
Wayde Z.C. Marsh

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Washington & Lee University

Professor Alexandra Brown, Primary Reader
Professor Timothy Lubin, Secondary Reader

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Abstract

This paper seeks to investigate and provide renewed clarity to the ways Johann Gottfried Herder’s (1744-1803) theory of nationalism is contested by using more modern theories of ‘nation’ and ‘religion.’ Using Benedict Anderson’s theory of the ‘nation’ as an “imagined community” and Èmile Durkheim’s theory of ‘religion’ as an essentially social phenomenon, this paper interprets Herder’s nationalism in a new way in order to promote an alternate path for his theory. Herder’s language often drives scholars to focus on the ways in which his theories and language contribute to German nationalism of the 20th century and the anti-Jewish policies that arose with it. However, when viewed through its relationship to religion, Herder’s nationalism instead moves humankind toward a utopian vision of world harmony through diversity. As a thinker of the German Enlightenment, Herder is primarily concerned with imagining the German nation in his own time, a project that depends upon thorough treatment of the natural cultural, not ethnic, facts that define such a nation. It is through Herder’s complex theories of the relationships between thought, language, religion, poetry, education, and history that he develops this vision for Humanität, ‘humanity.’ Religion, in particular, enhances the organic, as opposed to fabricated, development of national identity. If this identity sufficiently expresses a nation’s experience with their concept of the sacred, it drives a nation to seek not destruction and chauvinism, but rather peaceful interaction and coexistence in the ‘Garden of Nations.’
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I. Introduction

Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803) was a gifted philologist, translator, poet, Lutheran pastor, and friend and contemporary of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Friedrich Schiller, Moses Mendelssohn, and Gotthold Ephraim Lessing.¹ He is best known, however, as the father of modern nationalism and the Romantic Movement that led to German National Socialism.² According to one scholar, “he was a restless, active thinker whose range of interests were so broad that it is difficult to categorize him easily.”³ Often seen as an opposing force of both the Enlightenment philosophers who held reason to be sovereign and believed it was unaffected by history or language as well as the Romantics who favored the role of emotion, Herder’s views lie between these factions yet are often times overlooked.⁴ Because he transcends the categories modern scholars try to impose on his intellectually tumultuous time, Herder is written off as a ‘traditionalist’ at the risk of losing his unique and valuable philosophies and approaches.

Working through a remarkable range of disciplines, Herder develops theories about language and religion in order to imagine a German nation during a time when such a political reality seemed quite unlikely. Because his theoretical range is wide and abstract, however, scholars and political leaders have been ready to take sections of his works and push them in certain ways in order to produce a much different type of nationalism than Herder imagines is necessary to build a German nation. In this thesis, I seek to understand the ways in which Herder is contested in his

¹ Isaiah Berlin, Vico and Herder: Two Studies in the History of Ideas (New York: Viking Press, 1976), 145. ² Herder is the “father of the related notions of nationalism, historicism, and the Volksgeist, one of the leaders of the romantic revolt against classicism, rationalism, and faith in the omnipotence of the scientific method” and the innovator of the hermeneutical method (Berlin, Vico and Herder, 145). Volksgeist is ‘spirit of the people, That which ‘animates’ a people within its own “independent, organic entity” (Louis K. Dupré, The Enlightenment and the Intellectual Foundations of Modern Culture (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 220). ³ Herder, Johann Gottfried, Against Pure Reason: Writings on Religion, Language, and History, trans. and ed. Marcia Bunge (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1993), 1. Bunge believes him to have been a ‘restless’ member of the Aufklärung, Enlightenment, but suggests that his contemporaries and he himself felt similarly. Many other scholars share something close to this view as well. ⁴ “It has become increasingly common to exclude traditionalist thinkers such as Vico, Malebranche, Burke, and Herder from the Enlightenment as if they belonged to what Isaiah Berlin has called the Counter Enlightenment.” (Dupré, Intellectual Foundations, 5).
influence on modern concepts of nation and suggest an alternate path for Herder’s contribution to 
the concept of nation. I use more modern theorists of ‘nation’ and ‘religion’ to explore the ways 
in which Herder uses religion to help us better understand his influence on modernity.

