianity, it is that.”¹ The idea of Christianity as “anti-life” is no doubt important to Nietzsche. But Williams seems to have ignored a more fundamental issue: why, in the first place, is Christianity considered “anti-life” by Nietzsche; what originating-force drives it in such a manner that makes it essentially inimical to life? It is this underlying force that may rightly be considered the “nub” of Nietzsche’s critique, to use William’s expression. Similarly, in his important work, Nietzsche’s *Philosophy of Religion*, Julian Young gives attention to a number of things, but the all-important notion of *ressentiment*² is conspicuously absent in a work that is meant to blaze the trail in the area of Nietzsche’s “philosophy of religion.” Since *ressentiment* is hardly mentioned in that important work, I take it that Young does not recognize the role Nietzsche ascribes to it in explaining Christian life and values. Hence he fails to recognize its centrality in Nietzsche’s critique of

¹ S. N. Williams, *The Shadow of the AntiChrist: Nietzsche’s Critique of Christianity*, p. 126.

² The whole work explores the idea of *ressentiment* in Nietzsche’s critique of Christianity. In the course of the work, I shall expose the various ramifications of the idea of *ressentiment*. Just to provide a rough idea of this concept for the purposes of the introduction, I explain that *ressentiment*, for Nietzsche, represents a visceral and pathological hate that founds and animates Christianity. It is the originating and animating sentiment that explains all the negative features he identifies in Christianity.

Christianity. This is too great an omission for a work dedicated to Nietzsche's "philosophy of religion."

Against this backdrop, then, there is a need to establish and uphold the explanatory primacy of *ressentiment* in accounting for the vast array of practices and values that mark Christianity, in Nietzsche's reckoning. This is the task I shall broach in this research, a task that makes a unique contribution to the Nietzsche scholarship – namely, that it provides the key to unlocking the Nietzsche's celebrated critique of Christianity. "Genealogy" is the methodological framework within which Nietzsche undertakes his critique of Christianity. In this genealogical framework, therefore, I shall argue, by way of upholding the explanatory primacy of *ressentiment*, that Nietzsche takes *ressentiment* to be the originating-force of Christianity and, *ipso facto*, the strongest expression of its Will-to-power. I shall support this claim through a sustained interpretation of the relevant Nietzsche's texts along this line.

I shall show that *ressentiment* is not simply one among the many issues Nietzsche has with Christianity; indeed, I argue that it is the main issue, under which all the others may be subsumed, and in terms of which they may be explained. It makes sense to think that because Nietzsche regards *ressentiment* as the originating-force, it likewise has explanatory priority. Since *ressentiment* is the originating-force, Nietzsche's critique of Christianity may rightly be seen as a critique of its *ressentiment*-origin. For Nietzsche speaks of the "birth of Christianity out of the spirit of *ressentiment*" (EH, § *Genealogy of Morals*).

With regard to this "birth," one should be careful not to assume that it involves a conscious process by which Christianity adopts *ressentiment* as its founding principle. No such deliberate adoption of *ressentiment* ever took place at any point in the evolution of Christianity. Nietzsche does not suggest this, either. The relationship between Christianity and *ressentiment* should be placed in the context of Nietzsche's "genealogy," his unique way of accounting for how a phenomenon came to be insofar as this remains significant for our lives in the present and in the self-affirming future 'Dionysian religion' he heralds.

An important point to note is that the message of Nietzsche's "genealogy" is not directed at the ardent Christian who is, like the "Holy Man" in *Zarathustra's* Prologue, oblivious of what is going on in the world. Indeed, Zarathustra treats him with respect, and would not want to "take

something from” him. Hence Zarathustra quickly departs from him, leaves him in his pious oblivion, simply wondering at the old saint who apparently “has not yet heard the news that God is dead” (Z, “Prologue” §2). But not all believers are of the Holy Man’s type. There are tepid, hypocritical believers of the modern world who have heard the message of the “death of God” but prefer not to acknowledge and assimilate the message (GS, §125). It is to the hypocritical that Nietzsche directs his “genealogical” critique.

Our modern world has many such tepid, hypocritical ‘believers.’ And so, beyond the academic significance of underscoring the explanatory priority of *ressentiment* in Nietzsche’s critique of Christianity, I believe this work would serve as a gadfly to such believers. Nietzsche’s “genealogy” bears a message for humanity. Such ‘believers’ of the modern world should, therefore, not dismiss Nietzsche’s critique offhandedly or treat it in an unserious manner, reminiscent of how the “bystanders” of the marketplace treated the Madman’s message (GS, §125). Rather, they should see Nietzsche’s critique for what it is – a *gadfly* that stings them out of complacency and hypocrisy into making a choice for a life-affirming future.

In discussing *ressentiment*, I shall not be content with just pointing out how ‘dear’ the concept of *ressentiment* is to Nietzsche. Rather I shall investigate how, on Nietzsche’s view, *ressentiment* directly impacts Christian theory and practice. In my discussion, I shall actually engage with the key aspects of Christian theory and practice in light of Nietzsche’s “genealogical” account of them as arising from *ressentiment*.

To anticipate one aspect of this discussion, take, for instance, the ‘hallowed’ doctrine of the Cross *vis-à-vis* the question of Salvation. Traditional Christian theology has favored the “Penal Substitution” theory, which sees Christ’s death as a necessary way of paying the ‘debt’ that placates an ‘angry’ God on behalf of humankind. In recent theological discourses, however, theologians have challenged the use of the penal language of “debt” to couch the doctrines of the Cross and Salvation. For instance, Vincent Taylor, in *The Cross of Christ*, rejects this view as pagan.³ Several other theologians have voiced their protest in various ways. Interestingly – and as it relates to the present discussion – Nietzsche was being eerily clairvoyant several years earlier when he berated Christianity for couching ‘salvation’ on a creditor-debtor contractual

³ V. Taylor, *The Cross of Christ*, p. 91.

framework, insisting that this is a symptom of *ressentiment*, an absurd temperament that makes God at once a “creditor,” a “debtor” and a “scapegoat” (GM, §21). Though Nietzsche and Taylor are equally critical of the penal language in which Christian salvation is couched, they criticize from different standpoints – the former from the standpoint of a “genealogist” who radically envisions a new world order in which the message of the “death of God” will be assimilated, and the latter from the standpoint of a believer who simply wants to effect some theological revision.

Having clarified the general topic of my research, it is important at this point to briefly outline what aspects of the topic each chapter in the following thesis will address. The subject-matter will be explored under five chapters.

In the first chapter, titled “Nietzsche and Genealogy,” I shall outline Nietzsche’s “genealogy” as the methodological way in which he approaches the origin of Christianity in terms of *ressentiment*. Nietzsche views and critiques Christianity from “genealogical” standpoint. It is therefore vital to understand the genealogical framework properly. To do this, I shall begin by saying what “genealogy”, in the Nietzschean sense, *is not*. I do this with a view to throwing light on *what it is*. I contend that Nietzsche’s genealogy is not a Cartesian search for some apodictic foundation of knowledge, on the one hand, nor a historiographical quest for ‘fixed facts’ about the past, on the other hand. I shall explain that Nietzsche’s “genealogy” takes interest in how something *comes to be* insofar as it bears significance for the present while having a forward-looking prospect of a life-affirming future. Lastly, I will explain the relevance of Nietzsche’s genealogical approach to his critique of Christianity.

Building on the methodological question addressed in the first chapter, Chapter Two will explore the way in which Nietzsche “genealogically” establishes the relationship between *ressentiment* and the moral dimension of Christianity. First, I shall briefly delineate the contours of *ressentiment* by identifying its characteristics, as distilled from the relevant Nietzsche texts. *Inter alia*, I shall highlight the elements of visceral hate, cunning/subterfuge, vengefulness, class antagonism, power struggle and envy. It should be observed that there is nothing particularly Christian in the above-mentioned traits, as they generally belong to all ‘base’ people characterized as such by Nietzsche as ‘people of *ressentiment*.’ Christians possess them by the fact of their belonging primarily to the base, “slave class” in Nietzsche’s genealogical reckoning. On Nietzsche’s view, however, what distinguishes the Judeo-Christian species of *ressentiment*

from others is its value-creating character. By way of manufacturing contrary values, Christianity continues the moral warfare initiated against “master morality” by Priestly Judaism.

My second task in this chapter will then be to show what role Nietzsche ascribes to *ressentiment* in this moral warfare. In light of Nietzsche’s “genealogy,” I shall establish the relationship between *ressentiment* and what Nietzsche calls “slave morality” (as epitomized in Christianity). I trace the provenance of Christian “slave morality” to Priestly Judaism, since Nietzsche takes Christianity to be the “ultimate conclusion” of a long history of Jewish *ressentiment* against the ‘aristocratic morality.’ This *ressentiment* was championed by the priest-type. When faced with a mortal danger of extermination, the Jews showed an uncanny resilience and, with an unrivalled instinct for self-preservation aided by *ressentiment*, took the fight to the moral sphere, a move which guaranteed their victory (AC, §24). Indeed, Nietzsche believes Christianity could not have emerged but from the fertile Jewish soil, for “it was, in fact, with the Jews that the revolt of the slaves begins in the sphere of the morals” (GM I. §7). Discussions in this chapter will thus center on how *ressentiment* founds and fuels “slave morality,” as embodied in Christianity – viewed genealogically.

In Chapter Three, I shall be concerned with the sphere of Christian doctrine. To this effect, I shall present some important theological doctrines/tenets of Christianity with a view to identifying what Nietzsche regards as the *ressentiment*-factor behind them. I shall discuss the eschatological doctrines of the Second Coming, Resurrection, Personal Immortality and the Afterlife. These doctrinal aspects will receive a special attention because they are distinctly Christo-centric, a feature that marks a remarkable distinction between Christian *ressentiment* and the earlier forms of *ressentiment* found in Priestly Judaism. I shall also discuss, in the genealogical context, the Christological issues surrounding what Nietzsche refers to as the “Psychological type of the Redeemer,” and the soteriological⁴ question of the relation between Jesus’ suffering and death to Salvation. Again, these Christological and soteriological dimensions are peculiar to Christianity.

⁴ Eschatology (from the Greek *eschata* which means the “last things”) is a branch of theology concerned with questions of the “last things” – death, immortality, resurrection, afterlife, etc. Christology is the systematic study of Jesus the Christ, as it tries to understand who he is and the message he brings. Soteriology (from the Greek *soteria* which means “salvation”), in the Christian context, tries to spell out how the salvation of mankind is related to the life, teachings, death and resurrection of Christ.

Indeed, Nietzsche believes that Christian *ressentiment*, marked as it is with an uncanny capacity for manufacturing morality, is as well able to create theological doctrines after its own image. With regard to Christian eschatology, I shall show how, in Nietzsche's "genealogical" viewpoint, the notions of Resurrection and Afterlife recompense are seen as born of the sentiment of revenge, which is, in turn, a symptom of *ressentiment* (GM I, §4). I shall expose the gruesome slant to this vengefulness – expressed in the sadistic hopes of “delight in the eternal suffering of their erstwhile oppressors”⁵ as being constitutive of the afterlife ‘reward.’ Still in this chapter, I shall show how Nietzsche accounts for the *ressentiment*-factor in the Christian understanding of the Christ (the Christology of the “Psychological Type of the Redeemer”) and His mission of salvation (soteriology). In Nietzsche's genealogically-based verdict, the Church will be considered a “workshop” for doctrinal falsifications, thanks to the reactionary force of *ressentiment* (BGE, §14). As he further declares, “All church concepts are known for what they are, the most malicious counterfeits” (AC, §38).

The discussion in Chapter Four will revolve around the Christian theory and practice of asceticism, love, pity and guilt, as it tries to investigate why Nietzsche accounts for these phenomena in terms of *ressentiment*. I show that the institutionalization of asceticism represents, for Nietzsche, another important face of Christian *ressentiment*. Nietzsche expresses great indignation, not only in the senselessness of asceticism (which sometimes takes the form of sheer suffering for its own sake), but also in its elevation by Christians into a “whole mysterious salvation-apparatus” (GM II, §7). He even suggests a weird dimension to asceticism, as he associates it with a certain ancient mechanism of “mnemonics” (remedy for forgetfulness) that sustains itself on pain and bodily harm: “Perhaps there is nothing more awful and more sinister in the early history of man than his *system of mnemonics*...Only that which never stops *hurting* remains in the memory” (GM II, §3). The *ascetic priest*, a figure Nietzsche develops fully in the third part of the *Genealogy*, embodies this “system of mnemonics.” But he would exploit it further. He, the “diverter of the course of *ressentiment*”(GM II, §15), the “grand old wizard” would use the already-existing ascetic temperament of his herd to further brainwash them and establish absolute control over them, so much so that “men no longer grumbled at pain, men panted after pain: ‘More pain! More pain!’” (GM III, §20)

⁵ Conway, D., *Nietzsche on the Genealogy of Morals*, p. 48,

I shall further show in this chapter how Nietzsche likewise looks with suspicion at such sentiments as love, pity and guilt, sentiments that are otherwise called ‘virtues’ in Christian valuation. Elevating such ‘unhealthy’ sentiments, into “virtues” is, in Nietzsche’s estimation, a way of undercutting the values of valor exhibited by the ‘strong.’ He sees nothing life-enhancing about the feelings of pity and guilt. He instead sees them as “depressive”, for they sap energy out of life. In fact, his overall verdict is that “nothing is less healthy than Christian pity” (AC §7).

Once more, the thesis I have set out to defend in this work is that all the aspects of Nietzsche’s genealogical critique of Christianity is traceable to *ressentiment*. The task of defending this thesis will have been completed in Chapter One through Four. I shall round off the work with an evaluative chapter, in which I shall reflect on and assess the basic presupposition of the “genealogical” critique, which seeks to know where the modern Christian stands in light of the message that “God is dead.” I shall argue that “genealogy” as an approach has the merit of overcoming the challenges that attend methods which look for ‘facts,’ and that it also has the merit of not supposing that *ressentiment* is something deliberately adopted by Christians. However, as to the “genealogical” presupposition that ‘God is dead’ and history is thereby cleaved into two, I shall argue that the ‘Christian God’ (as the underpinning of the Christian world order and its concomitant values) is ever present even in the so-called ‘post-Christian’ modern world, but in new and subtle guises. Hence, we cannot strictly talk of a two-part history distinguished by the presence or absence of the ‘Christian God’. I shall rather maintain that history is a seamless spectrum in which there is a progressive *capacity* to choose or not to choose the ‘Christian God.’

In the evaluation section, too, I shall consider some alternative views or visions of Christianity. I feature them, not with the intention of serving as a ‘counter-attack’ on Nietzsche (given that the “genealogical” critique is concerned with issues higher than any individual aspects of Christianity may address), but simply as alternative ways of viewing Christianity outside the framework of Nietzsche’s “genealogy.”

Chapter One

Nietzsche and “Genealogy”

Introduction

My task in this Chapter is twofold. First, I shall provide a concise account of Nietzsche’s genealogical method so as to highlight its essential character. Second, I explain how this genealogy serves Nietzsche’s critique.

The nature of the subject-matter makes this chapter on Nietzsche’s approach imperative. Exploring the place of *ressentiment* in Nietzsche’s critique of Christianity only makes sense in the wider context of Nietzsche’s “genealogical” approach to his critique. Nietzsche’s critique as a whole may justifiably be termed an exercise in “genealogy”. By first explaining how Nietzsche’s “genealogy” works, I shall have prepared the ground for the subsequent chapters that deal with his critique of Christian morality, asceticism, and other features of Christianity. Placing this chapter on genealogy at the beginning of our discourse is therefore important, for it makes for an easier understanding of the rest of the work.

No doubt, the theme of genealogy occupies an important position – and seems to be virtually inexhaustible – in Nietzsche’s writings. I shall, however, confine myself only to such salient aspects as serve the present purposes. Having said this, I now confront the first task, which is to explain the way “genealogy” works.

1.1. Nietzsche’s “Genealogical” Approach: an Overview

As pivotal and almost ubiquitous as the term is, explaining the concept of “genealogy” in Nietzsche’s context is indeed an uphill task. The major source of this difficulty, as I perceive it, is Nietzsche’s own self-critical attitude towards virtually every conceivable term one would ‘ordinarily’ use to describe it. The term “genealogy” is a technical term in Nietzsche. In attempting to say what *it is*, one very quickly arrives at unfamiliar or even abstruse terms that sound pretentious. I would therefore like, for purposes intelligibility, to approach it by saying *what is not*, hoping that this may throw some light on *what it is*.

An important thing to note about Nietzsche's "genealogy" is that it is intended neither as a Cartesian foundationalism nor as a positivist historiography. More fundamental to the above dichotomy is Nietzsche's critique of the metaphysical value of truth in itself. The result is that his "genealogy" has to steer the middle course between objectivism, on the one hand, and subjectivism, on the other hand. Seen in the light of this 'middle course', genealogy is opposed to foundationalism and positivist historiography, both of which are premised on the notion that there are 'truths' and 'facts.' 'Foundationalism' is here used in the Cartesian sense of an apodictic epistemological ground of knowledge. This makes it quite inappropriate to construe Nietzsche's genealogy as a foundational 'tool' of sorts that may strictly be applied to a wide range of cases. Indeed, Nietzsche is wary of any such foundationalism. No knowledge is privileged as an absolute certainty. As he avers, "There are still harmless self-observers who believe that there are 'immediate certainties' ... But 'immediate certainty', as well as 'absolute knowledge' ... involve a *contradictio in adjecto*, I repeat a hundred times" (BGE, §16). He thinks that knowledge is so fluid and perspectival that it would be absurd to talk of absolute certainties. In fact, he ridicules and trivializes any such 'certainties' or 'truths' that may be posited as a foundation of knowledge: "What are man's truths ultimately? Merely his irrefutable errors" (GS, §265). "Irrefutable errors" is an oxymoron used here to further deride and undermine the faith in absolute certainties. Hence, the 'origin' that is being sought in Nietzsche's "genealogy" cannot be seen in epistemological or foundationalist terms.

Furthermore, genealogy is not historiography. Nietzsche admits that there is some 'history' to it, and even accuses some who paraded themselves as genealogists of lacking the historical sense (GM, "Preface" §7). But, this 'historical sense' does not amount to a historiography in the sense of a scientific probe into some supposed 'brute facts' regarding the past. There are no such 'brute facts' of history, Nietzsche would insist, and the 'origin' that is being sought does not lend itself to a positivist approach. The 'origin' in question does not have an ontological status of fixed fact, for there are no facts, but "interpretations" and perspectives (WP, §481). Nietzsche's 'perspectivism' is not relativism. Nietzsche simply wants us to be self-critical of our own positions at every given moment, acknowledging that there are no "truths", no fixed "facts".

From the foregoing ideas of what Nietzsche's genealogy *is not*, one might safely distill out some of its positive features. Nietzsche's "genealogy" is a way of telling the story of the present by understanding how it has *come to be*. To tell a story of how something has come to be, one may have to make some appeal to the past, indeed to 'origins', but not in a positivist, historiographical sense (as we have earlier explained). In Nietzsche's "genealogy", the past is effectively present, such that it also gives 'birth' (the Greek, *gennaó*) to a life-affirming, self-determining future. The present may thus serve as an integration point between the past and a self-affirming future. So, if Nietzsche's approach is called "genealogy", it is primarily because it is forward-looking, as it gives 'birth' (*gennaó*) to a new future. For instance, his genealogical critique of the *ressentiment*-origin of Christianity would serve the purpose of giving birth to a 'new religion' which transcends all the life-negating *ressentiment*-features of the old.

"Genealogy" is animated by self-understanding. The appropriation of the past in a way that makes it effectively present facilitates self-understanding. Michael Förster provides an important definition of genealogy in a way that underlines this aspect of self-understanding. For Förster, it "is primarily a means to better understanding, or explaining ... and especially a means to better self-understanding."⁶ He stresses this element of self-understanding. Julian Young expresses a similar opinion, maintaining that the whole point of the probe into 'origins' is "to facilitate this acquisition of self-knowledge, to provide a pattern or dynamic that we can recognize in ourselves."⁷ In other words, the essence of a genealogical account, say, of Christianity, is to show how Christianity remains effectively present in our current situation, such that Christians recognize the pattern in themselves, thereby fostering self-understanding. As Förster further explains:

The method achieves its distinctive contribution to better understanding people's psychological outlooks and practices, saliently including our own, by showing, in a naturalistic (that is, nonreligious, nonmythical, nontranscendent) way, that and how they have developed historically out of earlier origins prior to which they were not yet really present at all and from which they have emerged via a series of transformation.⁸

On Förster's view, then, genealogy facilitates self-understanding by seeking to understand the circumstances or conditions that may plausibly account for the emergence of a given

⁶ M. Förster, "Genealogy" in *American Dialectic*, Vol 1, No. 2, p. 232.

⁷ J. Young, *Nietzsche's Philosophy of Religion*, p. 147.

⁸ M. Förster, *Op. Cit.*, 232.

phenomenon out of a long history of changes and transformations. Self-understanding is the result of making the past effectively present to us here and now.

Since “genealogy,” in Nietzsche’s sense, is especially interested in the present with a forward-looking projection into the future, a typical genealogical concern would be in line with what Morgan Rempel asserts regarding the Jesus Phenomenon: “The fundamental issue for Nietzsche is not whether or not Jesus of Nazareth ever lived, but by what means he might be best *apprehended* some nineteen centuries later.”⁹ “Genealogy” therefore has the task of helping us appropriate a given phenomenon in a manner that it bears meaning for us in the present. It is not surprising then that Nietzsche directs his focus on how the Redeemer might be meaningfully appropriated centuries afterwards: “What I do care about is the psychological type of the redeemer. After all, the Gospels might actually provide information on this point ... Not the truth about what he did, what he said, how he really died: but rather the question: Can we even conceive of his type anymore?” (AC, §29) So, “genealogy” tries to understand how the figure of Jesus has become an effective reality which continues to bear meaning for us and for any future generations. But “type” itself is not something fixed, Nietzsche would caution. The “genealogical” approach is thus intended to provide the most plausible way of conceiving a phenomenon and the most likely circumstance under which it emerged without relying on fixed structures. Again there is more to it than a search for supposed ‘facts’ of history, a search Nietzsche would consider frivolous and futile.

There is a sense in which Nietzsche’s “genealogy” as a framework for self-understanding by way of reference to some ‘past’ may be compared to the various biblical accounts contained in the first eleven chapters of the Book of Genesis. The parallel between the two lies somewhat in the analogous interest in accounting for realities by providing a framework that refers back to the ‘past.’ The Genesis accounts seek to explain the human realities (“facticity,” to employ an existentialist term) of death, suffering, sin, etc. by way of a framework that refers to a certain ‘beginning’ (drawing inspiration from earlier Babylonian Gilgamesh and Enuma Elish myths). It would be wrong to dismiss them offhandedly; they are non-literal or existential ‘truths’ that bear a heavy meaning for human existence. One may rightly call these Genesis accounts ‘religious aetiologies’ laden with deep religious and existential meanings.

⁹ M. Rempel, *Nietzsche, Psychohistory and the Birth of Christianity*, 4. [my emphasis]

Their similarity notwithstanding, the Genesis accounts are grounded on a religious framework that privileges and sometimes absolutizes some supposed ‘truths’. Again – and as was seen earlier – Nietzsche disavows any such privileged or absolutized viewpoints that may pose as ‘truths’, for “There is only a perspective seeing, only a perspective ‘knowing’” (GM, §12). This “perspectivism” is also expressed in *The Will to Power*, where Nietzsche claims that even our most trusted concepts might after all be “the inheritance from our most remote, most foolish as well as most intelligent ancestors” (WP, §409).