To begin to approach Herder’s theories of language, religion, and nation, one must 
understand the largest conceptual framework within which Herder works: his concept of 
*Humanität*, a seemingly utopian vision for world unity through recognition and preservation of 
diversity. Herder’s much debated treatment of language and religion must be understood within 
this larger theoretical framework that distinguishes him from other figures of the Enlightenment 
or “Aufklärer.” While many other utopias work toward equality based in sameness, Herder 
believes that humanity should naturally work towards a unity rooted in difference. It is, perhaps 
paradoxically, appreciation of these differences that binds peoples together to “progress from 
chaos to order.” According to Herder, “opposites themselves help and advance one another, for 
only through the union of both [of the two opposite entities] does a world come into 
existence…an existing whole that is wholly good and beautiful.” Herder is in many regards a 
Romantic and through this poetic language, his Romantic vision of all peoples’ future seems 
nearly impossible for a post-twentieth century world.

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5 While translated as “humanity,” in Herder’s work it is more than just another way to refer to the human race 
collectively. For Herder, it is a supra-national bond that holds all nations together in their diversity because of their 
shared source—“the image of God” language from Genesis 2. Further, the theory of *Humanität* Herder develops is 
“the work that inspired Kant to conceive of *Humanität* as a moral end” (Dupré, *Intellectual Foundations*, 142) 
because it is not just an observation of the world as it is, but a poetic journey through the development of humanity 
even into the future and Herder’s hope for a peaceful world.

6 Herder had “success in synthesizing its [the Enlightenment’s] leading ideas and in overcoming their one-sided-
ness. He balanced the universal ideal of *humanity* with the irreducible particularity of each nation, the idea of 
organic growth with that of causal determination, the divine guidance of history with the uninhibited autonomy of 

7 ‘Enlightener,’ a thinker of the Enlightenment in Germany.

8 According to Stefan Schick, this is one of the main reasons Herder is excluded from the Enlightenment canon—his 
vision of humanity is based on a preservation of difference while others desired the universal application of their 
own values. To Herder this type of unity was false political oppression that destroys any hope of true unity and 
community (Stefan Schick, “The humanistic origins of Herder’s nationalism – Marginal remarks on the 
contemporary debate about national identity,” forthcoming in *National and Constitutional Identity in EU Law* ed. 
Rainer Arnold).


10 Ibid 139.
The utopian nature of his vision of Humanität, however, makes it no less valuable to pursue as a way to contemplate the increasing challenges of nationalization in his time and globalization in ours. In fact, Herder believed that his vision was not utopian but rather a necessary reality in progress. The pursuit toward global unity through difference, not despite it, is achieved, for Herder, through a unifying agent: religion. Herder’s vision of Humanität depends upon its coming about organically through people, not “top down” as institutions or methods aiming to acquire or solidify political power. This ‘organic’ development is a central theme in Herder’s thought and is often explained as something ‘natural.’ Herder characterizes ‘organic’ as something that grows out of natural human social needs and is not an imposition from an outside order. Since God “engraved [his] image, religion, and humanity on the human soul,” Herder believes that “all human beings are citizens [of the city of God on earth], but all in accordance with very different classes and levels;” he calls these “parties of religion.” But, within this difference, “religion touches all human tendencies and desires in order to harmonize them…and guide them to the right path.” Religion is for Herder an inherently social phenomenon that reflects a people’s natural social tendencies in a way that coincides with their particular experiences of their environment and historical encounters with other humans. Herder’s philosophy of Humanität is essentially the development of human beings towards a state of organic equality and peace through socially necessitated organic progress, of which religion is a major part. Religion is crucial to Herder’s thought because it “belongs to the people” and unifies through organic development with people—it “is a living fountain.” Because of its organic nature, “even when it is dammed and blocked, it breaks forth again from its depths, purifies

11 Dupré, Intellectual Foundations, 221.
12 Herder, “Ideas Toward a Philosophy of History,” in Against, 91.
15 Ibid., 92-3.
itself, refreshes, and gives life,” not death. But, Herder is careful to express his critical view of
dogmas and doctrines, because they are “opinions” that divide rather than unite. Pure organic
religion stands, therefore, as the link between language and the experiences of a people that
have driven it to a specific historical moment. So, even when it is corrupted and ceases to be
organic, religion will purify itself and come back to reclaim the hearts of a people. Religion’s
clearest role in the development of people towards Herder’s vision of humanity is its ability to
educate a people about their origins as well as their relationship and duty to other peoples. It
carries a cultural, historical, and linguistic quality that is essential in educating the next
generation in the lessons of the past, so that they are better equipped to move closer to the
utopian vision. Religion and poetry together teach people how to live in harmony and continue to
express their national identity as it relates to phenomena beyond their control so that all nations
may progress. In order to understand Humanität as a reality, we must trace where Herder sees it
moving forward within the abstract ideas surround ‘culture.’ Poetry is the written form of the
religious history of a people and it is through the interdependence of these two elements that
Herder is able to see his utopian vision move towards reality.

Political scientist Russell Arben Fox recognizes the importance of the relationship
between Humanität and religion in his explanation of Herder’s philosophy of humanity. He notes
that Herder’s utopian vision begins “with his insights into the organic connection between

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16 Herder, “Concerning Religion,” in Against, 93.
17 Ibid.
18 This, for Herder, is a religion that is not consciously determined or manipulated as a way to consolidate political
power for a movement or person. Instead, pure organic religion is one that arises among the people without their
noticing as the way individuals begin to understand their relation to the sacred within a social context— with other
humans.
19 This duty is basically to avoid aggression towards other peoples: to avoid imperialism or imposition of values or
culture over another people, instead recognizing human equality and seeking to live in harmony.
20 The definition of this religion-poetry nexus is central to this paper and will be explored at greater depth in Chapter III.
human language and natural and historical forces.”

But, this concept of humanity develops significantly when Herder “moves on to a consideration of cosmological unity which those connections hint at” before it “climaxes with a contemplation of the national forms which emerge from and along with the people who realize these revelatory connections.”

The movements of “contemplation” and “consideration” that Fox identifies in Herder’s thought are experiences of human existence that drive the emergence of a national identity within the growing concept of human unity through a loose moral obligation. But, this process begins with an initial turn inward to understand the self, a turn which compels man to seek the cosmological unity among humans that inward evaluation begins to illustrate. Only then, does a national identity within a larger humanity arise as a people can juxtapose its own unique cultural externalities with others while keeping the unity of all humans foremost.

For Fox, the inward turn, contemplation, and consideration movements are central to the complex theories regarding humanity, with which Herder begins. But perhaps more subtly, they have “profound implications for how we think about belonging, identity, citizenship, and so forth, and nowhere are the implications potentially greater than in regards to the interrelated problems of religious pluralism and religious particularism.”

For example, Herder believes that “we can use religion to explain diverse structures in forms of government and in domestic, matrimonial, and civil society...[and that] we would find that many contracts, political ceremonies, and political institutions are based above all on ancestral religion.” As “the unnoticed mainspring of great changes in politics” and the overlooked key to interpreting Herder’s nationalism, religion is constantly present in the identity-forming movements that are

22 Ibid.
23 Ibid.
24 Herder, “Concerning the Various Religions,” in Against, 79.
integral to the development of humanity towards Herder’s vision.  

Herder recognizes, however, the difficulty in understanding the relationship between religious pluralism and religious particularism when he declares, “the Creator alone is the One who conceives the entire unity of one and all nations, conceiving them in all their diversity without losing sight of the unity.” So while Herder sees a challenge to this utopian vision, he maintains that through understanding of one’s own particularity, one can recognize that humanity can be nothing other than a unified diversity. Herder hopes to impress upon his Christian and non-Christian readers alike the importance of enhanced reflection on the cultural elements that unite a nation within itself and make it different from but connected and equal to others.