This general overview of Nietzsche’s genealogy would be incomplete if I do not point out that the genealogical method has a history that quite antedates Nietzsche. It has appeared under various names among a number of philosophers before Nietzsche. For our present purposes, however, I shall briefly mention Paul Rée, since Nietzsche specifically mentions him as providing the direct inspiration for writing his *Genealogy*. Rée also attempted a similar project in *The Origin of the Moral Sensations*. As Nietzsche recounts, “The first impulse to publish something of my hypotheses concerning the origin of morality was given to me by a clear, tidy ... little book ... The title of the little book was *The Origins of the Moral Sensations*; its author was Dr. Paul Rée” (GM “Preface” §4). Quite expectedly, the “impetus” or inspiration Rée’s work provided Nietzsche was that of compelling him to write a critique aimed at correcting the pitfalls in Rée’s approach. *Inter alia*, Nietzsche criticizes Rée’s “upside-down and perverse species of genealogical hypothesis, the genuinely English type”¹⁰ (GM Preface §4), his failure to engage in “actual history”¹¹ of morality ... gazing around haphazardly ... after the English fashion” (GM “Preface” §7) and, more importantly, his not being thorough enough, falling into the same traditional error of assuming “pity” to be the foundation of morality (GM “Preface” §6). The above problems Nietzsche identifies in Rée once again provide a clue to what Nietzsche himself thinks of his own genealogical method – its concern for ‘origins’ must be radical, and must presume nothing.

¹⁰ Dr. Rée was German, but Nietzsche may have identified in him the same pattern he saw in the English philosophers whom he most famously criticized.

¹¹ “Actual history” here is not to be seen as positivist historiography which merely seeks to uncover past events (*res gestae*), as opposed to “genealogy” which concerns itself with effective history.

Having provided a general overview of Nietzsche's "genealogy", the ground is now well prepared for attempting the second task of the chapter, namely, explaining how this "genealogical" approach serves Nietzsche's critical enterprise.

1.2. "Genealogy" and Critique

Nietzsche's preference for the "genealogical" approach to investigation is not in doubt. Having explained what this method entails, the crucial question that needs to be addressed is: how does it serve Nietzsche's way of critiquing a phenomenon?

It is generally agreed that Nietzsche's "genealogy" plays a vital role in his critical project. While some scholars think that his critique only destroys but never builds, others believe it is indeed constructive. Brian Leiter, for instance, belongs to the school which views Nietzsche's critique as serving only destructive ends.¹² On the other hand, there are scholars like Julian Young who take Nietzsche's critique to be constructive. As Young argues,

What I think Nietzsche is fundamentally doing is inviting the reader to examine his own motivation ... The point of the reference to the origins of Christianity is to facilitate this acquisition of self-knowledge, to provide a pattern or dynamic we can recognize in ourselves ... In two ways, then, genealogy is intended as rational critique. It is intended to expose the deleterious effects of those subjected to Christian moral judgement and is intended to expose the unpleasant psychology that motivates them – thereby revealing the 'moralist' as someone we do not want to be.¹³

The above view is consistent with Young's overall positive view of Nietzsche's project. The title of the work, *Nietzsche's Philosophy of Religion*, already suggests that there is a 'philosophy of religion,' in the first place, and that his genealogical critique of Christianity makes a positive contribution to this philosophy. Corroborating Young, Alan McLuckie cautions against a "face-value," "anti-religious" reading of Nietzsche, and maintains that Nietzsche indeed "has a positive, constructive view of religion."¹⁴

¹² Cf. B. Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*, p. 167.

¹³ J. Young, *Op. Cit.*, p.147.

¹⁴ Cf. A. McLuckie, "From Religious Neurosis to Religious Being: Nietzsche on our Religious Instinct [An Unpublished MA Thesis, Department of Philosophy, University of Alberta, 2007], pp. 1-2. As a matter of fact, the notion that Nietzsche has a "positive, constructive view of religion" was the central thesis McLuckie set out to defend in the entire work.

Having explained what the “genealogy” is (in the preceding section) and established its relevance to Nietzsche’s critique, a critique with a constructive, forward-looking outlook of heralding a ‘new religion’ that overcomes the life-negating attributes of Christianity (on Nietzsche’s view), it is important to say a few words about the whole question of “genetic fallacy,” the most common charge leveled against Nietzsche’s genealogical approach.

The “genetic fallacy” is used in our present context to describe Nietzsche’s “investigation of the descent (*Herkunft*) of moral values,” such that this investigation influences our present “evaluation of the moral point of view.”¹⁵ With respect to “slave morality”, a moral order Nietzsche juxtaposes with “master morality”, the former promoting weakness and the latter endorsing strength, one may ask: is it a “genetic fallacy” to maintain that “slave morality” is “objectionable simply on the ground that it has an objectionable origin.”¹⁶ Does Nietzsche’s genealogical approach really amount to a “genetic fallacy?”

In his work, “Is There a Genetic Fallacy in Nietzsche’s Genealogy of Morals?” Paul Loeb makes a case to the affirmative. As I shall show, Loeb might be right in his protestations against those who tend to ‘hold brief’ for Nietzsche, but he does not, however, succeed in demonstrating that Nietzsche’s genealogical approach amounts to a genetic fallacy.

Loeb begins by challenging scholars like Nehamas and Schacht who hold that Nietzsche’s genealogy does not involve a genetic fallacy. He insists that scholars who exonerate Nietzsche from a genetic fallacy wrongly interpret Nietzsche’s remark that “The question regarding the descent of our valuations and tables of good absolutely does not coincide with their critique.”¹⁷ He suggests that the remark may have been remotely used to challenge the approach of English historians of morality who supposed it was just enough to point to the base roots of altruistic morality¹⁸, while they themselves were unsuspectingly held captive by the same

¹⁵ A. Nehamas. *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*, p. 107.

¹⁶ P.S. Loeb, “Is There a Genetic Fallacy in Nietzsche’s Genealogy of Morals?” in *The Agonist*, p.9.

¹⁷ WP 254. Cited in Schacht, pp. 352 – 4.

¹⁸ The term “altruistic morality” in the present context refers to a morality founded on the assumption that humans are fundamentally driven by love, pity and kindness towards their fellow humans. Nietzsche’s whole project in the First Essay of his *Genealogy* is to show that the connection of these sentiments to morality only came after the enthronement of “slave morality”. Through his genealogical account, he makes the point that, when “master morality” held sway, such sentiments were seen as weakness and indeed bad.

morality they criticized.¹⁹ Loeb goes further to insist that Nietzsche's genealogical exercise is an *automatic* critique of "slave morality" and an endorsement of "master morality". He buttresses his point by identifying in Nietzsche a form of "aristocratic determinism" that persuades him that a thing that has a noble origin would remain noble while a thing whose origin is base would remain so. The citation below summarizes Loeb's position:

My own approach, by contrast, began with the determination that Nietzsche's genealogy of moral values presupposes a metaphorical extension of the noble mode of valuation according to which value is always inferred from descent. Given his hypothesis regarding the plebeian descent of moral values, Nietzsche claims his genealogy proves that they are 'bad' in the aristocratic sense. Further, Nietzsche's aristocratic determinism persuades him that these values remain base because their vulgar origins cannot be changed. From Socrates to Judea to the Reformation to the French Revolution to English Darwinism, Nietzsche finds a recurrence of plebeian *ressentiment* that gave birth to the moral values they hold in common.²⁰

The conclusion Loeb makes in light of the above passage is that Nietzsche's genealogical approach necessarily leads to his rejection of "slave morality".

My adjudication of the matter is that Loeb may well be right in seeing how the uncovering of the base origin of 'slave morality' *could* lead to a critical attitude towards it in all its forms. After all, Nietzsche thinks that an insight into the "*pudenda origo*" (base origin) of "slave morality" "brings with it the feeling of a diminution in value of the thing that originated thus and prepares the way for a critical mood and attitude against it" (WP, 254). I note, however, that Loeb seems to have lost sight of the fact that Nietzsche's "genealogy" does not approach an issue with pre-determined answers. Coming with pre-determined answers would defeat the very point of the genealogical approach – and Nietzsche is conscious of this. Admittedly, genealogy sets things up in a way that the results or outcomes are such that touch upon 'origins'. However, it is neutral about what the origin-related outcomes might be. It does not foresee these outcomes, strictly speaking. Hence, the distinction between merely looking for 'origins' and precision about outcomes has to be recognized.

Therefore, Loeb tends to exaggerate the connection between the "investigation into the base origin" and a "feeling of diminution in value". The delicate line of distinction has to be

¹⁹ Cf. P.S. Loeb, *Op. Cit.*, p. 9 – 10.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 13-14.

maintained in order not to make genealogy a subtly biased exercise. It is perhaps for this reason that Nietzsche speaks of “preparing the way,” an expression that minimizes the force of necessity of the “diminution in value”. The question of a genetic fallacy immediately disappears if one is able to see this “feeling of diminution in value” not as a *necessary* outcome of the investigation but a *possible* outcome. Moreover, Nietzsche would not wilfully and proudly elevate a false reasoning, namely a “genetic fallacy,” as Loeb seems to be suggesting, to a philosophical principle or methodology. Perhaps, too, a better awareness of the overall implication of “genealogy” for Nietzsche’s notion of ‘truth’ would make Loeb think less of truth as something ‘fixed’. The idea of “fallacy” already privileges a certain way of reasoning as ‘true’. It has been shown how Nietzsche denies that there are ‘truths’. Most assuredly, Nietzsche’s critical attitude to the very notion of ‘truth’ challenges the very concept of “fallacy”, as applied to his “genealogy.”

Conclusion

I have explained in the foregoing discussion that “genealogy” is Nietzsche’s way of accounting for phenomena by way of narratives which probe into the ‘birth’ or ‘origins’ of such phenomena. The purpose of this probe into ‘origins’ is not to arrive at some objective truths but to make the phenomena effectively present in a manner that helps us understand where we stand in regard to the phenomena.

Furthermore, the genealogical approach is a veritable instrument of Nietzsche’s critique, a constructive critique, aimed at uncovering the “unpleasant psychology”²¹, to employ Julian Young’s expression, behind our tables of morals, with a view to ushering in a future in which humanity overcomes such moral tables in defiant self-determination.

I maintained that Nietzsche’s “genealogy” is not guilty of a “genetic fallacy” because there is no necessary connection between an “investigation into the base origins” of morality and the “feeling of diminution in value”; at most, the investigation merely “prepares the way” for a critical disposition. Moreover, since “fallacy” privileges a certain way of reasoning as ‘true’, Nietzsche’s critical attitude to the very notion of ‘truth’ challenges the idea of “fallacy” as applied to him

²¹ J. Young, Op. Cit. 147.

As I earlier hinted, this chapter on the genealogical method is vital for the overall project. Nietzsche's critique of Christianity must be seen in the larger context of his "genealogical" approach. And "genealogy", as has been shown, is a key to unlocking Nietzsche's critique as a whole. "Genealogy" will prove invaluable in understanding Nietzsche's problems with the specific features of Christianity that will be addressed in the rest of the chapters – from morality through doctrines/teachings to a wide range of Christian practices. In the next chapter, I shall show how "genealogy" becomes useful in accounting for the moral dimension of Christianity in terms of *ressentiment*.

Chapter Two

Ressentiment and the Moral Dimension of Christianity

Introduction

In the preceding chapter, I discussed Nietzsche's "genealogical" approach. In doing so, I provided the framework for exploring the idea of *ressentiment* in Nietzsche's critique of Christianity. In this chapter I shall accomplish two tasks. My first task is to show how Nietzsche characterizes *ressentiment* in general, that is, considered *per se* with no particular reference to Christianity. I do this by delineating the contours of *ressentiment* and identifying the various senses conveyed by the term in Nietzsche's parlance. I intend to demonstrate that, in Nietzsche, *ressentiment* has the general features of visceral hate, cunning/subterfuge, vengefulness, class antagonism, power struggle siege mentality, victim-syndrome, and envy. There is nothing distinctively Christian in any of the above characteristics of *ressentiment*. In fact, Nietzsche thinks that *ressentiment*, as made manifest in the above traits, belongs generally to a class he refers to as the "slaves" (weak, lowly) as against the "noble" class. Hence, if any of these features are associated with Christians, it is only insofar as Christians belong to or perhaps even epitomize the weak "slave" class, from Nietzsche's "genealogical standpoint." This point will be underlined in the course my discussion.

But beyond the general characteristics of *ressentiment* considered *per se* as a sentiment not restricted to Christians and Jews, I shall highlight what Nietzsche takes to be the distinctive mark of the Judeo-Christian species of *ressentiment*. According to Nietzsche, the distinguishing character of the Judeo-Christian species of *ressentiment* is to be located in the moral sphere, for it commits itself to a moral warfare against aristocratic values, a war it wages by manufacturing contrary values summed up in "slave morality". "Genealogically" construed, Nietzsche believes that Christianity largely continues the moral war initiated by priestly Judaism against the aristocratic values. Seen in this light, Christian *ressentiment* is only a variation of something non-Christian. But what distinguishes Christian *ressentiment* from priestly Judaism is what I prefer to call the 'Christo-centric' dimension of Christian *ressentiment*. (This Christo-centric character of Christian *ressentiment* will be seen more clearly in the doctrinal spheres I shall explore in the next chapter). Though both are at bottom committed to the destruction of "aristocratic morality",

priestly Judaism does not have this ‘Christo-centric’ slant that draws its direct force from the person of Jesus and his teachings.

My second task will therefore be to explore how Nietzsche associates the moral aspects of Christianity with *ressentiment*. I shall identify as the highpoint of this *ressentiment*-animated moral crusade the radical activities of St. Paul, that “genius in hatred, in the vision of hatred, in the merciless logic of hatred” (AC, §42). Underlining the role of *ressentiment* in Christian morality will help advance my thesis that Nietzsche takes *ressentiment* to be the originating-force of Christianity, a force which also animates it.

Before delving into the discussions proper, it is appropriate to make this all-important clarification. When Nietzsche associates Christianity with *ressentiment*, he does not think that there was any *point* at which the founders of Christianity gathered to adopt *ressentiment* as a ‘founding principle’, as it were. Nor does he suppose that there was a moment Church authorities consciously decided constitute themselves forces or bastions of *ressentiment* in the world. This species of thinking just misses the whole point of Nietzsche’s “genealogy.” As I showed in the last chapter, “genealogy” seeks to understand a phenomenon by appropriating the past in a way that it becomes effectively present. Recognizing how “genealogy” works would guard against any possible misconception that sees *ressentiment* as a “deliberate policy” adopted at a moment *in time*.

Having said this, I begin by delineating the contours of *ressentiment* in Nietzsche’s reckoning.

2.1. Delineating the Contours of *Ressentiment* in Nietzsche

A word on Nietzsche’s preference for the French term is appropriate. Walter Kaufmann, the eminent Nietzsche scholar and translator, provides an important guide. In the Editor’s Introduction to the *Genealogy*, Kaufmann furnishes a number of reasons for Nietzsche’s preference for the French *ressentiment* over the German *Groll* (rancor) or any other German words. Firstly, “the German language lacks any close equivalent to the French term” (GM, Editor’s Introduction, §3). This fact constitutes, according to Kaufmann, a “sufficient excuse” for Nietzsche. Secondly, Nietzsche uses the French word to express his reaction against the overly nationalistic tendencies of the likes of Wagner (especially in the wake of his break from

Wagnerian influence) and Hegel who chauvinistically sought to ‘Germanize’ the philosophical enterprise to the detriment of the rest of Europe. His choice of the French term, therefore, represents his commitment to being a “good European” rather than a narrow German nationalist (Cf. GM Editor’s Introduction §3).

It is reasonable to also suggest that the use of French words or some foreign words was acceptable, and perhaps fashionable, among the cultured people and the intellectual circle in the Germany of his day. Educated, cultured Germans of his day would have used it without difficulties, in a way similar to how an English educated person might use the French-borrowed word ‘*rapprochement*’. Nietzsche might well have wanted to prove a point against the likes of Wagner and Hegel, but I think the inspiration or, at least the ‘incentive’, to prove it in this manner may have been supplied by the fact that French-borrowed words were already in use by the educated people of his day.

The French term, *ressentiment*, may appropriately be rendered as the English ‘resentment’. In its most ordinary meaning, it conveys a sense of a visceral hatred, dislike or odium. To use Lucy Huskinson’s expression, it is a “sickly, all-consuming hatred.”²² “Sickly” and “all-consuming” here make a certain suggestion of helplessness, as though the hater had little or no control of such hateful sentiments, and probably needs help if he were to overcome this condition. *Ressentiment* is thus a pathological hate, the hater thoroughly and helplessly consumed by his feelings. This description might appear exaggerated at first glance, but it nevertheless represents Nietzsche’s characterization of *ressentiment* as a pathological, all-consuming hate.

But, who, according to Nietzsche, are these ‘haters’? What class of people possesses this species of hate-feeling? To *whom* do they direct their hate? Against *what* do they react? Answering these questions will help in no small measure in showing how Nietzsche characterizes *ressentiment*.

Nietzsche thinks that *ressentiment* is a sentiment of the weak, lowly and disadvantaged of society. The weak are given to hate. As disgruntled elements of society, hate comes easily to the weak and lowly. It should be pointed out that there is nothing distinctively Christian about hate.

²² L. Huskinson, *An Introduction to Nietzsche*, p. 13.

At this point I still discuss *ressentiment* in a general, non-Christian sense. Of course Nietzsche refers to Christians as haters. But this is only so because they belong to a specific class of people to whom this feeling is proper. In Nietzsche's genealogical estimation, Christians number among the weak and the lowly in society. So, *ressentiment* has something of weakness, lowliness, and inferiority to it. If Christians are a people of *ressentiment*, "genealogically" viewed, it is precisely because they are considered by Nietzsche as first and foremost weak, lowly and inferior. As Nietzsche recounts:

The Christian movement, being a European movement, was from the very start a whole movement of the rejected and dejected elements of every type: - they want to gain power through Christianity...At the point when Christianity was spreading among the sick, the corrupt, the Chandala classes throughout the whole imperium, the counter-type, the nobility, had assumed its most beautiful and mature form. The great numbers gained control; the democratism of the Christian instinct had won... Christianity is based on the rancor of the sick, the instinct against the healthy, against health. Everything well-constituted, proud, high-spirited, beauty above all, hurt their ears and eyes. (AC, §51)

The above citation brings out some other interesting elements of *ressentiment*. Expectedly, the 'sick' and powerless would be dissatisfied with their lot. Disgruntled and consumed in self-pity, the "weak" would be quick to assign blames to anyone other than themselves. They would blame their overall social disadvantages on the 'noble.'

Therefore, to the question of the 'whom,' it becomes clear that *ressentiment* is directed against the strong, noble and fortunate. As I shall show in Chapter Four, Nietzsche claims that *ressentiment* may also be directed against the self, as in the case of the ascetic priest who, out of frustration, resorts to self-torture and enjoins his herd to do the same. He uses this self-torture to make a political point that somewhat advances his quest for power. At any rate, *ressentiment* always has a stimulus, whether self or other. In the latter case, it is directed against the noble. As Nietzsche observes, Christianity "has used the *ressentiment* of the masses as its main weapon against everything on earth that is noble, joyful, and magnanimous" (AC, §43). Notice here that *ressentiment* has been considered a veritable weapon of warfare, not just against the noble but against nobility itself, not just against the joyful but against joy itself. Its 'warfare' may then be considered *total* because it is not limited to persons and things but extends also to all conditions and states of affairs that are considered good and healthy by the noble. It might be misleading to imagine that *ressentiment* is only against things 'extraordinary' and 'spectacular', as it were.

Nietzsche suggests that what *ressentiment* repudiates under the false label, “the world,” are sometimes the most “common” things: “To be a judge, to be a patriot, to defend one’s self, to be careful of one’s honor, to desire one’s own advantage, to be proud...every act of everyday” (AC, §38). Since people of *ressentiment* resent both the extraordinary and the ordinary, it can be inferred that the only thing that does not elicit a feeling of insecurity is what is just as ‘weak’ as they.

In the Section §51 of *The Anti-Christ* cited above, one notices a sort of envy and class antagonism playing out. This is actually the case – revealing yet another character of *ressentiment*. The antagonism is not mutual because the strong and noble have no place in their heart to harbor *ressentiment*; they would have no time for whatever might count as pettiness. It is to the weak that such petty jealousy belongs. The weak are envious of the powerful, and would like to turn things around. But they are utterly incapacitated and cannot possibly bring about this turn of fortunes through any direct means. Hence, they will completely rely on the craftiness of the priest, a special ‘hierarchy’ among the ‘herd’ which shares something of ‘nobility’ while belonging to the ‘herd’ by nature and instinct. Mattias Risse throws light on the place of the priest in Nietzsche’s classification. He describes the “priest”, in Nietzsche’s understanding, in terms that call to mind the role of communists in Marxian theory. Communists are a self-conscious ‘special class’ among the proletariat that provides leadership to an otherwise directionless mass of disgruntled social elements. It is they who will drive and precipitate the Revolution. Similarly, “priests emerge as intermediate figures between knights and slaves, sharing creativity and determination with the knights and powerlessness and frustration with slaves.”²³ Just like the proletariat is rudderless without the communists, the herd is also rudderless, very much like ‘sheep without a shepherd’ (to employ a biblical imagery), without the priest. Since the priest possesses the requisite tact, it is he who will spearhead the revolt of all disgruntled elements against nobility

How then would the priest who, according to Nietzsche, does not match the noble in physical strength, wage a war against the noble? Nietzsche suggests that the priest would wage this war by no other means than his legendary craftiness deployed in the sphere of morality. Before any further comments on morality, a word on priestly craftiness is in order – for this is

²³ M. Risse, “Origins of Ressentiment and Sources of Normativity”, p.10.

yet another character of Christian *ressentiment*. For Nietzsche, Christian *ressentiment* has something of slyness and cunning to it. He has this to say about the priest-type, who epitomizes Christian *ressentiment*: “The truly great haters in world history have always been priests; likewise the most ingenious haters: other kinds of spirit hardly come into consideration when compared with the spirit of priestly vengefulness” (GM I, §7). “Ingenious” here used to describe priestly vengefulness conveys a sense of expertise in cunning, such that dwarfs other forms of cunning. Nietzsche further paints an elaborate picture of the “man of *ressentiment*” to underscore this crookedness:

The man of *ressentiment* is neither upright nor naïve nor honest and straightforward with himself. His soul squints; his spirit loves hiding places, secret paths and backdoors, everything covert entices him as his world, his security, his refreshment; he understands how to keep silent, how not to forget, how to wait, how to be provisionally self-deprecating and humble. A race of such men of *ressentiment* is bound to become eventually cleverer than any noble race. (GM II, §10)

The man of *ressentiment* has to resort to high-level cunning for obvious reasons. It is a survival strategy. What he lacks in physical and material strength, he makes up with his legendary craftiness. Were he to get himself involved in open confrontations with the noble and powerful, he would be roundly defeated. Hence, he discerningly avoids the ‘conventional war’, and will resort to ‘guerrilla warfare’ of sorts, a war waged on of values.

This last point introduces one important dimension of *ressentiment* Nietzsche regards as distinctively Judeo-Christian – the value-manufacturing dimension. None of the features I have so far discussed is strictly Judeo-Christian. But Nietzsche believes that the Judeo-Christian tradition is a *ressentiment* movement marked by an uncanny value-manufacturing capacity, for “with the Jews there begins the slave revolt in morality” (GM I, §7). This moral revolt initiated by the priestly Judaism against the ‘aristocratic values’ will be continued with Christianity but in new guises that bear the name of Christ. Later in this chapter, I shall show how Nietzsche locates the sources of the Christian *ressentiment*-animated morality in Priestly Judaism, and in the next chapter, I shall fully explore what I call the “Christocentric” character of Christian *ressentiment* as expressed in Christian doctrines.