Herder often refers to Christianity as a universal religion that functions as ‘dew’ for many nations while also speaking forcefully and directly against imperialism, harsh colonialism, and other efforts made by one nation to take over another. Herder reaches this conclusion because he observes Christianity’s ability to peacefully subsume national religions within itself by learning a people’s national language and religion and then incorporating new sacred beliefs through familiar language and culture. For Herder, a religion is admirable not in and of itself, for there is no objective measure for religion, but rather for how well it functions in pressing a people to turn inward only to then reach beyond their linguistic, cultural, or geographical

25 Herder, “Concerning the Various Religions,” in Against, 79.
26 Herder, “Yet Another Philosophy of History,” in Against, 40.
27 Herder demonstrates that diversity does not necessarily mean division and that religion is organically connected to concepts of national and political identity and functionality.
28 Herder “invite[s] both Christians and non-Christians to read [his] book [because] in all human souls truth is the same” (Herder, “Concerning Religion,” in Against, 93).
29 In religion this reflection manifests itself in that realization that within a religion, people relate to the sacred in similar ways that are different from other religions, but all religions express a people’s search for truth regarding the beyond or sacred.
30 Bunge “Introduction,” in Against, 3.
31 As evidence, Herder seeks to “remember the admirable Ulphilas. He converted the Goths through his translation of the Gospels, that is, through his cultivation of the Gothic language. How did the enlightenment of all Europe begin in the dark Middle Ages? Through the translation of the Bible into the language of the Limousin and into other national language” (Herder, “First Dialogue Concerning National Religions” in Against, 104).
32 According to Schick’s reading, Herder believes that “there is no abstract benchmark of successful humanity with which one might measure the different nation’s concerning their inner value” (“The humanistic origins,” 9).
boundaries to search of cosmological unity through mutual understanding.\textsuperscript{33} For just as dew lies on trees in a lush garden, Christianity peacefully and naturally can lie atop various nations’ existing identities to demonstrate the similarities between all people despite difference in composition and growth. Christianity is thus superior not because it is more accurate in its search for truth, rather because it can inculturate better than others which Herder has studied.

Christianity functions as an example of how religion should enable a people to function and interact within that changing world without losing its own identity.\textsuperscript{34} Herder is not biased as a Lutheran pastor evaluating the content of religion, rather he urges careful investigation of the process by which religion must continue to express the connection between language and experience.\textsuperscript{35} Herder’s admiration of Christianity is also an expression of the value he places in particular, organic religion rather than universalized religion. Christianity, evangelizing in the way Herder believes to be a rightly practiced Christianity,\textsuperscript{36} particularizes itself to reflect the\textit{Geist} of a specific people and binds them together in a community. Imposed religion, on the other hand, creates a political community that fails to unite a people genuinely because it does not express their highest ideals—the search for truth regarding sacred things.\textsuperscript{37} Religion should reflect the\textit{Geist} of the people by expressing their experience with their physical environment and the sacred in a changing and progressing world.\textsuperscript{38} Therefore, religion arises to provide a people with continual access to their national identity. Each culture must take on a religious identity compatible with their culture through organic, grass-roots maturation, thus forced conversion is

\textsuperscript{33} A people must have a firm understanding of itself or it does not have this naturally occurring urge to consider and move toward the “cosmological unity” that many Enlightenment thinkers posited.

\textsuperscript{34} This type of religion at first appears conservative but it only uses its past to propel it into the future with a strong enough identity that the fear of losing one’s identity does not harm the ongoing process of\textit{Humanität}.

\textsuperscript{35} By looking at the functionality of religions, Herder seeks to find the deeper purpose a religion serves in human society.

\textsuperscript{36} This category would include Christianity in many times and places but Herder is working with a certain conception of Christianity through much of his work. He is not blind to the often imperialistic nature of Christianity, but it is useful for him to use his ideal type of Christianity in attempting to demonstrate progress to\textit{Humanität}.

\textsuperscript{37} The political power that a religion wields does not give it a greater degree of value in Herder’s system, his focus is on function not power and control.