We may have earlier wondered what use the man of *ressentiment* will put his cunning to in the war against the powerful. Nietzsche contends that this invaluable gift of cunning will be

deployed in a moral warfare. Cunning is the weapon and the sphere of morality is the safest terrain, since “morality is the best way of leading people around by the nose” (AC, §44). The priest tactfully drags the noble to the sphere of morality, bringing about a moral subversion that would eventually weaken and rout the aristocratic class. In a nutshell, all that hitherto represented strength and power are demonized and discarded, while values that hitherto represented weakness are upheld as ideal under the guise of ‘humility,’ ‘docility,’ and ‘virtue’. The noble fall for this trap and are consequently emasculated and defeated.

Nietzsche unmistakably points out that *ressentiment* is at the root of this historical reversal of values: “The revolt of the slaves in morals begins in the principle of resentment becoming creative and giving birth to values – a resentment experienced by creatures who, deprived as they are of the proper outlet of action, are forced to find their compensation in an imaginary revenge” (GM I, §10). There is, thus, something creative about Christian *ressentiment*. It is a *ressentiment* that creates vengeful values. Nietzsche does not think that this creation of values is necessarily an intentional act; it is rather an expression of the Will-to-power, which “genealogy” allows us to see. The values in question are counter-values which devalue, negate and defeat the morality of the noble. The Sermon on the Mount²⁴ easily comes mind as the epitome of Christian values that Nietzsche would consider contrary to the aristocratic mode of valuation. It is easy to discern how in Christian *ressentiment*, creativity, craftiness, vengeance and morality become fused in meaning.

Contrasting the man of *ressentiment* with the noble will help bring out more features of *ressentiment*. Nietzsche pays glowing tribute to the noble/aristocratic, who acts from abundance of life, power and strength. The noble is characteristically care-free and forgiving. Again, unlike the slave, the noble is not petty. Nietzsche does not seem to be concerned about pointing out concrete individuals or group of individuals that may strictly embody these aristocratic features. Perhaps, too, “genealogy” does not require that the ‘noble’ or ‘slave’ classes be self-conscious groupings. Be that as it may, Nietzsche finds the ‘noble’ traits admirable and applauds them

²⁴ Starting from the Gospel of Matthew Chapter 5 through Chapter 7, the Sermon on the Mount is the most elaborate speech delivered by Jesus. In it, He outlines the values, visions and, as it were, the ‘code of conduct’ that should guide all His followers and those who wish to partake in the ‘Kingdom’ He comes to inaugurate. Chapter 5 specifically stipulates such values as meekness, pacificism, compassion, non-violence, love for enemies, etc. These values represent what Nietzsche refers to as “slave morality”, a type of morality he sees as contrary and, indeed inimical, to “master morality” that endorses strength, violence and brute force.

vehemently. Since the noble overflows with power, he does not bear grudges; indeed, he has no need for grudges. He easily forgets wrongs and, unlike the man of *ressentiment*, has no need to harbor malice or exact vengeance. He is, in fact, too powerful for such. This man is beautifully described in a manner that suggests something of a childlike innocence.

To be incapable of taking one's enemies, one's accidents, even one's misdeeds seriously for very long – that is the sign of strong, full natures in whom there is an excess of the power to form, to mold, to recuperate and to forget (a good example of this in modern times is Mirabeau, who had no memory for insults and vile actions done him and was unable to forgive simply because he – forgot). Such a man shakes off with a single shrug many vermin that eat deep into others. (GM I, §10)

Since the above disposition is given rise to by excessive power, it follows that *ressentiment* and rancor is occasioned by a feeling of powerlessness. The Christian, a quintessential man of *ressentiment* according to Nietzsche, is so precisely because he feels emasculated. Nietzsche sometimes suggests that the man of *ressentiment* is actually ambitious and envies the position of the “noble”. Nietzsche does not frown at being ambitious, per se; after all he preaches life-affirmation. What he does not, however, tolerate is the insincere and life-negating means through which the Christian goes about this, namely, by dragging everyone to that life-stifling moral sphere where he alone pontificates. Kaufmann links Nietzsche's *ressentiment* with “extreme or prolonged oppression and frustration,” as he maintains: “Impotence may thus be a source of poison, and the possession of power may be the medicine ... ‘medical kit of the soul: what is the strongest healing application? – victory’”²⁵ The man of *ressentiment* has a siege mentality and perceives himself as a victim. Only power can heal him. No doubt, *ressentiment* is an expression of the Will-to-power. But Nietzsche never hides his preference for the ‘noble’ way of expressing this Will-to-power, embodied in the life-affirming standards of “noble morality,” as against the “slave morality.”

Still by way of contrasting the noble man with the man of *ressentiment* (with a view to bringing out the character of *ressentiment*), it should be noted that the noble man's action or disposition is *independent* and *self-sufficient*, while that of the man of *ressentiment* is not. “Independence,” in this context, means that the noble man's actions can be analyzed exclusively in their own right without reference to anybody or anything else. They flow from the depths of

²⁵ W. Kaufman, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist and Anti-Christ*. p.194.

knightly character and proceed from abundance, the abundance of life-affirming sentiments. On the contrary, the action/disposition of the man of *ressentiment* is *essentially reactionary* – it is always against something or somebody. As Morgan Rempel observes,

Central to Nietzsche’s model of the origin of moral evaluation is that, in contrast to morality emanating from power, the “slave morality” of the powerless is fundamentally reactive, a product of negation, a function of *ressentiment*. To the extent that they are unable to partake of the direct, value-generating world of the powerful ... these qualities come to be resented by the powerless and accordingly are considered “evil”.²⁶

Actions driven by *ressentiment* are essentially reactionary because they cannot be analyzed unless with reference to the thing or the person against whom they are directed. They are characteristically dependent and cannot stand on their own. For instance, while the noble man affirms life, the man of *ressentiment* posits anti-life, which is only understood against the backdrop of life; when the noble man affirms health, the man of *ressentiment* posits anti-health or sickness, which depends on health for its meaning.

The reactionary character of *ressentiment* makes an ‘object’ or ‘external stimulus’ indispensable (GM I, §10). In fact, a *ressentiment*-motivated action depends upon this “stimulus” for its existence. Eva Melnikova aptly points out that *ressentiment* “Is not only a self-absorbed feeling of pity, or a mere awareness of one’s misfortune. As Nietzsche tells us, ‘it takes two for resentment’.”²⁷ This element of the ‘other’ against which *ressentiment* is directed underlines its reactionary character. It is also to this “other” that the man of *ressentiment* takes out his frustration. Sometimes, too, this frustration is directed inwards, as in the case of Christian asceticism, in which the ascetic priest tortures himself and enjoins his herd to do same. Whether the frustration is visited on someone or visited on oneself, the unchanging character of *ressentiment* is that there is always a ‘stimulus’ against which it re-acts.

In the foregoing characterization of *ressentiment*, we made several allusions to the sphere of morality. This sphere of morality deserves a special treatment. What follows is an elaborate account of Christian morality by way of tracing its very origin (“genealogy”) in *ressentiment*.

²⁶ M. Rempel. *Nietzsche: Psychohistory and the Birth of Christianity*, p. 94.

²⁷ E. Melnikova “Nietzsche’s Morality of Ressentiment” in the *Filosof*, pp. 7-8.

2.2. *Ressentiment* and the “Genealogy” of Christian Morality

Nietzsche situates the ancestry of Christian *ressentiment* and its attendant morality within the framework of *Priestly Judaism*. Abed Azzam explains that “Nietzsche’s historical conception of Judaism results in the division of Judaism into three phases: the biblical era (or Early Judaism), the second temple era (or Priestly Judaism), and Diaspora Judaism.”²⁸ Nietzsche argues that Early Judaism was not a religion of *ressentiment*. This is because their war exploits, especially at the high points of the Davidic Dynasty, established them as a proud and noble people. At those moments in their history, Israelites gloried in military conquests and were feared by their neighbors. Since *ressentiment* is a sentiment proper to the weak, it could not be associated with a noble and victorious people. Yahweh was the proud God of a proud and assertive people. However, historical circumstances, namely, repeated defeats and humiliations in wars, exiles and foreign domination, would alter this state of affairs, resulting in a loss of self-esteem, both on the part of the people and on the part of their Yahweh. So, the fortunes of Yahweh dwindled with the incessant humiliation of the Yahweh-people. Like the Yahweh-people, the hitherto assertive and life-affirming Yahweh was emasculated, became shy and turned inward (AC, §25).

Priestly Judaism emerges precisely as an attempt to provide an alternative way of thinking and of being, in the face of this new reality – of the people as a defeated people and of Yahweh as a ‘defeated’ God. The priest would change the character of Judaism. They introduced the values of a defeated people in a bid to explain away their unfortunate situation and demonize their conquerors. Such values would not have been tolerated in their moments of victory. This invariably ushered in the dawn of a *ressentiment*-informed morality. In the wake of this, Yahweh would be divested of its former qualities of strength and power. Yahweh now becomes the God of the sick, lowly, weak, base and pitiable. Nietzsche claims that, under the supervision of the Jewish priest, a wholesale falsification of history, God, morality and reality in general was carried out – “The concept of God falsified; the concept of morality falsified. Jewish priesthood did not stop at that. The whole history of Israel proved useless: get rid of it! – These priests performed a miracle of falsification” (AC, §26). By “falsification”, Nietzsche is likely referring

²⁸ Cf. A. Azzam, *Nietzsche Versus Paul*, p.25. Azzam’s detailed characterization of phases of Judaism in the context of Nietzsche’s genealogy is noteworthy.

to “slave morality” which now sees strength as evil and God as the God of the weak. To Nietzsche, “slave morality” brings about a re-definition of God, morality and history.

The priests may have been merely discharging their duties as shepherds to a defeated people. A siege mentality, defense mechanisms, defeatist narratives may have inadvertently found their way in the consciousness of a conquered people. These would become a veritable recipe of *ressentiment*, which finds an eloquent expression in the sphere of morals.

Nietzsche acknowledges there had been earlier revolts against knightly-aristocracy. But the most decisive would be the one organized by Judea against Rome on the moral sphere. In the context in which Nietzsche writes, “Rome” represents knightly-aristocratic values, while Judea represents “slave morality”. Nietzsche would think that the Jewish priests may have ‘co-operated’ with the colonial masters politically for fear or for self-enrichment, but they were nevertheless conducting an insidious sedition on the moral and spiritual plane, viewed from the standpoint of “genealogy”. This moral sedition was particularly potent and decisive because it was not waged with conventional weapons but through a radical devaluation of their enemies’ values. Here lies the great genius and novelty the Jews introduced to an age-old feeling of resentment slaves generally harbor against their masters. “With the Jews there begins the slave revolt in morality,” Nietzsche argues (GM I, §7).

In my earlier characterization of *ressentiment*, I noted that the Jewish priest chooses the path of a trans-valuation or revolt in morality because he finds no option more viable; indeed, moral/spiritual revolt is his only option. Obviously, he and his flock cannot match the knightly-aristocratic Romans in military and strategic strength. Bruce Detwiler captures this whole situation and, more interestingly, in a manner that once again supports my claims about *ressentiment*.

Wherever there is enslavement and oppression and wherever the oppressed are too weak to requite, there arises the potential for spiritual revolt. The feeling of powerlessness – the powerlessness of a priestly aristocracy under the heel of a warrior aristocracy, for example, or the powerlessness of common slaves before their masters – gives rise to a festering resentment and, indeed, a deadly hatred that fuels a quest for revenge on a spiritual level.²⁹

²⁹ B. Detwiler, *Nietzsche and the Politics of Aristocratic Radicalism*, p. 120.

On the above view, the priest and his herd resort to a ‘spiritual revolt’ as an alternative to direct confrontation. This ‘spiritual revolt’ will be driven by *ressentiment*, the ‘creative force’ that most readily expresses itself in morality: “The slave revolt in morality begins when *ressentiment* itself becomes creative and gives birth to values” (GM I, §10).

According to Nietzsche, the new values that arose in this context are a whole array of life-negating principles summed up in the term “slave morality”. “Slave morality” is a type of morality opposed to the longstanding aristocratic formula which defined the *good* in terms of strength, nobility and dominance. The “aristocratic value-equation (good=noble=powerful=beautiful=happy=beloved of God)” is discarded in favor of a contrary logic: “The wretched alone are the good; the poor, impotent, lowly alone are the good; the suffering, deprived, sick, ugly alone are pious, along are blessed by God ... and you, the powerful and noble, are on the contrary the evil, the cruel, the lustful, the insatiable, the godless to all eternity” (GM I, 7). The above citation is once again reminiscent of the Sermon on the Mount, the moral tablet of Christianity. In the wake of this inversion, the strong would now have to ‘apologize,’ as it were, for being strong, and the noble would have to be sorry for being noble. Nietzsche takes this inversion to be the moral legacy the Jews, an exceedingly crafty “priestly people,” will bequeath to the world, a legacy that will be directly inherited and advanced to an uncanny dimension by Christianity.

An important feature of Nietzsche’s “genealogy” of Christian morality is the idea that Priestly Judaism is a fertile ground for the emergence of Christianity. Seen through the “genealogical eye”, Nietzsche thinks that Priestly Judaism will give birth to Christianity, perhaps in the same manner that capitalism will give rise to communism, in Marxist theory of history. Marx holds that communists are the self-conscious members of the working class that will provide the leadership for the “Communist Revolution” that will destroy capitalism. The difference is that while communism arises as a fundamental antithesis that defeats capitalism, Christianity emerges to advance the *ressentiment* that exists in priestly Judaism in a much more virulent but insidious manner.

As the art of holy lie, Christianity brings to perfection the whole of Judaism, a Jewish preparatory exercise and technique developed over many hundreds of years with the

greatest seriousness. The Christian, this *ultima ratio* of lies, is the Jew once again – or even three times again. (AC, §44)

Christians are compared to Jews here perhaps to emphasize the claim that Christians inherited their *ressentiment* from priestly Judaism. However, the difference between the two will become clearer in the next chapter by the particularly ‘Christocentric’ character Christian *ressentiment*-animated doctrines take on. It suffices at the moment to hold that Nietzsche regards the subversive activities of the Jewish priest in the moral sphere as a ‘preparatory exercise’ for a more ‘sophisticated’ war to be waged by Christianity.

To Nietzsche, Christianity, the child, inherited the same ‘genes’ of *ressentiment* from its father, Priestly Judaism: “The small insurrectionary movement which takes the name of Jesus of Nazareth is simply the Jewish instinct of *redivivus*” (AC, §27). Again, ‘the name of Jesus of Nazareth’ already points to the ‘Christo-centric’ character of Christian *ressentiment* that I shall explore in the next chapter in the sphere of the doctrinal. When *ressentiment* takes on ‘the name of Jesus of Nazareth’, it will find it expedient to alter the outward appearance of *hate*, replacing it with an insidious *love*.

From the trunk of that tree of vengefulness and hatred, Jewish hatred ... there grew something equally incomparable, a new love...One should not imagine it grew up as the denial of that thirst for revenge ... No, the reverse is true! That love grew out of it as its crown, as its triumphant crown ...and the heights in pursuit of the goals of that hatred – victory, spoil, and seduction. (GM I, §8)

The “new love” here suggests that, considered “genealogically”, Christian morality has its sources in Priestly Judaism. The spread of Christianity with the new moral world-order it introduces is all part of the ‘black art’, the ‘grand politics’ with which Jews used to conquer the world. To Nietzsche, Jews feign enmity with the new insurrectionary movement even to the point of crucifying its leader. He claims to see through their ostensible opposition to the new movement to call it by what it is – a sheer smokescreen. As R. Almeida de Miranda puts the point, the continuity between priestly Judaism and Christianity could not have been better expressed: “Christianity is to be understood not as a reaction, but as a consequence and an inevitable result of the instinct of decadence which, reaching the farthest limits of its course, mutates into new forces and borrows new masks and new disguises.”³⁰ This continuity between

³⁰ R. Miranda de Almeida, *Nietzsche and Paradox*, p. 106.

priestly Judaism and Christianity is seen through the ‘eyes’ of Nietzsche’s “genealogy”. Historically, as we know, Jewish religious authorities vehemently opposed the newfangled Jesus-sect that sprang up from their midst, and were determined to go any length to suppress them. This fact alone would render any thesis postulating a conscious conspiracy between the two highly implausible. In fact, the followers of these two religions might after all have been living out their various religious convictions in good faith, oblivious of their being ‘partners in *ressentiment*’ in the eyes of Nietzsche’s “genealogy.”

In any event, Nietzsche regrets that the world actually did fall for the Jewish “bait” (GM I, §8), that is, Christianity, the ‘new guise’ under which Judaism seeks to advance its cause. And now, the cosmic consequence of falling for this ‘bait’ is the ultimate victory of Judea over Rome and the entire world, such that even in Rome, it is to “three Jews...and one Jewess” that one bows down to “as the epitome of the highest values” (GM I, §16). Jews have won; the whole world is under their moral spell!

But the genealogy of this moral victory would be incomplete without the special contribution of one man who is, according to Nietzsche, an embodiment of Judeo-Christian *ressentiment*. In what follows, we shall give our attention to Paul, highlighting briefly his special contribution to the ‘victory,’ especially in the moral sphere.

St. Paul

To situate Paul in the context of the moral tradition initiated by the Jewish Priest, Nietzsche interchangeably refers to him as a rabbi, a priest, and a Pharisee. To Nietzsche, Paul’s alleged ‘conversion’ makes no difference, for he retains and in fact typifies ever afterwards the appalling hatred and vengefulness that sit in the soul of the Jewish priest. In fact, according to Nietzsche, he remained the old Saul, even after his much-vaunted ‘conversion’. He is described as a “genius in hatred, in the vision of hatred, in the merciless logic of hatred” (AC §42), intent on completing the process of decadence initiated by the Jewish priest “with the logical cynicism of a rabbi” (AC, §44).

I have said earlier that Nietzsche identifies *ressentiment* as the foundational principle of Christianity, genealogically construed. In fact, he cannot emphasize enough the whole notion of “the birth of Christianity out of the spirit of *ressentiment*” (EH, “On the Genealogy of Morals”).

The idea that there is continuity, in Nietzsche’s reckoning, between the first-century and post-Jesus Christianity is obvious. But, this continuity has a name, as it were – Paul. To talk of a post-Jesus Christianity is to talk of Paul, for he almost single-handedly shaped its form and character, so much so that Christianity might as well be called the religion of Paul rather than of Jesus. In Nietzsche’s estimation, he is “the first Christian, the inventor of Christian-ness! Before him there were only a few Jewish sectarians” (D, §68).

In the moral sphere, Nietzsche notes that Paul’s teachings are aimed at consummating the moral subversions already began by priestly Judaism. When he bemoans the ‘revaluation of values,’ Nietzsche most certainly thinks that no one did more damage in this regard than Paul. More than any other propagator of the Christian faith, Paul embodies that feature of Christianity Nietzsche derides as “Platonism for the people” (BGE, “Preface”). The expression “Platonism for the people” in this context suggests that Paul’s message is shot through with the “Plato-type” dualistic otherworldly ideals, the type that can only distract people’s attention from the present life and the task of making the most out of it. Like Plato, Paul has an obvious bias against matter, as he vigorously enjoins his “flock” to lead lives that make them eligible for the afterlife reward “when this perishable body puts on imperishability and this mortal body puts on immortality”.³¹ Nietzsche would not hesitate to think that Paul’s moral principles, nay, his entire apostolic message, are essentially inimical to life.

Nietzsche takes Paul to have deliberately taken sides with the base, lowly and slavish – and that his message appeals only to the commoners and not the learned.

The ‘God’ that Paul invented for himself, a God who ‘confounds all worldly wisdom’... is in truth just Paul’s firm decision to do it himself: to call his own will ‘God’ torah, that is Jewish to the core. Paul wants to confound all ‘wisdom of the world’: his enemies are the good philologists and doctors from the Alexandrian schools –, he wages war on them. (AC, §47)

³¹ I Corinthians 15:54

A close analysis of Pauline ministry, as contained in the Acts of the Apostles and in Pauline Epistles, suggests that he preferred to deal with the simple-minded “poor” and was rather paranoid of the elite class. The Pauline communities in Asia Minor were largely composed of people of the lower class, who found solace in the new message he brought. No doubt, Paul had all the elite qualities – learning, eloquence, Roman citizenship, etc. – and could match the elite of his day on their own terms. Either by choice or by the demand of his ministry (as being part of the Jesus Movement that had a special sympathy for the poor), Paul seemed to have been comfortable dealing with people from the lower class. Sometimes he even showed outright antagonism towards the elite class. There are countless biblical passages that demonstrate this antagonism. In one of such passages, he claims: “God chose the foolish things of this world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of this world to shame the strong.”³² While these instances do not, *per se*, discount the validity of Paul’s message or undermine his apostolic worth, they provide some ground for Nietzsche’s indictment of Paul as a champion of the rabble class, with doctrinal and moral teachings that only advanced the process of decadence begun by Priestly Judaism.

Nietzsche unmistakably refers to Paul as a Jewish ‘priest’ *par excellence*. He holds this opinion of Paul because he observes in him a similar ‘solicitude’ the Jewish priest has towards his herd – to defend them from the strong, the elite class. A jealous shepherd, Paul’s moral teachings are mainly aimed at defending the herd against the imaginary attack of the strong. This, again, is characteristic of his priestly morality:

He [the priest] has to defend his herd – against whom? Against the healthy, of course, and also against envy of the healthy; he must be the natural opponent and *despiser* of all rude, stormy, unbridled, hard, violent beast-of-prey health and might. The priest is the first form of the more *delicate* animal that despises more readily than it hates. He will not be spared war with the beasts of prey, a war of cunning (of the “spirit”) rather than one of force. (GM III, §15)

The above passage provides a glimpse into why the whole architecture of Pauline morality has to be decidedly anti-aristocratic. As a quintessential priest, he uses his moral teachings as a defense mechanism aimed at rendering the aristocratic qualities of strength and valor unattractive so that his flock might not desire them. So, when Paul casts aspersions on ‘the wisdom of this world,’

³² I Corinthians 1:27

the wise and the strong as he repeatedly does in his Epistles (as we earlier noted), he intends to discourage these qualities in his flock by casting them in uncomplimentary lights. Nietzsche would consider Paul's message as part of the overall tactics that will eventually complete the victory of "slave morality" over "master morality," such that "the happy, well-constituted, powerful in soul and body" will "begin to doubt their right to happiness" (GM III, §14).

All this fits into the grand old politics of the priestly caste. Paul is the consummation of this power-politics. Obviously, "what he (Paul) needed was power; with Paul the priest wanted power once again – he could use only concepts, doctrines, symbols with which one tyrannizes the masses and forms herds" (AC §42). Paul did indeed return power to the priest – thanks to his *ressentiment*-animated ministry.

Conclusion

I have shown, from the foregoing, that *ressentiment* is a sickly pathological hate. This species of hate is associated with powerlessness. But it is also marked by a disguised quest for power. It is antagonistic, vengeful, reactionary and mostly directed at a perceived 'enemy'.

I argued that the distinctive character of Judeo-Christian *ressentiment*, according to Nietzsche, is its capacity to create values. Driven by *ressentiment*, the Judeo-Christian tradition manufactures life-negating values embodied in the term "slave morality", a moral order that overthrows the "master morality".

I established that this moral trans-valuation perfected by Christianity, on Nietzsche's account, originated in priestly Judaism. And I clarified that, though no theory of a 'conscious conspiracy' between Christianity and priestly Judaism may be established, Nietzsche's "genealogy" nevertheless provides a plausible context in which the relationship between the two could be seen.

This whole exercise of explaining the impact of *ressentiment* on Christian morality fits into our larger project of underscoring the centrality of the concept of *ressentiment* in Nietzsche's critique of Christianity.

The next chapter will dwell on the impact of *ressentiment* on Christian doctrines in Nietzsche's genealogical critique of Christianity. As Nietzsche observes, morality is not the only

weapon used by the priest (who typifies Christianity); he also uses “concepts, doctrines and symbols” (AC, §42). It is in these “concepts, doctrines and symbols” that bear the distinctive mark of Christ that I shall locate the ‘uniqueness’ of Christian *ressentiment*.

Chapter Three

Nietzsche's "Genealogical" Account of the Role of *Ressentiment* in Christian Eschatology, Christology and Soteriology

Introduction

The title of the project as a whole defines my task, namely, to explore and highlight the centrality of *ressentiment* in Nietzsche's genealogically-based critique of Christianity. In keeping with this single-minded task, I showed, in the preceding chapter, how Nietzsche identifies the role of *ressentiment* in the sphere of morality. In the present chapter, I shall extend my investigation to the area of Christian doctrine, with a view to demonstrating how Nietzsche sees *ressentiment* in his "genealogical" account of some doctrinal tenets of Christianity. I shall explore the areas of Eschatology (theology of the "last things", *eschata* – death, judgment and the afterlife), Christology (systematic study of Jesus the Christ) and Soteriology (theory/theology of salvation). The role of *ressentiment* in some of these cases might not be immediately obvious. Nietzsche insists, nevertheless, that they are still ultimately traceable to *ressentiment*, genealogically construed.

I here claim that it is in this doctrinal sphere that one locates something distinctively Christian. The reader should recall that, in the previous chapter, the value-creating character of *ressentiment* is shared with Priestly Judaism. For Nietzsche holds that the moral warfare initiated by Priestly Judaism against the "master morality" is merely being sustained in Christianity under new guises. In the present chapter, however, the tenets of Christian eschatology, Christology and soteriology are particularly Christo-centric, that is, they are centered on the person and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. This Christocentric dimension is not shared with Priestly Judaism.

As I set out to discuss how Nietzsche "genealogically" judges these doctrinal dimensions of Christianity as arising from *ressentiment*, I do not presuppose there is a 'fixed essence' (as it were) of Christianity defined by doctrines. The idea of a 'fixed essence' is wrongheaded, from the "genealogical" point of view. It smacks of essentialism, as we saw in Chapter One, from which Nietzsche clearly dissociates his "genealogy." Furthermore, the notion of a 'fixed essence' of Christianity would miss the whole point of Nietzsche's "genealogy" which considers Christianity, not in its supposed 'essence,' but as an effective reality present to us in and through

its doctrine. So long as we do not think in terms of ‘fixed essences,’ then it is safe to say that, in “genealogy”, Christianity is appropriated and made effectively present to us in and through its doctrine.

Having made this important clarification, I now begin by looking at the role of *ressentiment* in the eschatological doctrines of Judgement, Resurrection, Immortality and the Afterlife vis-à-vis Nietzsche’s “genealogical” critique of Christianity.

3.1. *Ressentiment* and Christian Eschatology: Judgement, Resurrection, Immortality and the Afterlife.

Nietzsche’s attitude towards Christian eschatological teachings is that of suspicion and downright ridicule. Like Christian morality Nietzsche also takes Christian eschatology to be life-negating.

From the “genealogical” standpoint, Nietzsche judges all the tenets that compose what is known as ‘Christian eschatology’ as arising from *ressentiment* – “the doctrine of judgment and return ... the doctrine of the resurrection; and at this point the whole idea of ‘blessedness’ ... all for the sake of a state after death”(AC, §42). For him, they are also a misrepresentation or falsification of all the Evangel (Jesus) stood for, the Evangel whose original message lacks eschatological undertones, on Nietzsche’s view. Since Nietzsche speaks of ‘misrepresentation’ and ‘falsification,’ it could be inferred that he somewhat dissociates and even exonerates Jesus from the *ressentiment*-laden faith of his followers. So, there is a sense in which a distinction could be made between Jesus’ life *per se* and what his followers made out of him. However, Nietzsche does not spell out this distinction properly. Be that as it may, it is wrong to suppose that any ‘misrepresentation’ or ‘falsification’ on the part of his early followers was necessarily willful. Indeed, Nietzsche’s “genealogical” account does not suggest that this misrepresentation was necessarily willful. He would most certainly think that the Will-to-power operative in the disciples was expressing itself this way. “Will-to-power”, a central idea in Nietzsche’s thought, could be seen as a fundamental principle or force that drives all life-forms to not merely remain in existence but rather express and maximize its strength and power. For Nietzsche, Will-to-power is all-pervasive and indeed intrinsically linked with life itself, for “life itself is *will to power*” (BGE, §13). Will-to-power could be expressed in a variety of ways which might

sometimes involve conquering, overpowering and outwitting others, not just for survival but also to make one's power maximally felt.

Nietzsche is of the view that Jesus, unlike his followers, harbored no iota of *ressentiment*, and was indeed superior to *ressentiment* (AC, §40). Consumed by a vindictive temperament, on the contrary, the early disciples manufactured the notion of judgement out of the substrates of Priestly Judaism to which they are heirs. To be sure, there is a form of 'indictment' that goes with a failure to use one's freedom appropriately. But this indictment does not come from God. It is rather automatic, a form of self-condemnation. Therefore, to project this self-judgement to God would not only be a symptom of what Nietzsche sees as a misguided "familiarity with God" (GM III, §22) but also a failure on the part of humans to own the judgment. In their warped sense of judgement, the healthy and the noble of this world are the ones that will be condemned to eternal damnation, while they (that is, Christians and all the 'sickly' and the 'slavish' elements of this world, in Nietzsche's estimation) are supposed to be compensated in the hereafter.

Nietzsche further notes that the doctrine of Final Judgment is rooted in vengeance, the inability of the first disciples of Jesus of Nazareth to forgive his death.

But the disciples were far from being able to forgive this death ... Revenge resurfaced, the most unevangelical feeling of all. It was impossible for this death to be the end of the matter: 'retaliation' was needed, 'punishment' (--and really, what could be less evangelical than 'retaliation', 'punishment', 'passing judgement'!) (AC, §40)

The Jewish rulers would be made scapegoats in their attempt to answer the critical question of "Who killed him? Who was his natural enemy?" As Muller-Lauter narrates, "The new resentment-movement, which of course, more deeply understood, merely continues the old Jewish one, is set aflame by Jesus' death. In view of the cross, the disciples sought to identify Jesus's enemies and they discovered them to be the rulers of Judaism."³³ But the 'rulers' are not the only scapegoats; the entire "upper class" (AC, §40) will also be marked for "Judgment". This inclusion of the entire 'upper class' justifies the interpretation of 'Judgment' in the Christian sense as an extension of the general antagonism towards the aristocracy, and indeed against "everything on earth that is noble, joyful, and magnanimous, against our happiness on earth" (AC, §43). Perhaps the appearance in all three Synoptic Gospels of the passage that stipulates the

³³ W. Muller-Lauter. *Nietzsche: His Philosophy of Contradictions and the Contradictions of His Philosophy*, p. 55.

near-impossibility of a ‘rich man’ making the Kingdom further indicates this general anti-‘upper class’ posture.³⁴ So, in crafting the idea of “divine judgment,” the early disciples had a well-defined agenda, and were clear about the target of this ‘judgment.’

There is even a sadistic strain to this judgment against the upper class. The early disciples are not just satisfied with the punishment of their ‘enemies;’ they also demand an extreme form of punishment that might gratify their thirst for vengeance. In this connection, Nietzsche reports the sadistic triumphalism of Tertullian, a venerated early Church Father, who once warned his flock of the “cruel pleasures of the public games,” reminding them of the glorious ecstasy that awaited them – namely, the spectacle of the cruel torture of sinners in hellfire (GM I, §15).³⁵ In fact the joy of heaven would be incomplete without such gratifications and “delight in the eternal suffering of their erstwhile oppressors”³⁶

The sadistic and vindictive undertones of ‘Judgment’ (on their own terms) are viewed by Nietzsche as being closely associated with a certain materialistic vanity. Deprived of the good things of this world (of course by their own misguided preference for the ‘ascetic ideal’) Christians get fixated about such material things. They invent the “hinterworld” as a place of compensation for their suffering: “It was suffering and incapacity that created all hinterworlds, and that brief madness of happiness that only the most suffering person experiences” (Z “On the Hinterworldly”). And so, ‘Judgment,’ as they conceive it, must place at their disposal those good things they missed so badly. Nietzsche does not hesitate to think that the Christian notion of ‘heaven’ as a place of abundance and compensation takes its root from such materialistic vanity. The nature of their afterlife would be such that furnishes a materialistic compensation for what their life-negating religion has denied them. So, all the good things of this life they may have sacrificed for the sake of the Kingdom would be given to them a hundred times over.³⁷ Like the notion of eternal torture in hell, the notion of materialist rewards in the ‘Kingdom’ suggests a continued sensate existence. But a sensate existence contradicts the overly spiritualized way they first presented the idea of ‘heaven.’ To Nietzsche, this would all the more confirm that a *ressentiment*-driven eschatology would defy any logic in its quest to satisfy its selfish ends.

³⁴ Cf. Matt. 19: 23-26; Mk 10:23-27; Lk 18: 24-27.

³⁵ In GM I. 15, Nietzsche provides a detailed account of Tertullian’s sermon, with a graphic description of how this torture will take place and ‘blessed’ ecstasy that will be derived from it.

³⁶ D. Conway, *Nietzsche on the Genealogy of Morals*, p. 48.

³⁷ Cf. Mk 10:30; Lk 18:29.

Nietzsche also speaks of a secret desire for power: “Luther has already said this, and better than I, in these verses: ‘if they take from us body, goods, honor, child and wife: let it go – the Reich must yet remain to us!’ Yes! Yes! The ‘Reich’” (D, §262). Intent on ridiculing the notion of Heaven/Kingdom as compensation, Nietzsche craftily cashes in on Luther’s use of the word, “Reich” (Kingdom). The German word, “Reich”, conveys a sense of “political power”. It should be recalled that Nietzsche ranks Christians among the weak and the powerless of society. Since they cannot compete with the strong, aristocratic class for earthly powers, it is therefore understandable why they should be fixated about temporal powers. In fact, they will already start reaping the political gains of their eschatological narrative in the present life if they succeed in making the aristocratic class subscribe to their narrative. The “ascetic priest,” a master tactician, knows he would gain some political leverage if the mighty of this earth happen to fall for his ‘bait.’ Though Christians are called ‘weak’ and ‘powerless’ in a certain limited sense, they still express their fundamental Will-to-power. And it is this Will-to-power that explains their ceaseless quest for power, largely through *ressentiment*-suffused means.

According to Nietzsche, Christians are not only power-thirsty, they are also ambitious. The imaginary eschatological security they created for themselves is once again a manifestation of their ambition. He finds this intolerable:

Humility and self-importance cheek-by-jowl; a garrulousness of feeling that almost stupefies ... Finally, they even want “the crown of eternal life,” these little provincial people; but for what? to what purpose? Presumption can go no further. An “immortal” Peter: who could stand him? Their ambition is laughable: people of that sort regurgitating their most private affairs, their stupidities ... And the appalling taste of this perpetual familiarity with God! (GM III, 22)

It is no surprise that Nietzsche sees the postulation of “the crown of eternal life” as a sort of chest-thumping. He thinks that it is excessive ambition that leads to a feeling of self-importance which, in turn, tempts Christians to blasphemous pretensions of “familiarity with God.” The expression “familiarity with God” may have been used lightheartedly, but it expresses a more serious indictment of the Christian notion of afterlife recompense as a wishful thinking and a childish fantasy, on Nietzsche’s view. A typically Nietzschean way of viewing the ‘blasphemy’ in question is that afterlife wishes undermine and desecrate the ‘Overman project’ of affirming the earth and harnessing humanity’s creative powers to the utmost. The very notion of afterlife recompense is, at bottom, susceptible to the critique that it undermines the “Overman project.”

The popular Marxian claim that religion is the ‘opiate’ of the masses comes to mind. As ‘opiate,’ the Christian notion of the afterlife sedates the masses so that they do not confront the realities of this world, and so fail to work for change and improvement.

Nietzsche’s rejection of Christian eschatology is consistent with his famous repudiation of the immortal soul concept. He finds the notion of the immortality of the soul quite ridiculous, and blames Plato for polluting the world with such a bad concept. As a philologist, Nietzsche is aware of the fact that the immortal soul concept long antedates Socrates and Plato, and might well be part of ‘received wisdom’ in the times in which they lived. Perhaps the stress is more on *popularizing* the concept than on *originating* it. Even the question of *popularizing* is still subject to debate. Be that as it may, he derides Christianity as “Platonism for the people” (BGE “Preface”) for adopting a warped dualism that distracts our attention from the present world, fosters a phobia for the present life, and encourages otherworldly illusions. Nietzsche thinks that the doctrine of the immortality of soul is one of such doctrines designed to flatter man and satisfy his “metaphysical need,” but has no place in science.

One must ... also declare war, relentless war unto death, against the “atomistic need” which still leads a dangerous afterlife in places where no one suspects it, just like the more celebrated “metaphysical need”: one must also, first of all, give the finishing stroke to that other and more calamitous atomism which Christianity has taught best and longest, the soul atomism. Let it be permitted to designate by this expression the belief which regards the soul as something indestructible, eternal, indivisible, as a monad, as an atomon: this belief ought to be expelled from science! (BGE I, “On the Prejudices of Philosophers” §12)

As already suggested in the passage, ‘soul atomism’ is a metaphysical thesis which attempts to demonstrate the immortality of the soul by likening it to an atom. Atomists, the earliest among whom is Democritus, take the “atom” to be the eternal, indivisible and indestructible stuff of all things. Therefore to equate the soul with an atom is to bestow on it the attributes of indestructibility. Democritus and early atomists did not in any way identify their *atomon* with the soul. Nietzsche would thus think that Christians and all who subscribe to “soul atomism” are mischievously using ‘atomistic’ categories to describe the soul in a bid to satisfy their ‘metaphysical need,’ the need in question being the desire for their own immortality. I have already noted that Nietzsche does not tolerate any such doctrines that distract our attention from the present life. He regards such teachings as anti-life – and this is one of his major problems

with Christianity. His philosophy is avowedly earthly, this-worldly. It therefore comes as no surprise that his Zarathustra bears this central message: “I beseech you, my brothers, remain faithful to the earth, and do not believe those who speak to you of extraterrestrial hope” (Z “Prologue”, §3). To be “faithful to the earth” for Nietzsche’s Zarathustra, man must affirm this present life, and must be all too happy to live it again and again exactly as it is, “calling out *da capo*” to the joyous spectacle of existence (BGE, §56). “*Da capo*,” a musical expression used to signal a repeat, is employed by Nietzsche to capture the notion of the Eternal Recurrence of the same.

In connection with Nietzsche’s repudiation of Christian eschatology, it is worth noting that Nietzsche famously endorses what is known among Nietzsche scholars as “aristocratic radicalism.”³⁸ Typically, his aristocratic radicalism would see any eschatological ideas of the equality of souls as a symptom of *ressentiment*, sheer class antagonism and conspiracy. Here again, Paul is fingered as championing the campaign against the strong and healthy through “the outrageous doctrine of personal immortality” (AC, §41). Nietzsche therefore sees Christian eschatology as a political device used by the unfortunate to tyrannize the fortunate. It makes sense to imagine that Nietzsche would approve of the immortality of the “noble” or the fortunate, since it would be have a life-affirming foundation associated with the redemptive religion that Dionysus brings. I take his complaint about the ‘democratization’ of personal immortality as his proof that it is a grand conspiracy designed to work against the fortunate.

Granting ‘immortality’ to every Tom, Dick and Harry has been the most enormous and most vicious attempt to assassinate noble humanity. - And let us not underestimate the disaster that Christianity has brought even into politics! Nobody is courageous enough for special privileges these days, for the rights of the masters, for feelings of self-respect and respect among equals – for a *pathos of distance* ... The aristocratism of the mind has been undermined at its depths by the lie of the equality of souls ... Christianity is a rebellion of everything that crawls on the ground against everything that has height. (AC, §43)

From the above, it is safe to say that Nietzsche’s rejection of Christian eschatology is consistent with his “aristocratic radicalism” and vice versa. Perhaps if these eschatological tenets were such that respected the “pathos of distance,” Nietzsche would have found them less unattractive.

³⁸ Bruce Detwiler has a book with the title, “Nietzsche and the Politics of Aristocratic Radicalism,” a work in which he outlines Nietzsche’s support for inequality, social stratification and the “pathos of distance” between the different classes of society. In fact, the Nietzsche secondary literature is awash with chapters and sections dedicated to Nietzsche’s notion of “Aristocratic radicalism”.

There are good reasons to refer to Nietzsche as an ‘aristocratic radical.’ This designation should not be seen as an ‘indictment’ on Nietzsche, but rather an apt expression of what Nietzsche proudly professes and acknowledges. His *Übermensch* would profess “aristocratic radicalism,” and professing it would be a proof of the *Übermensch*’s freedom from *ressentiment*. Nietzsche never hides his sympathy, nay, preference for the strong, noble, upper class over those he regards as the ‘weak’ lower class. The strong and noble are the “masters” while the weak are the “slaves.” In his dualistic “master morality”-“slave morality” dichotomy, he still never hides his preference for the former.

Nietzsche not only critiques the Christian ideas of immortality and the afterlife, he also critiques the Resurrection, the single most important eschatological assertion of the Christian religion, as Paul and other key New Testament authors regard it. There is no better articulation of the centrality of the Resurrection to Christianity than as expressed in the following lines:

But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain ... For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all men most to be pitied.³⁹

St. Paul does not always think it necessary to demonstrate the Resurrection with consistent proofs and logic, as he considers it an ineffable reality. On the one hand, the above passage could be read in a way that suggests that it serves only to reaffirm the faith of those who already believe, and so not meant to serve as a logical proof of the Resurrection. On the other hand, it could be seen as being aimed at convincing those of the Christian community in Corinth who “say that there is not resurrection of the dead,”⁴⁰ since not all may have been of a mature faith, after all. Whichever way one chooses to interpret the passage, there is some attempt, at bottom, to hinge the hopes of resurrection of the Christian faithful on the actual resurrection of Jesus Christ. Paul argues that the Christian life and its attendant challenges would be meaningless if not rewarded by a post-mortem future, which would only be possible if Jesus Himself actually rose from the dead.

³⁹ 1 Corinthians 15: 12 – 18. This whole Biblical chapter contains an elaborate treatment of the theme of Resurrection and its lofty place in Christianity.

⁴⁰ 1 Corinthians 15: 12.

Those who choose to see Paul as actually engaging in a proof would quickly point out how Paul's argument begs the question, since the mere danger of a 'futile faith' does not independently prove the fact of the Resurrection. There is also a fallacy of *argumentum ad misericordiam* (appeal to pity) in the attempt to show that those who already died believing and those who already committed themselves to the faith enterprise would not go unrewarded. It is perhaps on account of the flaw in the argument that Nietzsche derides the "rabbinical impudence" of Paul, now being deployed in the service of a newfangled faith. To Nietzsche, only a "pervasion of an interpretation" typical of Paul could justify the "logical form: 'if Christ did not rise from the dead, then our faith is in vain'" (AC, §41).

But Nietzsche's problem is not just with the Paul's logic; he also calls Paul's very claim of Jesus' resurrection a "lie", based on hallucination and lacking any basis in reality: "To take this Paul ... at his word when he takes a hallucination and dresses it up as a proof that the redeemer still lives, or even accepts that he had this hallucination in the first place, would be a true *niaiserie*⁴¹" (AC, §42).

Given the focus of the research, I shall be more interested in the link between *ressentiment* and the resurrection claim of Jesus' first disciples (including Paul). Nietzsche has maintained that the disciples of Jesus could not forgive his death. So, proclaiming that he had risen was a grand design contrived to spite his "killers" and avenge him. As it were, the thirst for vengeance characteristic of *ressentiment*-laden elements birthed this masterstroke of ingenuity unprecedented in the history of loyal discipleship – namely, the propagation of an immortalizing rumor. For Nietzsche takes the Resurrection as no more than an immortalizing rumor, born of *ressentiment*.

A discussion on the vexed issue of the Resurrection would be incomplete if we do not situate it in the context of current biblical scholarship. Current Biblical researchers almost unanimously agree that the Resurrection is a *statement of faith* rather than a *statement of fact*. Rudolf Bultmann is a leading proponent of this position, as he argues that the Resurrection should not be seen as a message of a literal reconstitution of Jesus' physical body but rather that

⁴¹ "Niaiserie" conveys a sense of "gullibility".

of the renewal or resurgence of the disciples' faith, a faith in whose 'eyes' their Master "lives".⁴² The difference between the above verdict of current biblical scholarship and that of Nietzsche is perhaps that the former takes the Resurrection claim to have been prompted by faith while the latter takes it to have been prompted by the retaliatory instinct of *ressentiment*. But both are united in the point that the Resurrection is neither a historical fact nor a literal truth. Even the discrepancies in the accounts of the empty tomb, post-resurrection apparitions and other details that combine to form the Resurrection grand narrative should make anyone who would insist on the literalness of the Resurrection tread with caution.

I contend that it is still possible to make sense of the doctrine of the Resurrection without insisting on its literalness. It is only when we do away with literalness that we may begin to think of the Resurrection as *something really impressive* that revitalized and sustained the disciple's faith in an apparently defeated Master, a faith that is not helplessly dependent on minute details of history. John Hick points us to this direction.

The resurrection may have been a bodily event, and the body may have mysteriously materialized and dematerialized; there may have been angels, earthquake and guards fainting...But the gospel that Jesus lives, exalted by God to the glorious role in the process of man's salvation, does not depend upon the historicity of any of these problematic elements on the New Testament tradition.⁴³

The expression, "exalted by God" in the above citation points us in the right direction. The Resurrection is not act of Jesus the Crucified, nor yet is it an act of man. It is thoroughly an *act of God*, appropriated by faith alone. When it is said that the early disciples did not find it necessary to "prove" the Resurrection, it is surely in the sense in which the Resurrection is seen as God's act. Perhaps this is the most plausible way of understanding the Resurrection. Beyond the legendary elements found in the Gospels concerning the Resurrection lies the simple faith proposition that "God raised Him [Jesus]". This simple propositional affirmation, "God raised Him/Jesus" (and its variations) appears at least 25 times in the New Testament.⁴⁴ The substance of the Resurrection faith of the early disciples therefore consists in this proposition that "God raised Jesus" from the dead; in other words, that the Resurrection is an act of God. In light of the

⁴² Cf. R. Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology: The Mythological Element in the Message of the New Testament and the Problem of its Re-interpretation" in *Kerygma and Myth: A Theological Debate*, Pp. 38 – 43.

⁴³ J. Hick, *Death and Eternal Life*, p. 177.

⁴⁴ Acts 2:24, Eph. 1:2, Rom. 8:11, Acts 3:15, Acts 4:10, Acts 5:30, Acts 13:30, Acts 13:34, to mention but a few.

above, any conception of the Resurrection that verges on physical reconstitution or resuscitation might well be considered wrongheaded.