\textsuperscript{38} An example of how Herder balances casual determination with organic growth through religion.
A Nationalreligion is one that can express the organic connection between language and forces that determines a Volk’s experience within a changing world. National religion tracks a people’s organic development within the divine order they seek to understand and drives them to move through their national identity toward “cosmological unity.” Herder explains the complex and interdependent relationship between religion, language, and national identity, but appears to avoid determining the place of the Jewish Volk in his German nation and in Humanität itself. This is important because of his supposed role in the Romantic Nationalism that ultimately led, according to historians like Victor Klemperer, to the horrific events of twentieth century Germany.

II. HERDER THE ROMANTIC

Herder is a complex thinker whose deep work within various fields of study provokes controversy. With such a wide range of disciplines explored, scholars are unsure of how to categorize Herder within the various intellectual camps of the Aufklärung. It is because Herder’s theories are analyzed anachronistically, however, that his theories become the subject of inquiry into Germany’s development of nationalism in the post-World War II world. In the search for uncovering the causes for the rise of German chauvinistic nationalism, many turned to the supposed “father of modern nationalism” to find traces of chauvinistic national pride.

39 “Supporting Jewish emancipation, Herder sharply refused attempts of assimilating the Jewish minority” (Schick, “The humanistic origins,” 11).
40 The German Enlightenment.
41 Schick, “The humanistic origins.”
42 Richard Wolin “make[s] Herder responsible for the excesses of a completely different nationalism in the 20th century, since he allegedly justifies an attitude that cultures and nations should only stay true to themselves,” Kai Nielsen describes “Herder as some kind of counter-enlightener [who] opposes the universal ideals of enlightenment and replaces them by his claim for the superiority of national self-identity,” René Pomeau believes him to be “some ‘literary ancestor of racism’,” and Max Rouché claims “that his idea of Nationalism culminates in Nazism” (Schick, “The humanistic origins,” 5).
Of the scholars who believe Herder’s nationalism is linked with the rise of Nazism, Victor Klemperer is one of the most interesting. He claims that the Nazis deliberately yet surreptitiously integrated National Socialist ideology within the German language in such a way that it would survive, without speakers’ knowledge of it, for some time after the end of the Third Reich. Near the end of his best-known work, The Language of the Third Reich, he asks if there is “any intellectual connection between the Germans of the Age of Goethe and the people who supported Adolf Hitler.” Klemperer tries to decipher an intellectual link between the Enlightenment and his contemporary Third Reich Germany by tracing Germany’s culture, as it is reflected in language, back from the Third Reich to die Goethezeit. This question is not new—many scholars past and present have inquired whether the Third Reich was a natural development that aligned with Germany’s intellectual past or a rogue movement that did not. But, Klemperer’s approach is notable and most relevant to this study because it takes language to be the clearest link between the identity of a people and their relationship to other peoples.

Klemperer begins with the French concept of “abiding features of national character” called traits éternels as the possible key to understanding how Nazi Germany could come about. But, in the same breath Klemperer identifies “Herder, the humanitarian” as a source mentioned by “the Hitlerites” themselves. Despite Herder’s humanitarian and pluralist reputation, Klemperer believes there is a need to investigate the claims made by Nazis that Herder is a source of this particular conception of nationalism. He draws “a connection between the bestiality of Hitlerism and the Faustian excesses of classical German literature and German

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43 Klemperer was a Professor of French during WWII who was prevented from being taken to a concentration camp only because his wife was Aryan.
45 “The Goethe time,” the time of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s literary preeminence, from the 1770s to the early to mid 1800s.
46 Klemperer wishes to investigate whether “the Hitlerites” were “right when they laid claim, for example, to Herder, the humanitarian” (The Language of the Third Reich, 121).
idealist philosophy,” including Herder in the latter.\(^{47}\) Indeed Klemperer believes that Herder
encourages the German cultural trait of ‘excessiveness’\(^{48}\) so that the German people are
encouraged toward National Socialism by Herder’s enthusiasm for extreme chauvinism.