Admittedly, understanding the Resurrection in a non-literal sense does not salvage the doctrine from the grand “genealogical” indictment that it still belongs to the ‘old’ decadent religion and has no place in the self-determining ‘Dionysian religion’ Nietzsche envisions. However, a non-literal approach still has the merit of shielding the doctrine from some rather flippant criticisms that merely ridicule the contradictions in the details of the Resurrection account.

In AC §42, Nietzsche suggests that the eschatological portrait of the Evangel was not original to him, but only “started seeping into the type of the redeemer,” thanks to the *ressentiment*-driven efforts of Paul and other overzealous disciples. I shall now turn to this notion of the “type of the redeemer” to explore the role Nietzsche ascribes to *ressentiment* in the manufacture of this ‘type.’

3.2. *Ressentiment* in Christology: Accounting for the “Psychological Type of the Redeemer”

I broach the topic of the “psychological type of the redeemer,” aware of the ambiguity that surrounds the concept, an ambiguity Nietzsche himself did not help clarify. On the one hand, one might want to interpret Nietzsche as saying that there is a “real” Jesus, as it were, expressed in his “psychological type” over and above the distortions of the Gospel. On the other hand, one might want to avoid interpreting Nietzsche in a manner that could drag him into the polemics of distinction between the ‘Jesus of History’ and the ‘Christ of Faith’ or into the “Quest for the Historical Jesus,” undertaken by Albert Schweitzer.⁴⁵ Indeed, Nietzsche was not interested in such matters, such “quests”.

The passage below roughly describes his main concern regarding the “Psychological Type of the Redeemer”.

⁴⁵ The publication of Schweitzer’s book, *Quest for the Historical Jesus*, introduced a new era in the attempt of scholars at investigating the life of Jesus. Schweitzer’s “Quest” no doubt has antecedents in the works of scholars such as Schleiermacher, Renan, Strauss, etc. (Nietzsche himself repeatedly criticized Renan and Strauss in his works). Schweitzer’s “Quest” sparked subsequent 20th Century debates on the historical life of Jesus. Ernst Kasemann, whose work is sometimes referred to as the “Second Quest,” is one of the key figures of this period. Another important feature of this period is the “Jesus Seminar,” an all-important meeting of top Biblical scholars, who assembled from various parts of the world with the singular aim of determining what Jesus actually did or said. The attempt to probe into the historical life of Jesus of Nazareth has continued to interest scholars to this day.

What I do care about is the psychological type of the redeemer. After all, the Gospels *might* actually provide information on this point, in spite of themselves, however garbled or crammed with alien features it might be: just as the psychology of Francis of Assisi can be found in his legends, in spite of *themselves*. Not the truth about what he did, what he said, how he really died: but rather the question: Can we even conceive of his type anymore? Has it been ‘passed down’? – The attempts that I have seen to read the Gospels even as the history of a ‘soul’ are proofs to me of a hateful sort of psychological thoughtlessness. (AC, §29)

This approach fits well with Nietzsche’s genealogy as opposed to historiography whose goal is to uncover ‘facts’ of history. Though he seems to take notice of the distinction between what might be called the ‘real’ Jesus and the Christ handed down in Church tradition, he is preoccupied more with the question of the possibility of the “type” and how it is effectively appropriated. And he is quite optimistic about the possibility of a ‘trans-historical’ type (as long as the type is not seen as ‘fixed’), since a ‘historiographical’ approach and the attendant obsession with ‘facts’ about the ‘historical Jesus’ seems doomed to fail. As Azzam explains, “What is being stressed here is that what remains important for Nietzsche is to have the Gospels – as distinct from other sources ... proving that his type is still readable out from the Christian tradition that handed him down.”⁴⁶ Nietzsche’s optimism thus stems from his recognizing that the Gospels provide some useful information as to the “psychological type” despite being riddled with “alien features.” He, therefore, distances himself from any pretensions to discover the “truth about what he did, what he said.”

Nietzsche’s approach is opposed to those of Renan and Strauss that only looked for ‘facts’ about the past. In Chapter One, I explained that Nietzsche’s genealogical method seeks to understand phenomena by explaining them in terms of how they came to be. If Nietzsche’s “genealogy” considers “psychological types” (as seen in the notion of the “psychological type of the redeemer”), then “genealogy” becomes an exercise in “psychohistory,” to use Morgan Rempel’s term.⁴⁷ In the case of Christianity, the “psychohistory” in question would be an account of the role of *ressentiment* as its originating-force and animating principle. On the basis of this genealogical approach, therefore, Nietzsche criticizes Renan and Strauss. In fact he ridicules Strauss’ petty worries about the contradictions in the Gospel tradition and the consequent difficulty of retrieving the ‘historical Jesus,’ observing that Strauss landed himself

⁴⁶ A. Azzam, *Nietzsche versus Paul*, p. 69.

⁴⁷ The title of Rempel’s work is instructive: “Nietzsche, Psychohistory and the Birth of Christianity.”

into the messy situation in the first place by choosing a wrong approach, the ‘historical approach’ as an approach distinct from “genealogy” (AC, §29). Unfortunately, Nietzsche does not provide adequate information as to the possible relationship between this “psychological type” and the actual historical realities of the First Century Palestine. For our present purposes, the safest statement one could make is that this “psychological type of the redeemer” is, in Nietzsche’s reckoning, a “portrait” of Jesus that can be derived from the Gospels (despite their “alien features”), insofar as this portrait does not posit itself as the infallible representation of what Jesus actually did or said.

Now, the crucial question that confronts us is: what role does Nietzsche ascribe to *ressentiment* in the investiture of the “psychological type of the redeemer” with “alien features,” to employ Nietzsche’s expression?

Nietzsche believes that people consumed by *ressentiment* would – perhaps inadvertently – end up distorting the image of their ‘master’ to suit their selfish ends. For the first disciples, therefore, their image of Jesus must be such that is useful in the war against their enemies. Their Jesus must be fashioned after their image and likeness. He must hate what they hate and their enemy must be His enemy. Nietzsche captures this idea in the following words:

For my part, I have no doubt that the turbulent state of Christian propaganda infused the type of the master with ample quantities of bile (and even esprit): everyone knows how sectarians won’t think twice before turning their masters into their apologetics. When the first congregation needed a judging, quarrelsome, wrathful, malicious, nit-picking theologian to use against theologians, they created a “God” to fit these requirements: just as they did not hesitate to put words into his mouth, those totally unevangelical words that they could not do without, ‘Second Coming’, ‘Last Judgement’, every type of temporal expectation and promise. (AC, §31)

The ‘bile’ Nietzsche refers to in the above citation is certainly the bile of *ressentiment*. The first disciples created a type of the Redeemer laden with hatred, just as they were. If their type of the Redeemer was not infused with sufficient bile, it would not have been possible to use him to voice their hate-filled doctrines, especially the eschatological doctrines of the ‘Second Coming’ and ‘Last Judgement’. I have earlier shown how Nietzsche takes Christian eschatology to have arisen from *ressentiment*. Now, the idea that eschatological speculations were retroactively introduced suggests that Jesus was originally not an eschatological figure, and that his original message had no eschatological undertones. It makes sense, then, to think of Nietzsche’s figure of

the *Übermensch*, a type avowedly “faithful” to the earth (against all afterlife conjectures), as a salutary figure that rescues the “psychological type” and redeems it from the eschatological assault dealt it by Christianity.

Aside the whole question of eschatology, Nietzsche identifies a number of other ‘alien’ features introduced to distort the type of the Redeemer, all of which express the *ressentiment* of the first Christian community. These include the image of the Messiah, the teacher of morality, the miracle worker, etc. (AC, §31)

But Nietzsche insists that the above *ressentiment*-fueled depictions of the Jesus-type are misleading. He takes Jesus to be the very opposite of all these. If one is to abide strictly by the “psychological type,” on Nietzsche’s genealogical assessment, the most appropriate thing one can say about Jesus, is that he was an “idiot” (AC, §29). There is no telling how Nietzsche arrived at this assessment. Jorg Salaquarda makes an attempt, but this only sheds light on the use of the word “idiot”. He claims that Nietzsche uses “idiot” in the original Greek sense of an apolitical man, unassuming and utterly unconcerned with the affairs of the state.⁴⁸ Though this view is consistent with Nietzsche’s apolitical perception of the “psychological type of the redeemer,” the question of how Nietzsche arrived at this apolitical perception of the “type” in the first place remains unanswered.

A thorough reading of *The Anti-Christ* §40 will see a figure of Jesus ‘dragged’ into politics by his unscrupulous first disciples. Nietzsche’s Jesus was so modest and unassuming that he wanted nothing more from his death than “publicly to give his doctrine its strongest test,” that is, simply to bear a public testimony of his conviction in his message. But his disciples find this too unambitious for their liking. They will construct a “type” of their master that sets him at loggerheads with the political structure of the time (because they themselves found themselves in such a situation). Out of bitterness and a refusal to forgive the master’s death, they will construct an eschatologically vindictive master’s type that will sit in judgment against their enemies (AC, §40). They will falsify the “history of humanity into the prehistory of Christianity ... The type of the redeemer, the doctrine, practice, the death, the meaning of his death, even the aftermath of his death – nothing was left untouched, nothing was left bearing any resemblance of reality”

⁴⁸ J. Salaquarda, “Dionysian versus the Crucified: Nietzsche’s understanding of the Apostle Paul” in *Studies in Nietzsche and the Judeo-Christian Tradition*, p. 107.

(AC, §42). The fact that the Master's type is constructed out of bitterness and an unforgiving spirit once again buttresses my claim that the "psychological type of the redeemer" is such that was smeared with *ressentiment*, on Nietzsche's genealogical standpoint. In other words, the "type" of the Redeemer that Christianity operates with is, according to Nietzsche, only explainable in terms of *ressentiment*.

Here again – and quite predictably – Nietzsche directs his blame at Paul. I have earlier pointed out that he regards Paul, not Jesus, as the true founder of Christianity. Jesus is exonerated from the *ressentiment*-instinct that has come to characterize Christians (AC, §40), as he is also dissociated from the 'alien' features with which his "psychological type" was corrupted. Nietzsche insists that this corruption was almost singlehandedly perpetrated by Paul. It is Paul who distorts and falsifies the type of the redeemer in order to serve his selfish purposes. Since Paul invented a 'God' and a Jesus-type out of his own whims, Christianity will have to live with the reality of ever confusing God's will for Paul's. "The 'God' that Paul invented for himself," says Nietzsche, "is in truth Paul's firm decision ... to call his own will 'God', torah" (AC, §47). Paul does same with the "psychological type of the redeemer".

The idea of man's creation of a God-type after his image is reminiscent of Feuerbach. This section of the work would perhaps be incomplete if mention is not made of Feuerbach who somewhat popularized such a view. "For God did not, as the Bible says, make man in His image," Feuerbach maintains, "on the contrary man, as I have shown in *The Essence of Christianity*, made God in his image."⁴⁹ The key message of Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity* is that man's religious instinct has manufactured the notion of the "divine" and its essential attributes out of his basic human instincts, such that the whole edifice of religion might as well be considered a grand exercise in anthropomorphism. Anthropomorphism is the transfer of human attributes to a divine being. When Nietzsche speaks of the "psychological type of the redeemer", he does not claim that Jesus is a mere figment of Christian imagination. He is rather saying that the image of him that is handed down to us is such that reflects the instincts and inner longings of the disciples. The Master was simply used as their mouthpiece to talk back at their 'enemies' and wage their wars. And, in line with my overall thesis, the disciples' instincts have a name – *ressentiment*. Of course, the fact that Nietzsche frowns at the disciples does not mean

⁴⁹ L. Feuerbach, *Lectures on the Essence of Religion*, p. 187.

that the image they created is worthless. At the very least, it has, for all practical purposes, constituted itself a meaning-bearing reality with which the Master is appropriated. In other words, the ‘type’ made sense to them, and might have something enduring to contribute in the wider appropriation of the person of Jesus the Christ.

Nietzsche observes that, in reconstructing the Master’s type after their whims, the disciples embarked upon a reckless but thorough activity, leaving no stones unturned. Nothing was spared, not even in the area of soteriology (that is, the understanding or interpretation of the dynamics of Jesus’ supposed salvific mission). I shall now examine what Nietzsche says about the relationship between *ressentiment* and the soteriology that Paul and other early disciples left in their wake.

3.3. *Ressentiment* and Christian Soteriology: Salvation, Cross and Sacrifice

Soteriology (from the Greek *soteria* which translates “salvation”) concerns itself, broadly speaking, with the whole concept of salvation. In the Christian sense, as it directly concerns us in this research, soteriology represents a systematic articulation of the Christian understanding of the salvific import of Jesus’ mission on earth, in fulfilment of the God’s eternal plan of salvation for the whole humanity. A key element of the Christian religion is the belief that Jesus Christ was sent by God to save mankind. In this light, Christian soteriology is an attempt to understand how precisely this salvation was wrought. Traditional Christian soteriology has located the salvation of mankind in the suffering, crucifixion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. More precisely, humanity is supposed to be saved from suffering through what Christian theology refers to as the propitiatory suffering and death of Christ on the Cross. This idea is beautifully summarized in the passage: “He Himself bore our sins in his body on the cross ... For by His wounds you were healed.”⁵⁰ The point here is that the suffering of the Son on behalf of disobedient humanity is supposed to placate an enraged Father.

In what follows, I shall show how Nietzsche challenges the underlying idea and mode of thinking that combine to form what might for a long time be considered the ‘orthodox’ Christian soteriology. And, in line with the central thesis of the research, I shall show that the problems

⁵⁰ 1 Pet. 2:24

Nietzsche finds in the underpinning ideas of Christian soteriology can be summed up in *ressentiment*.

When one speaks of “salvation”, this crucial question easily comes to mind: From *what* is humanity supposed to be saved? In answer to this question, Christian soteriology has maintained that humanity is being saved from *sin* and the *punishment* due to it. In other words, Christ came primarily to save humanity from sin and its fatal consequences. In turn, the very idea of sin makes sense only in the framework of the Creation-Fall narrative in which humanity stands in need of redemption.

But Nietzsche challenges the very concept of sin, insisting that it was entirely lacking in the ‘psychology of the evangel’⁵¹: “The concept of guilt and punishment are completely missing from the psychology of the ‘evangel’; so is the concept of reward. ‘Sin’, any distance between God and man: these are abolished, -- *this is what the ‘glad tidings’ are all about*” (AC, §33). Here, Nietzsche is apparently contending that the concepts of sin, guilt, punishment and reward were entirely absent from some supposed ‘original’ psychological type. One could therefore infer that he takes these notions to be something of ‘late-comers’ to the “type” and, as such, part of the corruption and the ‘alien’ features that we saw earlier. It is hard to determine what Nietzsche takes this ‘original’ type to consist in, and he does not provide clues in this regard. This remains one of the grey areas in Nietzsche thought. What cannot be disputed, nevertheless, is that he believes a ‘corruption’ took place and that ‘alien’ features were added.

It would be wrong to suppose that Nietzsche’s rejection of the above idea of sin is tantamount to an outright rejection of the idea of redemption. The fact is that he has a place for redemption, and indeed thinks that religion has a task of redeeming humanity from suffering. He only quarrels with the particular way in which Christianity construes this redemption, premised as it is on the unhealthy and *ressentiment*-informed notion of ‘sin’. The redemption Nietzsche has in store for humanity, in the wake of the “death of God,” is such that is based on self-creation embodied in the *Übermensch*. It is such that owns, recreates and wills the past and the present in an affirmative “thus I willed it!” (Z II, “On Redemption”). Reflecting further on the relationship between willing and redemption from suffering, Alan McLuckie suggests: “Another way to think

⁵¹ “Psychology of the evangel” seems to be just another way Nietzsche speaks of the “psychological type of the redeemer”.

about this is that suffering arises from our inability or, more to the point, our unwillingness to take responsibility for our actions, including our role as creators and arbiters of all truth and value.”⁵² To all intents and purposes, a willingness to will and to take responsibility for our actions represents the affirmation of Eternal Recurrence which, in turn, signals redemption.

Since a healthier form of redemption was available to humankind (according to Nietzsche), why then would Christians prefer a form of redemption premised on ‘alien’ features imposed on the Evangel? Nietzsche suggests, on the basis of his “genealogy”, that it was the priest (in this case, Paul and the early disciples who embody the priest-type⁵³) who maliciously introduced these dangerous concepts as a weapon against the strong and well-constituted. As announced earlier, it would be wrong to suppose that Paul and the early disciples presided over a process deliberately aimed at advancing a *ressentiment*-agenda. Nietzsche does not think so either. Only a ‘genealogical eye’ could uncover the *ressentiment* behind the whole process. In this ‘genealogical eye’ therefore, Nietzsche considers the whole doctrinal architecture of ‘sin’ as a product of embittered, *ressentiment*-laden minds: “The doctrines of sin and the forgiveness of sins ... are, Nietzsche claims, nothing more than the creation of an embittered mind: a morality devised from weakness and a sickness that seeks to negate the power of the master.”⁵⁴ Fueled by *ressentiment*, these concepts will therefore serve the overall purpose of weakening the strong and paving a way for their defeat in a psychological warfare orchestrated by the priest. The priest sprays humanity with guilt through the instrumentality of the doctrine of sin.

“Sin” – for this is the priestly name for the animal’s “bad conscience” (cruelty directed inward) – has been the greatest event in the history of the sick soul: we possess in it the most dangerous and fateful artifice of religious interpretation. Man, suffering from himself ... thirsting for reasons – reasons relieve – thirsting, too, for remedies and narcotics ... he must seek it in himself, in some guilt, in a piece of the past, he must understand his suffering as a punishment. (GM 3, §20)

⁵² A. McLuckie, “From Religious Neurosis to Religious Being: Nietzsche on our Religious Instinct” [An Unpublished MA Thesis], Department of Philosophy, University of Alberta, 2007, p. 94.

⁵³ Any person steeped in Nietzsche’s parlance, especially in *The Anti-Christ* and the *Genealogy*, would agree that “Priest” is a highly symbolic and all-ramifying term, which represents, not just the Jewish or Christian priest, but virtually the whole Judeo-Christian tradition perceived by Nietzsche as presiding over the movement of decadence and *ressentiment*. Seen in this light, the “priest” is not so much a person as a spirit, the spirit embodied in Paul and the early disciples, the Church Fathers and the Medieval churchmen, Luther and Calvin, the various church authorities and zealots who steered the *ressentiment* movement down the ages.

⁵⁴ L. Huskinson, Op. Cit. p. 24.

The notion of sin is not only a spiritual weapon; it is also a political weapon. Nietzsche sees the priest's teaching as having the capacity to poison the soul of humanity. This way, a universal Church of all humanity will be formed which is at the same time a congested sick bay (GM 3, §16) for poisoned souls, who must turn to the priest for emotional and 'spiritual' succor. The priest is at once a "wizard" and a "sorcerer" who offers all emotional pain-killing remedies (GM 3, §20). This way, the priest rises to prominence; he gains the power he so badly craves and maintains his relevance. Lucy Huskinson lucidly explains this political dimension of the doctrine of 'sin' vis-à-vis *ressentiment*:

According to Nietzsche, priests are the worst perpetrators of resentment ... Priests crave power, and in order to acquire it they 'develop theories of guilt, sin, and forgiveness', which 'allows them to be the mediators of a system of reward and punishment' and to preside over the very fate of humanity.⁵⁵

Suffice it to say from the foregoing that the very notion of "sin" upon which the doctrine of salvation is founded, is already suspect, on Nietzsche's viewpoint. Moreover, it represents a corruption in the "psychological type of the redeemer" who was originally bereft of this dangerous concept: "'Atonement' and 'praying for forgiveness' are not the way to God: only the evangelical practice leads to God, in fact it is 'God' – What the evangel did away with was the Judaism of the concept of 'sin', 'forgiveness of sin', 'faith', 'redemption through faith – the whole Jewish church doctrine was rejected in the 'glad tidings'" (AC, §33).

Not only is the very concept of 'sin' in the Christian sense⁵⁶ suspect, the particular way in which humanity is said to have been saved from its consequences also leaves much to be desired. What does traditional Christian soteriology teach about the way in which the salvation of humanity was brought about? For centuries, the soteriology that held sway in the Church was the "Penal Substitution" theory, in which Christ has to suffer and die in order to pay the debt of sin humanity owes His angry Father and God. Such a penal language finds ample support from the Bible itself, of course championed by Paul, who is unrelenting in establishing what he sees as the necessary link between the Cross and Salvation:

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ It is reasonable to think of 'sin' in Nietzsche's context in terms of the refusal to will and to assume the full responsibility for it. The ultimate 'sin' for him would be the refusal to embrace the life-affirming future 'religion' that he envisions.

But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we are now justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son ... but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received our reconciliation.⁵⁷

The above passage captures the ‘Penal Substitution’ model, the idea that Christ “died for our sins”⁵⁸ to placate the Father. To say that this is the dominant soteriology, nay, theology of the New Testament would be an understatement. The relationship between the Cross and human salvation is largely depicted in such legalistic or ‘sacrificial’ languages as “ransom” (Greek *lutron*, as found in 1Tim 2:6), “propitiation” (*ilasmos*), “atonement” (*ilasterion*).

But Nietzsche finds this penal or sacrificial language superstitious and pagan. To him it is indecent and indeed unacceptable.

The unbalanced reason of the small community found a horribly absurd answer: God gave his son to forgive sins, as a *sacrifice*. This brought the evangel to an end in one fell swoop. The *guilt sacrifice*, and in fact in its most revolting, barbaric form, the sacrifice of the *innocent* for the sins of the *guilty*! What a gruesome paganism! (AC, §41)

It makes sense to propose here that Nietzsche uses the term ‘paganism’ in its original sense connoting an uncivilized and often cruel lifestyle of ‘people of the countryside.’ Seen in this light, the word ‘pagan’ is rescued from the warped sense in which proselytizers of a certain religion denigrate the indigenous cultural practices of the people they come to ‘convert.’ Since Christians are mostly ‘guilty’ of such proselytizing exercises, I think that using the same expression for a Christian doctrine could be Nietzsche’s veiled protest against such an exercise. The penal framework upon which the notion of Christian Salvation is built portrays God as a pagan idol who would stop at nothing to exact His pound of flesh.

As I have demonstrated, the connection between guilt and suffering has, on Nietzsche’s viewpoint, foundation in a *ressentiment* mindset. Nietzsche has already shown that the early Christian community was, true to its ‘priestly’ character, a people of *ressentiment*. It is therefore no surprise that *ressentiment* once again reflected in their understanding of the salvific mission of their Master. Though Julian Young’s description is made in a context unconnected with

⁵⁷ Romans 5: 8 – 11.

⁵⁸ Cf. Rom 4:25, 1Cor 15:5, Gal 1:4.

ressentiment, I find the following passage relevant in buttressing the point about the role of *ressentiment* and paganism on Christian soteriology:

Having inherited the pagan idea of the creditor god, the Christian ‘stroke of genius’ was to invent the idea of a ‘maximal’ God and hence a maximal debt, while at the same time making it a debt that, on account of our sinful, animal natures, in principle we *cannot* repay ... Only God can repay the debt – and did through his own suffering and crucifixion. Christianity’s ‘master-stroke’ was thus to turn the debt into an *undischargeable* debt, thus making us originally and inescapably guilty.⁵⁹

The relationship between debt and punishment is an ancient human practice, which Christianity only appropriated, for, at some crucial moments in history, “it became increasingly necessary to *vulgarize Christianity and make it barbaric*, - Christianity soaked up doctrines and rites from all the subterranean cults” (AC, §37). We observe in this context that ritual sacrifice is an important feature of religion and culture from antiquity to the present times. Exacting the supreme price of human blood as atonement for a grave wrongdoing or as a means of attracting some special divine favors is not alien to human culture. In fact, this writer comes from one of such cultures, the Igbo people of Africa, where human sacrifice was prevalent. Chinua Achebe, a veritable spokesperson of the Igbo culture, could not miss out the element of human sacrifice in his award-winning novel, *Things Fall Apart*. The slave boy, Ikemefuna, had to be sacrificed in order to appease Amadioha, the great god of Umuofia.⁶⁰ Such a practice was rife in Africa, or perhaps, in antiquity, broadly construed.

In the Second Book of his *Genealogy*, Nietzsche is at pains unearthing the extant history of the relationship between debt (wrongdoing) and punishment (sacrifice), which often masks itself as “justice” but is, in truth, sheer retaliation, a sadistic arrangement by which the creditor derives some joy from the suffering of the debtor (GM II, §6).⁶¹ Here, the suffering or pain of the debtor is meant to serve as a form of compensation for the loss or injury suffered by the creditor.

⁵⁹ J. Young, *Nietzsche’s Philosophy of Religion*, p. 152.

⁶⁰ The Fate of Ikemefuna is fully narrated in the Seventh Chapter of Achebe’s award-winning novel, *Things Fall Apart*. Okonkwo’s (the protagonist) murder of his adopted son, Ikemefuna, in fulfilment of an unspecified ritual demand (mostly likely for healing the earth after a period of curse in order to make for bountiful harvests), is, in many ways, the turning point in the novel. Ikemefuna’s blood continued to haunt Okonkwo ever afterwards. It is curious how the gods would require a sacrifice that would nevertheless haunt the one who offers the sacrifice. This somewhat points to the idea that the metaphysical formula that links sacrifice and appeasement in pagan cultures might be something even the gods have no control of. It is a mystery, as it were.

⁶¹ One might suggest that Nietzsche’s key task in the Second Book of his *Genealogy* is to chronicle the age-old relationship between guilt (debt) and punishment, as he superbly locates the origin of our present moral thinking on this ancient creditor-debtor contractual relationship.

The pain of the debtor is sometimes quantified in such a way that guarantees that the creditor derives as much pleasure as he lost on account of the said offence. In the “Penal Substitution” theory of salvation explained earlier, God would be the creditor and man the debtor. Man was meant to suffer and die for his debt (sin) had Christ not done so on his behalf. Like all creditor-debtor situations, what remained unaltered was that the debt was paid through suffering and pain. That Christianity founds its soteriology, thanks to *ressentiment*, on this type of creditor-debtor arrangement is something Nietzsche would consider rather indecent. To construe the Cross in sacrificial terms, as Christian scripture and tradition do, is as well indecent, barbaric, and would once again justify the claim that Christianity is a religion of *ressentiment*, on Nietzsche’s view.

It is important to point out, however, that contemporary Christian theologians have begun to challenge the sacrificial language traditionally used to portray the Cross and Salvation. For instance, Vincent Taylor, in *The Cross of Christ*, observes that understanding the Cross in sacrificial terms smacks of paganism.⁶² A number of contemporary theologians have also voiced their protest against the language of sacrifice. For instance, Karl Barth, the renowned Swiss Protestant theologian, regards as unscriptural and “foreign to the New Testament” the idea that by Christ’s “suffering our punishment we are spared from suffering it ourselves, or that in so doing he, ‘satisfied’ or offered satisfaction to the wrath of God.”⁶³ The point Barth makes here is that the idea that Christ had to suffer to placate an angry God has no justification in the New Testament. Green and Baker also challenge the idea of ‘Penal Substitution’ but on the ground of the unity of the Trinity. They contend that the idea that the Father punishes the Son, no matter what the reason is, suggests a rift in the Trinity.⁶⁴ It is interesting to observe that Nietzsche, the supposed ‘anti-Christ’ and ‘madman’, heralded such protests several decades earlier.

Conclusion

To sum up, I draw the reader’s attention once more to the point that summarizes the entire chapter: When “genealogically” viewed, there is, according to Nietzsche, a *ressentiment*-factor behind the tenets that combine to form Christian eschatology, Christology and soteriology.

⁶² V. Taylor, *The Cross of Christ*, p. 91.

⁶³ K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics* Vol. IV p. 253

⁶⁴ Cf. J.B. Green & M. D. Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in New Testament and Contemporary Contexts*, 147.

The Christo-centric character (i.e. revolving around the person and teachings of Christ) of these tenets represents something distinctive of Christian *ressentiment*.

Nietzsche sometimes conceives these tenets as having the trappings of ‘conspiracy.’ For instance, the Cross is viewed as “the mark of the most subterranean conspiracy” (AC §62), a potent sign (reminiscent of the famous Constantine’s *in hoc signo*) with which Judea routed Rome and “everything filled with secret rebellion, the whole inheritance of anarchistic activities in the empire” (AC, §58) united into an “incredible power” against the aristocracy and all the values it represents.

However, the fact that these tenets are construed in terms of *ressentiment*, on Nietzsche’s genealogical account, does not entail a conscious process on the part of Christians. They may well be an expression of Christianity’s Will-to-power, albeit such that puts itself at the service of *ressentiment*.

In the foregoing discussions in this chapter, I made several mention of ‘guilt,’ ‘punishment’ and ‘sacrifice,’ but in relation to the Cross and salvation. In the next chapter, I shall examine how the Ascetic Priest weaves these same concepts into veritable instruments of his “ascetic ideals” – all in the service of *ressentiment*.

Chapter Four

Other Faces of *Ressentiment* in Christian Theory and Practice

Introduction

In Chapter Two and Chapter Three I explored what Nietzsche would consider the ‘faces’ of *ressentiment* in Christianity (though he does not exactly call them ‘faces’). In the second chapter, for instance, I identified and explained the ‘faces’ of *ressentiment* in the sphere of Christian morality. And the third chapter dwelt on the ‘faces’ of *ressentiment* in the eschatological, Christological and soteriological doctrines of Christianity. It is only reasonable to now expand this enquiry to other important features of Christian theory and practice such as asceticism and the notions of guilt, love and pity. This is the task that I undertake in the present chapter.

I shall show how Nietzsche critiques Christian asceticism, taking hold of the figure of the “ascetic priest.” I argue that, for Nietzsche, the ascetic priest, who embodies the ascetic institution in Christianity, is driven by a thirst for power masking itself as ‘spirituality’ and sometimes as solicitude for his “flock”. In line with my key thesis, I shall interpret this power-hunger as a symptom of *ressentiment* which is, in turn, an expression of Will-to-power.

Similarly, I shall consider the Christian notions of guilt, love and pity as springing from *ressentiment* – on Nietzsche’s “genealogical” standpoint. As such, they constitute, on Nietzsche’s verdict, some of the most dangerous sentiments with which Christianity undermines and defeats life.

4.1. The Ascetic Dimension of Christian *Ressentiment*

Asceticism is an age-old human practice. Though largely identified with religion, it nevertheless finds expression in various spheres of human life and culture – arts, philosophy, sportsmanship, etc. Asceticism generally involves the refusal to gratify the body with pleasures or needs such as food, sex and various forms of psychological and physical comfort in order to achieve some supposedly higher goals. As in most other religions, the ascetic culture has been part and parcel of the Christianity from its very inception.

But Nietzsche frowns at all strains of asceticism, including those popular with artists and philosophers. He seems, however, to have a special aversion for Christian asceticism and launches a tirade against it. Since asceticism in its original sense of *askesis* (conveying a sense of “training” and “discipline”) has no derogatory connotations, one might rightly guess that the problem Nietzsche finds with the Christian strain of asceticism has to do with his point that it is life-denying. Seen in this light, it is Christianity that corrupts the meaning of asceticism. I here argue that the various attacks he directs at Christian asceticism can be summarized under the thesis I have sustained all through this work – the *ressentiment* thesis – for there is no better way to sum up Nietzsche’s overall critique of Christianity.

Nietzsche’s critique of Christian asceticism largely comes in the form of invectives he launches against the “ascetic priest”, a figure which, to him, embodies the Christian predilection for self-torture. He regards this predilection as instinctual. Doubtless, he is well disposed towards instincts in general, but when these express themselves as self-flagellation, then they become counter-productive – as it were, ‘bad instincts.’

Nietzsche repeatedly maintains that the ascetic priest is basically being driven by thirst for power masquerading as ascetic spirituality. Asceticism is seen as a veiled expression of the priest’s Will-to-power. Hence he does not hesitate to call asceticism the “will to power of the very weakest” (GM III, §14). I recognize the difficulty in providing an accurate, unproblematic definition of the all-important concept of Will-to-power. Having already thrown some light on it in the preceding chapter, it is important for our present purposes to add that Will-to-power is the vital force present in each life-form by which it expresses and asserts its existence and power. Will-to-power is an active principle; it is described in terms which suggest that it never ceases to express itself. Nietzsche thinks that, in expressing its Will-to-power, a given life-form is only fulfilling the most basic function of existence, failure to do which is tantamount to a ‘decline’ or outright non-existence: “Life itself is ... the instinct for growth ... for power: where the will to power is lacking there is decline” (AC, §6). It is important at his juncture to draw the reader’s attention to one of the central claims of this work, namely, that *ressentiment* is an expression of the Will-to-power in the Christian. Now, the use of asceticism as an instrument of power only corroborates this claim: “The ascetic priest, this apparent enemy of life, this denier – he actually belongs to the really great conservative and affirmative force of life” (GM III, §13). On the face

of it, one would think that the ascetic priest has renounced life and attaches no importance to it. Viewed “genealogically,” however, this denier of life is very much in love with life and power. He craves power and finds the practice and promotion of asceticism a veritable means to attain power. I shall elaborate on this point in what follows.

In delineating the contours of *ressentiment*, I brought out the element of ‘power struggle’. Consumed by hate, the ascetic priest, a character type among the weak and sickly, is locked in an eternal power struggle with the aristocratic class. Though he finds himself among the lower class, he is distinct from them because he possesses an uncommon capacity for undermining the aristocratic class through his subversive gospel. Envious of the aristocratic class, he is driven by *ressentiment* to challenge the aristocratic class with the intention of turning the political equation in his favor. Since he is unable to engage the aristocratic class directly, the ascetic priest now resorts to the indirect tactics of propaganda warfare of values. Bernd Magnus et al make this remark regarding the ascetic priest and the character of the hate he harbors against the aristocratic class: “These sufferers, bearers of *ressentiment* and ‘psychologically unfortunate,’ hate the well-constituted and desire revenge; they try to poison the consciences of the fortunate with their misery by making them feel shame.”⁶⁵ Ascetic practices thus belong to this wider propaganda project aimed at supplanting the ‘aristocratic life,’ a life marked by an overflow of joy and an abundance of life. Since he does not enjoy the privileged life of the aristocrats, his ultimate goal is to cast this in bad light so as to make it unattractive.

They walk among us as embodied reproaches, as warnings to us – as if health, well-constitutedness, strength, pride, and the sense of power were in themselves necessarily vicious things for which one must pay some day, and pay bitterly: how ready they themselves are at bottom to make one pay; how they crave to be hangmen. There is among them an abundance of the vengeful disguised as judges, who constantly bear the word “justice” in their mouths like poisonous spittle, always with pursed lips, always ready to spit upon all who are not discontented but go their way in good spirits. (GM III, §14)

Once the well-constituted falls for the ascetic priest’s narrative that strength is evil – and they actually did make this epoch-making mistake – the priest capitalizes on it to achieve his goal, that is, to gain more power. As it were, this situation whereby the strong begins to feel sorry for being strong is the world order sufficient for the priest to come to prominence. One

⁶⁵ Bernd Magnus, et al. “Reading Ascetic Reading; *Towards the Genealogy of Morals* and the Path Back to the World” in *Nietzsche, Genealogy and Morality*, p. 417 – 418.

must not fail to notice in this whole scenario the triadic play of *ressentiment*, Will-to-power, and asceticism. In this triadic play, Will-to-power manifests itself as asceticism using *ressentiment* as a catalyst. In other words, Will-to-power is at the root of the ascetic priest's unceasing quest for power and control. Hence he plays the ascetic card and the propaganda thereof in order to achieve his goal. In turn, it is *ressentiment* that supplies the needed quantity of 'bile' and 'bad blood' required to sustain a subversive campaign against the aristocratic class.

Nietzsche exposes yet another way in which the ascetic priest gains control by expressing his Will-to-power through ascetic practices. In virtue of his Will-to-power, which finds expression in *ressentiment*, he not only seeks to undermine the authority of his natural enemies, the aristocratic class, but also strives to keep his flock in check. As I showed in the previous chapter, his flock is composed of diseased souls weighed down by the guilt of sin. These diseased souls must turn to him for cure. Ascetic practices will become an important ingredient of the cure he administers. The priest imposes ascetic practices on the 'flock' intent on brutalizing them. In so doing, the priest is no doubt expressing his Will-to-power. In fact, his task as a 'shepherd' of souls becomes a lot easier once he succeeds in making them get used to pain or even start desiring pain and bodily privation.

The old depression, heaviness, and weariness were indeed overcome through this system of procedures ... This ancient mighty sorcerer in his struggle with displeasure, the ascetic priest – he had obviously won, his kingdom had come: one no longer protested against pain, one thirsted for pain; “more pain! more pain!” the desire of his disciples and initiates has cried for centuries ... Every painful orgy of feeling ... all stood in the service of the sorcerer, all served henceforward to promote the victory of his ideal, the ascetic ideal. (GM III, §20)

As can be seen from the above, the ascetic priest administers his doses of ascetic stipulations precisely to have his 'patients' get used to pain and eventually have pain-feeling completely deadened. All ascetic practices may thus be rightly seen as a 'pain-killer'. They are a pain-killer, whose efficacy is heavily dependent on the extent to which the 'patient' is brainwashed or 'hypnotized' into thirsting for pain – “more pain, more pain!” Nietzsche actually refers repeatedly to the ascetic priest's method as a form of “hypnotism” (GM III, §17). His detailed description of the ascetic priest's approach is instructive here:

This dominating sense of displeasure is combated, first, by means that reduce the feeling of life in general to its lowest point. If possible, will and desire are abolished altogether;

all that produces affects and “blood” is avoided (absence from salt: the hygienic regimen of the fakirs); no love; no hate; indifference; no revenge; no wealth; no work; one begs; if possible, no women, or as little as possible. (GM III, §17)

The picture Nietzsche paints above describes Christian asceticism, nay religious asceticism in general, for “wherever on earth the religious neurosis has appeared we find it tied to three dangerous dietary demands: solitude, fasting, and abstinence” (BGE, §47). “Religious neurosis” here refers to the sickly, life-negating expression of religious sentiments as a symptom of *ressentiment*. Nietzsche suggests that Christian asceticism in particular is shot through with the ‘neurotic’ features of solitude, fasting and abstinence.

The ascetic priest has craftily guarded the secret in a way that makes the whole ascetic arrangement/institution play into his hands. As a matter of fact, it is the priest himself who erected the whole ascetic edifice in order to keep the ‘sheep’ or ‘patient’ under control. Unmistakably, only a man of *ressentiment* could weave such a complex web of subterfuge in order to keep himself in power. It is through the *ressentiment*-based ascetic propaganda that the ascetic priest painstakingly comes to prominence, establishing a world order in which he now pontificates over the lives and values of others. Nietzsche would not hesitate to regard Christendom as this world order in which the priest presides. The ascetic propaganda not only brings it to power but also perpetuates this power in Christendom.

Also in line with the use of asceticism to gain control is the point that asceticism has a unique way of presenting the practitioner as ‘harmless’ while at the same time inspiring awe, aura, respect and fear. The ascetic priest has long discovered the ‘ancient formula’ and the dual effect it produces. Ordinarily, a lifestyle of privation should attract indignation, contempt and social stigma. But by some stroke of genius, the ascetic priest turns it to his advantage, “finally arrogating to themselves powers that once belonged only to the gods.”⁶⁶

As men of frightful ages, they did this by using frightful means: cruelty towards themselves, inventive self-castigation – this was the principal means these power-hungry hermits and innovators of ideas required to overcome the gods and tradition in themselves, so as to be able to believe in their own innovations. I recall the famous story of King Vishvamitra, who through millennia of self-torture acquired such a feeling of power and self-confidence that he endeavored to build a new heaven ... whoever has at

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 413.

some time built a “new heaven” has found the power to do so only in his own hell. (GM III. §10)

There is a psychology behind the awe and power that surround the ascetic priest. The self-inflicted injuries and severe hardship he endures are somewhat aimed at publicly demonstrating his belief in himself. It is also a strong signal to the people. It is an invitation for the people to believe him. This way he ends up winning public approbation. In the passage below, Nietzsche eloquently underscores the psychology behind the popular approbation the ascetic priest wins by means of ascetic practices and, more importantly, explains this in terms of will-to-power.

So far the most powerful human beings have still bowed worshipfully before the saint as the riddle of self-conquest and deliberate final renunciation. Why did they bow? In him ...they sensed the superior force that sought to test itself in such a conquest, the strength of the will in which they recognized and honored their own strength and delight in dominion: they honored something in themselves ... Moreover, the sight of the saint awakened a suspicion in them: such an enormity of denial, of anti-nature will not have been desired for nothing, they said to and asked themselves ... it was the “will to power” that made them stop before the saint. (BGE §51)

If the saint is able to endure so much hardship, so runs the logic of public sentiment, then there is something ‘special’ about him. He must have some secret knowledge and should therefore be approached ‘worshipfully’ for guidance. His message must be divine; in fact, he must himself be divine. It is interesting to see, too, the role of Will-to-power in this whole scenario, a role that reinforces the central claim in this chapter. As Nietzsche beautifully puts it, the masses cannot but capitulate because “they recognized and honored their own strength and delight in dominion.” This is a clear reference to “Will-to-power!”

“Genealogy” retrospectively sees the Will-to-power at work in the ascetic priest, who might well be oblivious of it. Probably, he is more interested in the political advantages than the fact that something significant is taking place at the deeper level. Again, his obsession for the political advantages makes him ignore the fact of their being purchased at a high price, a price equivalent to “his own hell” (GM III, §10) as Nietzsche describes it.

Going by Nietzsche’s account, one might legitimately infer that the Christian church, being the institutional epitome of the ascetic priest, may have gained prominence and now commands a universal respect precisely by playing the ‘ascetic card,’ that is, by portraying to the world the outward cloak of asceticism. In Nietzsche’s genealogical account, Christianity was of a

‘rabble’ origin, but it painstakingly walks its way to the top by creatively deploying the tool of asceticism: “Asceticism and puritanism are almost indispensable means for educating and ennobling a race that wishes to become master over its origins among the rabble and that works its way up towards future rule” (BGE, §61). This was the case with Christianity, Nietzsche would say.

I have shown how the institutionalization of Christian asceticism, according to Nietzsche, springs from power-hunger typical of *ressentiment*. There is yet another element of Christian asceticism that gives it away as arising from a temperament of *ressentiment*. It is its particularly ‘violent’ posture. For asceticism in general is considered by Nietzsche as violence towards oneself. It feeds on the ancient psychology of mnemonics (cure for forgetfulness) which depends of brutal means for its efficacy. This point is eloquently expressed in the passage below.

Only that which never ceases to hurt stays in the memory ... Man could never do without blood, torture, and sacrifices when he felt the need to create a memory for himself; the most dreadful sacrifices and pledges (sacrifice of the first-born among them), the most repulsive mutilations (castration, for example), the cruelest rites of all the religious cults ... -- all this has its origin in the instinct that realized that pain is the most powerful aid to mnemonics. In a certain sense, the whole of asceticism belongs here: a few ideas are to be rendered inextinguishable, ever-present, unforgettable, “fixed,” with the aim of hypnotizing the entire nervous and intellectual system with these “fixed ideas” – and ascetic procedures and modes of life are means of freeing these ideas from the competition of all other ideas, so as to make them “unforgettable.” (GM II, §3)

Thriving on cruel means, the discipline of asceticism only makes for a more optimal intellectual functioning of the person by freeing some ideas “from the competition of all other ideas.” Hence, the gains of ascetic practices are not necessarily ‘pious.’ In fact, before even dwelling on priestly asceticism in the third book of *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche first explains in a painstaking manner how ascetic practices are beneficial to athletes, artists, philosophers and a host of other spheres of life. In all this, the *ressentiment* underpinnings of ascetic cruelty cannot be denied.

In discussing Christian asceticism, one must not lose sight of the fact that Nietzsche characterizes Christianity as anti-life, especially seen against the backdrop of the life-affirming ‘higher’ values he advocates. The self-inflicted violence and all forms of harm done to the body in the name of asceticism may rightly be seen in light of the broader anti-life posture that Christianity adopts. Though aiding “mnemonics,” as Nietzsche admits, asceticism works

contrary to the overall well-being of the person. It basically stifles the free expression of human nature and emotions; indeed, it practically silences them. This sacrifice and stifling of human instincts is among the most prominent reasons he finds Christianity intolerable. Christianity, he would say, belongs to the “moral epoch of mankind.” In this epoch, “one sacrificed to one’s god one’s own strongest instincts, one’s ‘nature’: this festive joy lights up the cruel eyes of the ascetic, the ‘anti-natural’ enthusiast” (BGE, §55). In this epoch “physical well-being is viewed askance, and especially the outward expression of this well-being, beauty and joy; while pleasure is felt and sought in ill-constitutedness, decay, pain, mischance, ugliness, voluntary deprivation, self-mortification, self-flagellation, self-sacrifice” (GM III, §11). Worse still, “the body is despised, hygiene repudiated as sensuality; the Church even opposes cleanliness” (AC, §21). It is apparent from the above citations that the more life-denying aspect to Christian asceticism is not abstinence from food and drink but the suffocation of the most natural instincts of man and the undermining of general wellbeing.

I must quickly point out here that some of Nietzsche’s claims are rather exaggerated, anachronistic and do not represent the Church’s current orthodox theology of the body. Admittedly, some unhealthy theologies concerning the body have found their way in the Church at one point or another, theologies that view the body suspiciously and only as a source of sin which must be subdued through ascetic practices and sometimes self-flagellation. These theologies have their root in the dualistic repudiation of matter in favor of spirit/form. Manichaeism, perhaps the most popular of such dualistic theologies (now heresies), easily comes to mind. Though incorporating a wide range of syncretic elements, Manichaeism (after Mani, its 3rd Century AD originator) basically holds a dualistic universe where good/light is locked in an eternal struggle with evil/darkness. As it concerns us, Manichaeism regards the body, indeed matter in general, as evil, which has to be overcome through prescribed religious practices.⁶⁷ It is important to observe that Nietzsche’s literary hero, Zarathustra (Zoroaster) furnishes the earliest dualistic notions that inspired Manichaeism. However – and most interestingly – the New Zarathustra comes to abolish dualism and replaces it with a generous life-affirming religion that places humanity “beyond good and evil.”

⁶⁷ Manicheism was heavily influenced by Zoroastrianism and Gnosticism. In turn, it exerted a lot of influence on Christianity well into the 6th Century and, at some point, constituted itself a religion in its own right.

It is noteworthy, however, that the Church has at various times officially condemned as heresy any such ideas that exaggerate the power of bodily desires in relation to the weakness of the will (probably on account of the Original Sin) in a manner that undermines the dignity of man as the *imago Dei* (image of God) and the temple of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, a more optimistic theology of the body has since emerged which largely draw on the mystery of the Incarnation – to the effect that the human body has been healed and divinized by Christ who took on human form. Anthropology becomes ‘divinized’, thanks to the Incarnation. For, as Pope John Paul II puts it in his Apostolic Letter, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, “The mystery of the Incarnation lays the foundation for an anthropology which, reaching beyond its own limits and contradictions, moves towards God himself, indeed towards the goal of ‘divinization’”⁶⁸ Suffice it to say, in light of the above, that the Church now has a healthier theology of the body, a theology that recognizes that the body is not intrinsically evil but indeed good.

Since the present chapter is designed to explore the “faces” of *ressentiment*, I shall commit the rest of it to discussing the theme of Christian love, pity and guilt and how they might, on Nietzsche’s view, be driven by *ressentiment*.

4.2. Christian Love, Pity and Guilt: Exploring their *Ressentiment* Foundations

Love and pity are considered “virtues” in Christianity. (Note that there is no clear evidence that Nietzsche distinguishes “pity” from “compassion” since the same term “*Mitleid*” is used for both. Moreover, he criticizes “*Mitleid*” in a blanket fashion, i.e. irrespective of the guise in which it appears). Guilt, when expressed in relation to God, is a sentiment generally seen in Christianity as admittance of wrongdoing which goes with some form of commitment to stop the wrong doing or even to make amends. There is a way of relating Nietzsche’s German *Schuld* (being indebted) with the Christian sense, such that what emerges would be a sense of indebtedness to God or neighbor. The Christian teaching that all people are guilty before God⁶⁹ would perhaps make sense in this light. The three sentiments have an important place in

⁶⁸ Pope John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, no. 23.

⁶⁹ Cf. Rom. 3: 19

Christianity. In fact, love is unquestionably regarded as the highest of virtues – and this is biblically supported.⁷⁰

Of particular importance to us is the fact that, though highly esteemed as ‘virtues’ in Christianity, these sentiments are nevertheless regarded by Nietzsche as arising from *ressentiment*. Though they have an outward appearance of ‘virtue,’ Nietzsche nevertheless sees them, from a “genealogical” standpoint, as belonging to the larger arsenal used by Christians to antagonize the ascendant life. Their deceptive appearance makes them especially dangerous, as they have constituted themselves a deadly weapon in the hand of the ascetic priest to defeat the aristocratic morality. In tracing the Jewish origin of Christian *ressentiment*, Nietzsche has this to say:

From the trunk of that tree of vengefulness and hatred, Jewish hatred – the profoundest and sublimest kind of hatred ... there grew something equally incomparable, a new love, the profoundest and sublimest kind of love ... One should not imagine it grew up as the denial of that thirst for revenge, as the opposite of Jewish hatred! No, the reverse is true! That love grew out of it as its crown, as its triumphant crown ... in pursuit of the goals of that hatred ... This Jesus of Nazareth, the incarnate gospel of love. (GM I, §8)

The point being made here is that nothing has changed essentially from the *ressentiment* movement that started with Priestly Judaism. It has only become more insidious because it has borrowed new costumes and acquired a new name. Indeed the hate that defined the old ‘trunk’ remained hate, a hate that morphed into a “new love’ that Christianity now professes.

As a disguised form of the “hatred” of Priestly Judaism, Nietzsche sees Christian love as insidiously ‘pacifist’. It is only with the ‘eye’ of “Genealogy” that one is able to see through the smokescreen that is Christian love. The Christian exhortation to love is part of the overall ‘pacifist’ tenor of the Christian message. Christians are admonished to ‘turn the other cheek,’ ‘love your enemies’ and not pay back evil with evil. By contrast, the Old Testament, particularly the period before the emergence of Priestly Judaism, is considered by Nietzsche as a book of valor and display of strength. Hence he regards the combination of these two diametrically opposite books (in his opinion) to make a single Bible as “perhaps the greatest audacity and ‘sin against the spirit’ that literary Europe has on its conscience” (BGE, §52).

⁷⁰ Cf. I Cor Chapter 13. As a matter of fact, the entire New Testament is replete with similar “hymns” and orations in praise of Love.

As noted earlier, ‘pacifist love,’ according to Nietzsche, has an insidious psychological effect of tormenting the aggressor with depressing pangs of guilt. Nietzsche would prefer that the offended put up some aggressive fight, as it would be quite unfair to the offender if no resistance is offered. Indeed he considers ‘silence’, for so he calls it, as rude. In *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche bares his mind on this:

You just need to do me some wrong, I will ‘retaliate’, you can be sure of that ... It also seems to me that the rudest word, the rudest letter, is more good-natured, more honest, than silence. People who are silent are almost always lacking in subtlety and courtesy of the heart; silence is an objection, swallowing things down will always lead to a bad character, it ruins your stomach too. (EH I, §5)

On this view, pacifist love, which thrives on ‘silence’ (non-retaliation), is only a time-bomb waiting to explode.

This ‘silence’ is not only rude but also insincere. It is important to recall that in characterizing *ressentiment* in Chapter Two, I made mention of the sense of powerlessness the inferior feels before a superior whose mere presence he finds threatening. For Nietzsche, Christians (as epitomized by the priest) belong to the lower, inferior type who cannot risk engaging the aristocratic class in an open quarrel for the fear of being crushed. For their impotence, and as a survival strategy, they must therefore put up a less threatening appearance; they must not be confrontational; they must preach peace and love. But this is dishonest, since they are only full of tyranny, ambition and conceit within: “You preachers of equality, the tyrant’s madness of impotence cries thus out of you for ‘equality’: your secret tyrant’s cravings mask themselves thus in your words of virtue” (Z II, “On the Tarantulas”). Masked in the ‘words of virtue’ are “aggrieved conceit, repressed envy,” Nietzsche insists.

There is no better word for this type of hypocrisy than *ressentiment* (as I have demonstrated). As Walter Kaufmann argues: “What he attacks ... is the state of mind that frequently hides behind the respectable façade of Christian virtue; and of the motives Nietzsche discusses in this context, the one he emphasizes most is *ressentiment*. This is one of the key conceptions of Nietzsche’s psychology and clue to many of his philosophic contentions.”⁷¹

⁷¹ W. Kaufmann, *Op. Cit.*, p.371

In delineating the contours of *ressentiment*, I linked it with a certain power struggle between the aristocratic, well-constituted class and the base class Nietzsche takes Christianity to represent. In light of this struggle, Christianity has to pose as a “religion of love” (AC, §30). It adopts a gospel of love and the pacifist tactic of ‘turning the other cheek’ for sheer expediency. Love becomes a war tactic aimed at making the unsuspecting stronger opponent underestimate the enemy and trivialize the struggle. This is the height of priestly cunning, a cunning that guarantees victory. The slaves would eventually defeat the aristocratic class and overthrow the latter’s morality, thanks to the tactic of pacifist love.

Like love, pity is another Christian virtue Nietzsche is wary of. For all practical purposes, Christianity conflates “pity” with “compassion”. As I suggested earlier, there is no evidence that Nietzsche distinguished one from the other, and the criticism he levels against one is also directed at the other. He uses the term “*Mitleid*” (suffering with) for both when it has the sense of “com-compassion” (fellow-feeling) and when it has the condescending posture of “pity”. Nietzsche looks warily at both the condescending type and the com-compassion (suffering-with) type, insisting that both are destructive. He detects an element of condescension and arrogance even in the Christian pretensions to “com-compassion” (suffering with).

The destructive character of compassion lies not only in its having a “depressive effect” (AC, §7) but also in its being “contagious”. Contagious, it has the tendency to spread suffering thereby increasing the number of sufferers – a situation Nietzsche really wants to avoid.

It is interesting to note that Nietzsche links this “suffering-with” to *ressentiment*. In this regard, *Mitleid* now becomes a tool used by Christians to impose misery on the strong, torment and poison the conscience of the fortunate: “They are all men of *ressentiment* ... inexhaustible and insatiable in outbursts against the fortunate and happy ... poisoning the consciences of the fortunate with their own misery” (GM III, §14).

As earlier indicated, Nietzsche thinks that *Mitleid* has a “depressive effect.” In fact, this is the summary of *The Anti-Christ* Section 7, a portion wholly dedicated to the treatment of *Mitleid*. Given its depressive effect, Nietzsche sees Christianity’s appropriation of compassion as part of its overall anti-life posture. He actually considers *Mitleid* a vice rather than a virtue. It is a vice which represents degeneration, physical and psychological exhaustion and hostility to life. And

this, to Nietzsche, is the hallmark of Christianity: “Christianity is called the religion of pity – pity is the opposite of the tonic affects that heighten the energy of vital feelings: pity has a depressive effect, you lose strength when you pity. Pity further intensifies and multiplies the loss of strength which in itself brings suffering to life” (AC, §7). Overall, *Mitleid* is considered unhealthy. Hence he concludes the Section 7 with these powerful words: “In the middle of our unhealthy modernism, nothing is less healthy than Christian pity”.

The discussion on this subject of compassion would be incomplete if we do not call to mind Schopenhauer, against whom Nietzsche seems to be directly reacting. In *On the Basis of Morality*, Schopenhauer places a high premium on compassion and, in fact, makes it the only basis of morality: “Only insofar as action has sprung from compassion does it have moral value,” insists Schopenhauer, “and every action resulting from other motives have none.”⁷² For Schopenhauer, therefore, the moral worth of an action lies in its being performed out of compassion. He cannot emphasize compassion enough. Indeed, he pays great tribute to compassion and speaks of it in such glowing terms as “the great mystery of ethics.”⁷³ From the above, the contrast becomes clear: Schopenhauer sees compassion as healthy, while Nietzsche see is as unhealthy; for Schopenhauer, compassion is constructive while it is destructive for Nietzsche. Hence, one could rightly say that Nietzsche’s critique of *Mitleid* makes sense only in his “genealogical” framework.

As has earlier been indicated, *Mitleid* as pity can be condescending and arrogant, in which case, it diminishes the humanity of the pitied. Nietzsche takes this to actually be the case with Christianity, such that *Mitleid* properly puts on the name of “pity.” The political angle to it is that it makes the pitied inferior to the one who pities, and gives the latter some leverage. To the one who pities, the political superiority over the pitied is purchased at the great cost of the “depressive effects” and the loss of vital energy.

Since *Mitleid* does no one any good, regardless of the guise under which it appears, Nietzsche sees it as an affect that necessarily brings about the decadence or degeneration of humanity. Going by Nietzsche’s low opinion of Christianity, it would come as no surprise that Christianity has championed this degeneration by endorsing *Mitleid* as one of its dominant

⁷² A. Schopenhauer, *On the Basis of Morality*, 144.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

virtues. Hence he laments: “Anyone who approached this almost deliberate degeneration and atrophy of man represented by Christian Europe ... would surely have to cry out in wrath” (BGE §62).

If pity is said to have such a depressive and degeneration effect that would make one cry out in wrath, then guilt (“bad conscience” as Nietzsche calls it) should be doubly so --- all belonging to the same arsenal with which the man of *ressentiment* undermines life and health.

It is important to recall that, in the previous chapter, the Christian doctrine of salvation (*soteriology*) is hinged on the idea of an irredeemable debt to a monstrous ‘God’, necessitating the self-sacrifice of a “God-man” in the person of Christ. And in the earlier parts of the present chapter, we saw how Christian asceticism is partly based on this same notion of indebtedness to a monstrous ‘God.’

Now, Nietzsche maintains that guilt or “bad conscience” is of the same origin – irredeemable, indebtedness to a monstrous ‘God.’ As it were, this maximum indebtedness gives rise to perpetual torment of the conscience, as though the self-sacrifice of God Himself on the Cross was not enough.

But a more primordial account for “bad conscience” lies in what Nietzsche refers to as the “internalization of man”, as occasioned by the emergence of civil society. In the wake of civil society, man, who hitherto gave free play to his instincts, now learns to suppress his instincts and natural freedom. Since these instincts are merely suppressed and not eradicated, they invariably re-direct their violence inward. The soul is consequently tormented. Nietzsche offers a good description of this phenomenon.

All instincts that do not discharge themselves outwardly turn inward – this is what I call the internalization of man ... Those fearful bulwarks with which the political organization protected itself against the old instincts of freedom ... brought about that all those instincts of wild, free, prowling man turned backward against man himself. Hostility, cruelty, joy in persecuting, in attacking, in change, in destruction – all this turned against the possessors of such instincts: that is the origin of the “bad conscience.” (GM II, §16)

The point Nietzsche is making here is that the goal of ‘taming’ and ‘civilizing’ man through a complex wheelwork of civil strictures and institutions backfired. ‘Civilizing’ the humankind turned out to be counterproductive. The humankind, who belongs to the wild, develops a

“homesickness” for the wild; he yearns for his “animal past,” and when this “past” cannot be replicated, his aggressive instincts begins to torment the soul – thus giving rise to ‘bad conscience’ (GM II, §16).

David B. Allison explains that this torment of the soul, otherwise known as guilt finds a “specific application in a debtor-creditor” relationship in which the individual feels himself indebted to ancestors, and might even go the extent of retroactively proclaiming them gods.⁷⁴ At this level, guilt of “bad conscience” is still on the sphere of the civil. The situation becomes radically different on the sphere of institutionalized religion.

With the advent of institutionalized religion, guilt or bad conscience becomes transferred from the order of civil, or human, law to that of divine law, divine ordinance – and for Nietzsche, this is what constitutes the *moralization of guilt* ... With this development, a higher stage is reached. Our guilt and indebtedness becomes sin for the Judeo-Christian God. Nietzsche claims, “the Christian God, as the maximum god attained so far, was therefore accompanied by the maximum feeling of guilty indebtedness on earth ... guilt becomes *infinitized*. Since indebtedness ... is now seen to be impossible ...the opposite sentiment arises, namely, that one *denies the very possibility of discharge* ...Hence, one assumes the “debt” upon oneself.⁷⁵

The Judeo-Christian tradition introduces a new and problematic dimension to the idea of indebtedness to a supernatural being. The explanation for the “maximum feeling of indebtedness” that attends the Judeo-Christian tradition is to be located in no other place than in its Creation framework. The notion of “*creatio ex nihilo*” (creation out of nothing) places the entire burden of creation and being on a Creator-God, a narrative which cannot but provoke a corresponding burden of infinite indebtedness for the miracle of being. Nietzsche contrasts the Judeo-Christian framework with the pre-Socratic Greek religion, where gods merely watch over the spectacle but do not generate it. Moreover, there is, according to Nietzsche, a magnanimous inbuilt mechanism of exonerating and vindicating humans. So, while the Judeo Christian tradition uses its God to torment humans with “bad conscience,” “these Greeks used their gods precisely so as to ward off the “bad conscience,” so as to be able to rejoice in their freedom of the soul – the very opposite of the use to which Christianity put its God” (GM II, §23). They pre-Socratic Greeks made their Olympian gods spectators, who would always lightheartedly excuse human misdeeds and excesses as mere ‘folly.’ Furthermore, the Olympian gods served to justify

⁷⁴Cf. D. B. Allison, *Reading the New Nietzsche*, 234.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

humans by making themselves, rather than humans, the originators of evil, taking upon themselves, “not the punishment but, what is nobler, the guilt” (GM II, §23).

By contrast, the mind-boggling proportion of the ‘debt’ of being and the monstrous size of the “Judeo-Christian God leave man perpetually helpless and condemned to pangs of guilt. Nietzsche notes that Christianity pushes this debt-guilt narrative – and this marks the Christian “stroke of genius” – to its dramatic limit when it makes the God-man, Christ, sacrifice himself on account of the monstrous proportion of the debt. The matter gets compounded! – “Mankind intensifies the cause of his suffering by adding the guilt for God’s own sacrifice, Jesus’s Crucifixion.”⁷⁶ It is important to point out that the idea of ‘sacrifice’ would play a different role outside this creditor-debtor exchange upon which the Judeo-Christian tradition is based. It makes sense to think that, in the pre-Socratic Greek religion, sacrifice would not serve the purpose of paying any “debts”. Instead, it would serve the purpose of entertaining the gods, so that they might look with delight at the whole spectacle of human activities from the great Olympian heights. This claim finds support in Nietzsche: “It is certain at any rate, that Greeks still knew of no tastier spice to offer their gods to season their happiness than the pleasures of cruelty. With what eyes do you think Homer made his gods look down upon the destinies of men? ... The entire mankind of antiquity is full of tender regard for the ‘spectator’ ... which cannot imagine happiness apart from spectacles and festivals. – And, as aforesaid, even in great punishment there is so much that is festive” (GM II, §7). Therefore, the “sacrifice” of acts of valor that spring from the raw and cruel instincts of humans would constitute a sweet fragrance to the delight of the Olympian gods.

Conclusion

In the foregoing discussion, I have demonstrated the *ressentiment*-factor behind Christian asceticism, love, pity and guilt. I have also shown how, in Nietzsche, ascetic practices become a disguised avenue through which the ascetic priest expresses his Will-to-power. It is a veritable propaganda tool that furnishes great political advantages by first undermining aristocratic values. Similarly, Nietzsche takes Christian love to be a façade behind which lurks the Will-to-power, the drive to dominate. Further, he sees pity from the ‘genealogical’ standpoint as particularly

⁷⁶ Ibid., 236

dangerous, on grounds that it has a depressive effect, spreads suffering, diminishes the humanity of the pitied and subjects them under the one who pities. With regard to “bad conscience,” I have shown how the Judeo-Christian tradition invariably generates the notion of absolute indebtedness for the miracle of being, but also for the miracle of the self-sacrifice of the God-man, Jesus. The priest (who, for Nietzsche, represents the Christian church) created the situation in the first place. He, to all intents and purposes, invented the ‘debt’ but also the ‘God.’ Guilt or bad conscience serves his pastoral, nay, political agenda. An “old witch-doctor,” as Nietzsche sometimes calls him, the priest badly needs a Church that is something of a sick bay for sick souls, so that his ancient narcotic portion might remain relevant (GM II, §15). He not only wants to maintain an absolute control over his flock, he also wants to maintain absolute control of the whole *ressentiment*-movement, steering “the direction of *ressentiment*” to his advantage (GM III, §15).

From a wider perspective, once the priest establishes a masterful control over the “direction of *ressentiment*,” and is able to manipulate everybody at will, the stage is set for the final overthrow of aristocratic moral world order and the enthronement of slave morality. To Nietzsche, this is the mission statement, nay, the destiny of the priest (who embodies Christianity). And he must be thoroughly consumed by *ressentiment*, if he is to achieve it!

A number of important issues have been raised in our discussions in the foregoing chapters. In what follows, I shall, by way of evaluative analysis, address the key issues involved.

Chapter Five

Evaluations and General Conclusion

The preceding chapters have addressed the various ramifications of the subject-matter. Most importantly, the discussions have been tailored to the main objective of underlining the centrality of the idea of *ressentiment* in Nietzsche's critique of Christianity. The foregoing discussions have no doubt raised a number of important issues that cannot be glossed over. Thus, in this chapter, I shall revisit and critically evaluate them, particularly the ones central to Nietzsche's project.

The point of this evaluation is not to comment on the individual aspects of Christianity that Nietzsche critiques. This would not only be futile, it would also miss the point of the "genealogical" critique which looks primarily at Christianity as an effective reality in the modern world, a world where, as Nietzsche puts it, "God is dead" (GS, §125). Therefore, what I shall do is to evaluate the fundamental presuppositions of "genealogy" as an approach whose thrust is how things stand in the modern world, and in the light of which Nietzsche proclaims God "dead."

In terms of the "genealogical" approach upon which Nietzsche's critique is based, I shall show that it has the merit of overcoming the pitfalls of objectivism, a historical approach that concerns itself with 'facts' about the past, an approach which finds expression in positivist historiography. Its interest in how a thing is effectively present rather than the details or 'facts' about the past helps overcome the difficulties presented by 'fact-finding' methods. I shall also applaud the point that the "genealogical" approach does not presuppose that Christianity consciously adopted *ressentiment* as a principle. As to the "genealogical" presupposition that "God is dead" and history is thereby cleaved into two, I shall argue that the "Christian God" (as the underpinning of Christian world-order and its concomitant values) is ever present even in the so-called 'post-Christian' modern world, but in new and subtle guises. This is such that we cannot strictly talk of a two-part history distinguished by the presence or absence of the "Christian God." I shall rather propose that history is a seamless spectrum in which there is a progressive *capacity* to choose or not to choose the "Christian God."

As I earlier hinted in the General Introduction, an important point to keep in mind is that Nietzsche does not direct his “genealogical” critique on the ardent believer who is, like the “Old Saint” in *Zarathustra*’s “Prologue”, not part of the happenings in the modern world and as such left in his pious oblivion. In the passage, Zarathustra in fact quickly takes leave of him so as not to “take anything from” him, merely wondering how the message of the “death of God” has not yet come to him (Z, “Prologue” §2). The “genealogical” critique is instead directed at the hypocritical believer, the “last man” of the modern world who has refused to appropriate and proclaim the message of the “death of God” (GS, §125).

In the course of the evaluation, I shall present other viewpoints. I do this with no intention of having them serve as a ‘counter-attack’ nor yet as a ‘defense’ (and this is not called for, given the earlier explanation that the “genealogical” project is concerned with the larger issue of the significance of the “death of God” in the modern world). Rather, they will serve simply as alternative visions of Christianity outside the framework of Nietzsche’s “genealogy”.

5.1. Evaluations

To evaluate Nietzsche’s “genealogical” critique of Christianity, one must assess the merits of the presuppositions of the “genealogical” approach vis-à-vis the critique of Christianity. From the discussions in the course of the preceding chapters, it becomes clear that the genealogical approach is a way of accounting for how a thing *might come to be* in a way that helps us see how they are effectively present to us here and now, that is, how we stand in relation to the phenomenon in question.

To begin, I believe that the emphasis on effective presence in the ‘here and now’, that is, how we stand in relation to phenomena (as opposed to looking for ‘facts’ about the past) has the merit of surmounting the problems that challenge an objectivist approach to history. Objectivism presupposes that there are fixed, objective ‘facts’ about the past, ‘facts’ that burden history with the task of discovering them. Objectivism which finds expression in a positivist historiography is fraught with challenges. For one, events involving human agents are not like objects of the physical sciences that could be subjected to empirical verifications by applying scientific methods. Indeed historical events are products of agent intentions and volition, to which we do not have a reliable access. The result is that a single event could be explainable in terms of an

infinite number of factors, some remote and some more immediate. Hence, it becomes difficult to talk of ‘facts’, causes and effect in any strict sense.

Let us take as an example the case of the life of Jesus of Nazareth. Different people have undertaken an account of his life based largely on the historiographical approach that looks for ‘facts.’ The pitfalls that attend the various historiographical attempts at accounting for the life of Jesus are connected with the very methodology that seeks to uncover ‘facts.’ As we saw in Chapter Three, Nietzsche specifically mentions and criticizes Strauss and Renan (AC, §28, §29, §32) for adopting the positivist historiographical approach that seems doomed to fail. Rather than engage in the futile exercise of discovering “the truth about what he did, what he said, how he really died,” Nietzsche point us in the direction of the “genealogical” concerns of how we may even “conceive of his type,” how it has been “passed down” (AC, §29). The direction that Nietzsche points to indeed surmounts the challenges encountered in looking for details and ‘facts’ about the person of Jesus.

In a “genealogy”, on the contrary, one does not go to the ‘past’ looking for ‘facts’ (an exercise I have shown to be fraught with difficulties). Rather one is concerned with the present and how a thing comes to be what it is for us, that is, how a phenomenon becomes an effective reality significant to us here and now. Therefore, the point that was made in Chapter One to the effect that “genealogy” makes for self-understanding is plausible. It makes sense if we consider that “genealogy” is an exercise that helps us understand how we stand in relation to the phenomenon in question. A comparison with Rousseau is in order here. When Rousseau accounts for the origin of inequalities among humans, he is acknowledging inequality as a reality among humans and therefore tells a story that draws from a pattern that is recognizable in society. He tells a story that accounts for the most plausible circumstances that gives rise to reality of inequality everyone knows and feels about society.

Such was, or should have been, the origin of society and laws, which gave new fetters to the weak and new forces to the rich, irretrievably destroyed natural liberty, established forever the law of property and of inequality, changed adroit usurpation into an irrevocable right, and for the profit of a few ambitious men henceforth subjected the entire human race to labor, servitude and misery.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ J. Rousseau, “Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality among Men” in *Basic Political Writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, p. 70

The expression, “should have been” captures the whole point of how “genealogy” works. It is proper to claim, in this connection, that while other accounts move from past to present, “genealogy” starts from the present as it goes in search of what “should have been”, that is, what gives rise to what we witness in the present. Nietzsche’s “genealogy” has a similar trajectory that starts from the present – and this emphasis on the present represents a merit of the “genealogical” approach.

Another positive aspect of the presuppositions of Nietzsche’s “genealogical”, in my estimation, is that it does not posit a conscious or deliberate process. With regard to the critique of Christianity as a religion of religion of *ressentiment*, for instance, Nietzsche does not take *ressentiment* to be a conscious process on the part of Christians. He does this in a clever way by associating *ressentiment* with the Will-to-power which every life-form inadvertently expresses. So the idea that Christianity may have deliberately adopted *ressentiment* as the originating-principle is out of the question. Seen in this light, Christians might just be acting out of their best intentions oblivious of the Will-to-power at work in them, albeit such that expresses itself in *ressentiment*.

Now, let us consider the basic premise of the Nietzsche’s “genealogical” critique, the idea that “God is dead” and that history has been divided into two in the wake of this momentous event. As Nietzsche articulates it, “There has never been a greater deed; and whoever is born after us – for the sake of this deed he will belong to a higher history than all history hitherto” (GS, §125). The modern era is, on Nietzsche’s view, such that is marked by the “death of God,” and moderns belong to a “higher history” by the fact of their being witnesses to this epoch-making event. Nietzsche reckons that Christianity, which gave meaning and value to people and upon which human civilization was hinged, has lost its grip on humanity. The post-Christian modern era for which Nietzsche takes himself to be a herald will be founded on life-affirming values; man affirms the earth and determines himself, having done away with the Christian God.

Not intending to engage in the never-ending arguments as to the proper ways in which the “death of God” thesis might be interpreted, I am concerned with what I choose to call a ‘meta-genealogical’ question of whether at all the “death of God” has actually taken place. In other words, it is a question of determining whether the modern world may rightly and primarily be seen as a world marked by the “death of God.” My submission is that, if we think of the

“death of God” in terms of Christian values and the world-order built around the “Christian God”, one could safely say that these values may have loosened their grip on humanity and not that they are completely ‘dead.’

Viewed differently, one might rightly claim that the modern world has carried over elements of what Nietzsche might regard as the ‘old’ Christian values in ways that make it difficult to talk of a complete ‘break’ or ‘cleavage.’ I think that the old framework of the ‘Christian God’ (with its values and suppositions) permeated into the supposed ‘post-Christian’ modern era in ways that we cannot easily recognize. The ‘old’ values and world-order established around the ‘Christian God’ are resilient and present themselves in new and subtle guises. If they were to present themselves in their old forms, carved as it were in tablets of stone and backed up with ‘divine’ authority, they would perhaps be offhandedly rejected by moderns as soon as they are recognized. It makes sense to maintain that the ‘moderns’ are distinguished from their predecessors by this higher *capacity* to choose or reject these values. The ‘old’ Christian values have nevertheless made their way to the modern times largely imperceptibly, and we live by them unknowingly.

These considerations, therefore, make it difficult to strictly speak of history as divided into two on the basis of the “genealogical” presupposition of the “death of God.” If we were to speak strictly of a two-part division of history, we would be confronted with the question of determining what might qualify as the precise ‘moment’ at which this supposed ‘cleavage’ happens. Questions would be raised as to whether or not it happens in *time*. Questions will also be raised as to the precise *form* this ‘cleavage’ takes. At what point might it be rightly claimed that we are truly in a post-Christian era? Would this era require a complete or a partial absence of the ‘old’ Christian values? In fact, is our modern world a post-Christian world and the modern person a post-Christian person in any true sense?

I therefore propose that the determination of history in terms of the “death of God” (i.e. the demise ‘old’ Christian order) be considered as a spectrum rather than a two-part division. As a spectrum, we can talk of progress in the potential *capacity* of man to choose or to not choose the ‘old’ Christian values/order. I have suggested earlier that Christian values have permeated in largely subtle forms into the supposed ‘post-Christian’ modernity, and so, the “Christian God” may never ‘die.’ But the *capacity* to choose or to not choose it is in steady progress. It may well

be that this *capacity* is higher in our times. We may be called ‘moderns’ or people belonging to a “higher history” in virtue of our having a higher *capacity* for choice. But being ‘modern’ is not a function of a one-off event that bestows this *capacity*, thus dividing history into two parts. It is rather a seamless progress.

The discussions so far have revolved around Nietzsche’s “genealogical” presuppositions which are at bottom the interpretation of where we stand in light of the thesis that “God is dead”. I have argued that Christian values have made their ways in new guises in the supposed ‘modern’ world, such that it is difficult to characterize the modern world strictly by the absence of Christian values. Hence, history is not a two-part reality but a seamless spectrum of the progressive *capacity* to reject the ‘old’ Christian values. So, if by the “death of God” one means the “death” of the “Christian God” (and its concomitant values or world order) then I deny the thesis that the modern world is marked by the “death of God.” Instead, the modern world is marked by a higher potential capacity to “kill” God.

As part of this evaluation, I find it important to feature alternative ideas and visions of Christianity. I do not intend them to serve as ‘counter-attacks.’ As a matter of fact, no response that deals with particular aspects of Christianity can effectively challenge Nietzsche, who criticizes Christianity from the larger “genealogical” perspective of how we stand in regard to the “death of God.” Only such responses as address the fundamental presuppositions of “genealogy,” as I have done above, may have addressed the real issues. Having made this clarification, I shall in what follows present some alternative ideas or visions of Christianity.

Let us consider Kierkegaard’s and Scheler’s views of the Christian love. In the previous chapter, I showed how, in Nietzsche’s “genealogy,” Christian *ressentiment* finds a telling expression even in what Christianity takes to be the highest of virtues. As we saw in Chapter Four, Nietzsche is wary of Christian love because he sees it as essentially the same hate that is the hallmark of Christianity, hate now ‘repackaged’ to make it appear attractive (GM I, 8). He thinks that Christians are only being dishonest when they talk about ‘love,’ and that their ‘love’ belongs to the overall anti-life tenor of Christianity, and potentially constitutes a ‘bait’ against the unsuspecting ‘enemy,’ the noble. He generally berates Christian love, considering it not only as a thinly-veiled hate but also something that represents weakness.

But Kierkegaard and Scheler have perspectives that challenge Nietzsche's perception of Christian love. The description of Christian love espoused by Kierkegaard and Scheler corresponds to what is referred to as *agape* love, a 'divine' impeccable form of love. *Agape* is distinguished from *eros* (sensual love) and *philia* (love for relatives and friends).

Like Nietzsche, Kierkegaard was disillusioned by the religious atmosphere of his day. The religious superficiality and ecclesiastical bureaucracy of the 19th Century Europe to which Kierkegaard and Nietzsche belonged left much to be desired. However, this state of affairs produces two divergent effects for the two philosophers. For Nietzsche, on the one hand, it leads to an avowedly anti-Christian rhetoric of blanket condemnation. For Kierkegaard, on the other hand, it arouses a desire to go beyond the superficiality of his contemporaries to search for the true essence of Christianity. As Ellie Bostwick observes, "Nietzsche ... was unable to discover the true essence of faith to experience the passion Kierkegaard found there. It is remarkable that two such comparable philosophers on such similar quests could end up with two such divergent outcomes."⁷⁸

Kierkegaard maintains that love is the essence of Christianity. Hence, to return to the original form of Christianity would necessarily involve a profound commitment to love. To give an entire book the title of *Works of Love* already demonstrates the centrality of love in the undistorted Christianity Kierkegaard aims to rediscover. In his *Works of Love*, Kierkegaard makes this important assertion with regard to love: "As Christianity's glad proclamation is contained in the doctrine about man's kinship with God, so its task is man's likeness to God. But God is love; therefore we can resemble God only in loving, just like, according to the apostle's words, we can only 'be God's co-workers – in love'"⁷⁹

Kierkegaard thus makes love the most appropriate response to the fundamental Christian invitation to kinship with God. From the foregoing, the contrast between Nietzsche and Kierkegaard becomes obvious: that which Nietzsche considers an expression of *ressentiment* and consequently an indictment of the Christian faith becomes in Kierkegaard the core of the faith, the practice of which marks an authentic Christianity.

⁷⁸ E. Bostwick, "Kierkegaard vs Nietzsche: Discerning the Nature of True Christian Faith," 27.

⁷⁹ S. Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 74.

Similarly, Max Scheler presents an account of Christian love that challenges Nietzsche's contempt for it. He goes about this in his work titled, *Ressentiment*, where he contrasts what he calls the "Greek love" with Christian love. While the "Greek love," according to him, involves a movement from the 'inferior' to 'superior' ('superior' and 'inferior' here refer to relational difference of persons, e.g. God and man, ruler and subject, boss and employee, etc.), "Christian love" involves a love-inspired movement from the 'superior' to 'inferior.' For Scheler, Christianity has effected a historical "reversal in the movement of love,"⁸⁰ whereby the superior comes to meet the inferior in respect and true solidarity. In this meeting, there is no risk that the superior's being and worth might be diminished in the process, nor does it present any danger of further diminishing the inferior. We must recall in this regard that Nietzsche rejects Christian love precisely because it is an expression of the *ressentiment* of the weak, by which they craftily wish to corrupt and weaken the strong. Scheler would think that such a fear arises only with the "Greek" conception of love, where a descent to a lower level basically represents a diminution of being, a fall. On the contrary, Christian love springs from "inner sanctity and vital plenitude;"⁸¹ it arises from fullness of being, so that nothing is lost. Undoubtedly, the Overman, whom Nietzsche presents as an ideal man, also enjoys a fullness of being; so he is completely lacking in *ressentiment* and does not entertain any such fears of a loss of being. Nietzsche insists, however, that Christians are way below the "Overman ideal." Hence their 'love' is necessarily a disguised form of *ressentiment*.

As I earlier suggested, the description of Christian love espoused in Kierkegaard and Scheler should leave no one in doubt that they refer to a species of love known as *agape*. I propose that Christian love as *agape* is irreproachable. The whole concept of love as *agape* makes it rather too difficult to fault. *Agape* is a Greek term which represents love in its most sublime form. While there are different kinds of love such as *philia* (familial love) and *eros* (sensual love), Christianity lays particular claim to *agape*, a pure love, untainted by self-interest. Sharing metaphysical status with the Good, as it were, no system or religion can conceivably go wrong by professing *agape* love or having it as an ideal. It is perhaps no coincidence the various biblical exhortations to love employ the word, *agape*. For *agape* is a type of love that represents strength rather than weakness, life rather than anti-life. *Agape* is dissociated from *mitleid*, that

⁸⁰ M. Scheler, *Ressentiment*, 86.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 90.

unhealthy kind of love which Nietzsche condemns as masking itself as ‘pity.’ *Agape* is a bond that should bind all humanity together in sincere fellowship and solidarity.

Having dwelt quite extensively on Kierkegaard and Scheler regarding Christian love, I wish to present another vision of Christianity that might be relevant to the subject. This is the Vatican II vision of Christianity. I reiterate the point that featuring the Vatican II vision of Christianity is not intended to serve as a ‘counter-attack,’ given that Nietzsche’s “genealogical” critique has a concern that historical attempts to ‘reclaim’ Christianity do not address. Be that as it may, I think the Second Vatican Council represents a watershed in Catholicism, because it has qualitatively better impacts for Catholicism than any past attempts at reform (including the “Jesuitism” Nietzsche downplays in the Preface to *Beyond Good and Evil*).⁸²

The Second Vatican Council (commonly known as Vatican II), lasting from 1962 to 1965, is a landmark event, which birthed revolutionary ideas that changed the Church’s vision and orientation. Scholars, and indeed the general public, are quite unanimous in the belief that the positive changes ushered in by the Council changed the Church for the better – in her self-understanding, Christian life, liturgy, spirituality, theology, ecumenism and a host of other areas. Vatican II represents the Church’s commitment to update itself to the realities of the contemporary world, as encapsulated in its defining word, *aggiornamento*. (“Aggiornamento” conveys the sense of “updating” in Italian). The Council’s opening statement in one of its most important documents, *Gaudium et Spes*, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, summarizes the very spirit of the Council: “The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age ... these are the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the followers of Christ ... That is why this community realizes that it is truly linked with mankind and its history by the deepest of bonds” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 1). Solidarity with the world, optimism, healthier moral vision, more rational religious practices and the overall life-affirming features that characterize the post-Vatican II Church distinguishes it from the Vatican I era under which Nietzsche lived and worked and, indeed, from any preceding period in Church’s history.

⁸² Nietzsche mentions Jesuitism and democracy as the last great attempts “in grand style” Europe made to loosen the age-long tension of “Christian-ecclesiastical” stranglehold on the Continent, an attempts to stop the worst from happening or at least delay it – universal disillusionment and the advent of nihilism (BGE, “Preface”).

Were the problems raised in Nietzsche's "genealogical" critique such that could be addressed by positive changes and revisions, one would have good reasons to think that Nietzsche's indictment of the Catholic Church would be minimal – thanks to the Vatican II Council. There are good reasons to also think that Nietzsche would at least have a higher opinion of the post-Vatican Church than the Church of his day, a Church whose life and practices somewhat provided an ample justification for Nietzsche's criticism. We recall from the preceding chapters that some of Nietzsche's problems with Christianity is the general life-negating, world-denying posture seen its moral tables, ascetic extremism and otherworldly tendencies. And here we are with a Church whose official vision and mission is solidarity with the world, linked to "the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of ... mankind and its history by the deepest of bonds." This vision seems to be in consonance with Nietzsche's all important notion of Eternal Recurrence, in which humans are urged to affirm the world and all it offers with a confident and vehement signal of "da capo" to the cosmic spectacle of existence (BGE, §56). I recognize, of course, that the post-Vatican II Church is not a perfect system. But it has a lot of commendable features, to say the least – and may rightly be considered a watershed.

Finally, I take the liberty to present another landmark feature of the post-Vatican II Church – The liberation Theology movement. Here again, I acknowledge that Nietzsche's "genealogy" project is concerned with far larger issues than any movement in Christianity may possibly address. I present Liberation Theology for the simple reason of juxtaposing it with Nietzsche's "aristocratic radicalism". It may well be that both have a common mission of "ennobling" or "enhancing" humanity – ultimately. But their visions as to the way to go about this "ennoblement" ("enhancement") are apparently different.

Let us consider the principle of "aristocratic radicalism," since Nietzsche's critique of Christian *ressentiment* is tied to his endorsement of elitism. "Aristocratic radicalism" is a term that represents Nietzsche's uncompromising commitment to a class-structured society in which the "elite humanity and higher caste" (WP, §752) is distinctly separated from the base, sickly, powerless and ill-constituted of society. He speaks severally of the *pathos of distance* (AC, §43) that should separate these two groups, ensuring that the strong, privileged class is not in any way compromised or corrupted by the lower class. As Nietzsche contends, "Life itself recognizes no solidarity, no 'equal rights,' between the healthy and the degenerate ... Sympathy for decadents,

equal rights for the ill-constituted – that would be the profoundest immorality” (WP, §734). Similarly, he states explicitly that “Every enhancement of the type ‘man’ has so far been the work of an aristocratic society – and it will be so again and again – a society that believes in the long ladder of an order of rank and differences in value between man and man, and that needs slavery in some sense or other” (BGE, §257). It is on account of this conviction that he reviles Christianity for threatening to destroy the *pathos of distance* through its lies of egalitarianism, including that of egalitarian or ‘democratic’ immortality that grants immortality to every Tom, Dick and Harry (AC, §43). Moreover, he blames Christianity for championing the ‘revolt’ of the “slave” class, which would no doubt destroy the status quo.

By way of assessment, I find Nietzsche’s ‘aristocratism’ or ‘elitism’ morally questionable. It is unfair, at bottom. Not even the prospects of ‘enhancing’ the human species would justify an unequal estimation and treatment of persons. Rather than ‘enhance’ humanity, this form of ‘aristocratism’ diminishes the human worth of individuals. “Aristocratism,” as espoused by Nietzsche, would sacrifice the dignity of some on the altar of the “ennoblement” of others. In so doing, some humans are treated as a mere *means* to an end. The ideal vision of society is such in which no member is “enslaved” (contrary to what Nietzsche tacitly recommends); it is a vision that upholds the dignity and equal treatment of all.

Contrast Nietzsche’s “aristocratic radicalism” with the Liberation Theology, one of the most important features of the post-Vatican II Church with a different vision of society, or, on Nietzsche’s own terms, a different approach to humanity’s “ennoblement.” Liberation Theology seeks to eradicate all unjust structures of society as a way of upholding the dignity of man.

Liberation Theology is a theological movement, nay, a social tsunami that swept through Latin America and made remarkable impacts on the wider world. Originally a theological movement initiated by the famous Peruvian priest and theologian, Gustavo Gutierrez, it became a social force that challenged unjust social structures and the Latin American dictatorships of the 60s, 70s and 80s. Various social revolutions around the world drew inspiration from its radical interpretation of the Gospel of Christ in liberationist or emancipationist terms. Liberation Theology considers the Gospel, or religion as a whole, worthless unless it positively affects the social, economic and political realities of the masses. Gutierrez insists that the biblical notion of ‘sin’ is at the root of all social anomalies, for it “is according to the Bible the ultimate cause of

poverty, injustice, and the oppression in which persons live.”⁸³ Indeed, Liberation Theology and all social movements that draw inspiration from it are firmly convinced that “only a radical break from the status quo, that is, a profound transformation of private property system, access to power of the exploited class, and a social revolution that would break this dependence would allow for the change to a new society.”⁸⁴ In many ways, the official social teachings of the post-Vatican II Church have been influenced by the spirit of Liberation Theology, in its efforts to be a veritable sign of Gospel in the contemporary world.

The Church is far from being perfect – undoubtedly. But movements such as the Liberation Theology are important, in that, they help to point the Church in the right direction.

5.2. General Conclusion

The subject of Nietzsche’s critique of the Christian religion has been approached in diverse ways. Some have approached it from the angle of Nietzsche’s idea of Christianity as a religion of decadence, while others have explored Nietzsche’s critique of certain individual aspects of the Christian religion.

In this work, I have approached Nietzsche’s critique from the standpoint of the notion of *ressentiment*, underlining the centrality of *ressentiment* in Nietzsche’s characterization and consequent critique of Christianity. I have done this by exploring the various dimensions of Christianity and showing how Nietzsche “genealogically” accounts for them in terms of *ressentiment*. Nietzsche problematized the various ramifications of Christian life and practice insofar as they originate in and are fueled by *ressentiment*.

I began by placing our whole discourse in the context of Nietzsche’s “genealogy,” for it is the framework under which he critiques Christianity. I emphasized that the ‘origin’ this “genealogy” tries to uncover should not to be seen in the Cartesian sense of an apodictic foundation of all knowledge, nor should it be understood in the positivist historiographical sense of ‘fixed facts’ about the past. “Genealogy” is rather a framework for understanding how something came to be insofar as it remains relevant to us here and now, while heralding a

⁸³ G. Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation*, p. 24.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

wholesome future when man determines himself and bears in himself the meaning of his own existence.

I discussed how Nietzsche's genealogical approach becomes useful in his critique of Christian morality as "slave morality." Nietzsche maintains that "slave morality" engenders a fatal "trans-valuation" that endorses and promotes everything that represents weakness and repudiates all that represents strength. "Slave morality," as epitomized in Christianity, seeks to overthrow the "master morality" and establish itself as the sole moral compass of the world. Overall, Nietzsche judges "slave morality" as dangerous and fundamentally life-denying, having its origin in the value-creating instinct of *ressentiment*.

I explained the dynamics of *ressentiment* in the doctrinal aspects of Christianity – in eschatology, Christology and soteriology. Nietzsche's "genealogical" account of these doctrines reveals a religion engaged in warfare against the 'aristocratic' values. To Nietzsche, Christian eschatological, Christological and soteriological constructs are life-negating at bottom – and serve as weapons against the 'aristocratic' values. Nietzsche identifies the elements of vindictiveness, antagonism and hate in these doctrinal ideas, a proof once again that they are fueled by *ressentiment*.

Similarly, he sees through the lens of his genealogy to identify a certain *ressentiment*-based hypocrisy and general anti-life pattern in the practice and profession of Christian asceticism, love, compassion and guilt. Furthermore, the (ascetic) "priest" a figure that represents all Christians in many ways, somewhat finds in these notions and practices an instrument of manipulation and power.

To make for a proper understanding of Nietzsche's key claim that Christianity is founded on *ressentiment*, I repeatedly explained that Nietzsche does not suggest any conscious policy of sorts on the part of Christians. In other words, we should refrain from thinking that Christians deliberately chose to constitute themselves forces of *ressentiment* in the world. To think that there was a moment when Christians consciously adopted *ressentiment* as its founding or operational principle would be a gross misrepresentation of Nietzsche. The relationship between Christianity and *ressentiment* would make sense only insofar as one subscribes to Nietzsche's "genealogy" and all that it entails. It is "genealogy" that reveals how the otherwise 'innocuous'

actions and inactions of Christians may be ‘inimical’ to the overall self-actualization of man and the prospects of the emergence of the life-enhancing “new religion” that Zarathustra heralds.

In light of the above clarification, I therefore assessed the presuppositions of “genealogical” critique of Christianity, namely, the question of how we stand in the world with vis-à-vis the “death of God” thesis. I argued that Nietzsche’s “genealogy” has the merit of overcoming the problems encountered in the search for ‘facts.’ Also considered as a merit is the fact that “genealogy” does not suggest that *ressentiment* is a necessarily conscious process. On the thesis of the “death of God,” I argued that the Christian values still live with the so-called post-Christian humans and may never ‘die.’ Hence, one cannot strictly talk of a two-part history on the basis of the presence or absence of the ‘Christian God.’ It makes more sense rather to see history as a seamless spectrum marked by a progressive capacity to choose or to not the values of the “Christian God”.

From our arguments and discussions, there is no gainsaying that the central thesis of this research has been successfully demonstrated: the thesis that, in the framework of “genealogy”, Nietzsche considers *ressentiment* to be the originating-force and the animating principle of Christianity. As such, it is an expression of Christianity’s Will-to-power. By underscoring the point that *ressentiment* is the originating-force of Christianity, according to Nietzsche, one may rightly infer that his critique of Christianity is essentially a critique of its *ressentiment*-character. This way, the academic significance of this research project becomes realized, namely, highlighting the centrality of the concept of *ressentiment* to the Nietzsche’s celebrated critique of Christianity. As far as I can tell, this *ressentiment* approach to Nietzsche’s critique of Christianity has not been earlier attempted, at least, not in such an elaborate manner that actually engages with the key features of Christian theory and practice. I most sincerely take it to be my unique contribution to the literature.

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