Klemperer’s theory considers how the Nazis imagined and then constructed German
society in their time, just as the thinkers of Herder’s time do. Nazis, however, imagined Germany
through race while Herder and other German Enlightenment thinkers avoided a genetic national
identity, relying instead on cultural identity. Naturally, the Romantic nation is connected to
ethnic identity but is not entirely determined by it.\(^{49}\) Klemperer believes the Nazis imagined a
Germany ‘romantically’ and thus seeks to understand the role Herder specifically plays in the
formation of the romanticized German national identity. In this search, Klemperer concludes that
had it not been for a few statements on humanitarianism, Herder could have been of even greater
use to the Nazis because of his “powerful understanding of what it meant to be German.”\(^{50}\)

Further, he holds that “the humanitarian ideal” which absolves the Romantics from blame for
Nazism, is burned through with nationalism and chauvinism.\(^{51}\) Therefore, according to
Klemperer, Herder is to blame for what is identified as the ‘excessive’ German culture that leads
to the rise of National Socialist ideology. Being “absolutely convinced that there is a strong
affinity between Nazism and German Romanticism,” Klemperer posits that Herder, as a member
of the Romantic Movement and as a founder of Romantic Nationalism, pushed Germany towards

\(^{47}\) Klemperer, *The Language of the Third Reich*, 122.

\(^{48}\) By considering the work of Wilhelm Scherer, who claims that “a lack of moderation seems to be the bane of our [German] intellectual development,” Klemperer clarifies his view of the intellectual development from *die Goethezeit to die Nazizeit* (Ibid., 122).

\(^{49}\) Klemperer posits that the shift of viewing Jews and Germans in terms of race is what drove anti-Semitic sentiment toward violence and hatred. But, he fails to see that Herder does not imagine national identity in these terms, and thus unfairly draws a connection between Herder’s views of Jews and the German nation and the intellectual basis for Nazi Germany’s efforts to eliminate Jews along with others not of the German race. With reference to Herder, Klemperer recklessly separates race, religion, and sense of nation quite distinctly when they are driven by the same national soul and are intimately connected quite complexly in Herder’s theories. The oversimplification yields a Herderian model more susceptible to anti-Jewish and extreme pride in ethnic identity that overrides the desire for equality and mutual understanding (Ibid., 125).

\(^{50}\) Ibid., 127.

\(^{51}\) Ibid., 130.
the excess of nationalistic identity more strongly than he built up a humanitarian ideal of equality and peace. This blame is based partially in his theories about the necessity of a German identity and partially in exclusivist language that can be misread as anti-Jewish rhetoric.

It is my view that Klemperer’s thesis conceives of a development to German nationalism in the Third Reich that is inconsistent with Herder’s original intent and context. First, Klemperer’s discussion of race and religion indicates that he confuses Herder’s theories by tying them to a political structure that was non-existent in Herder’s day. Furthermore, Klemperer misunderstands Herder’s basic ideas about what ‘national,’ ‘religion,’ and ‘political’ mean and how they are interrelated throughout history and into the future. The claims about Herder’s relationship to the development of this extreme exclusivist and anti-Jewish nationalism rely on isolating certain of his statements out of context and pushing them in such a way as to create the impression that Herder was a chauvinistic nationalist with anti-Jewish tendencies. The type of nationalism for which Herder is consequently blamed is not the one he conceived of in his extensive works. Rather, Herder’s interpretation of religion and its relationship to political structures and national identity present several alternative futures possible for the German Volk. Herder warned his fellow Germans of the dangers of allowing foreign influence to corrupt their culture and used historical examples such as the Jewish exile into Germany as evidence. The path to a German nation I find in Herder does not seek to eliminate linguistic or religious

52 Unlike nearby France and the new American nations, which were essentially political, Germany was non-existent as a single political or social entity. A series of duchies, kingdoms, and regions, Germany was a fragmented area broken from the 30 Years’ War. According to G.E. Lessing, “we Germans aren’t a nation yet” (“den Deutsche nein National theater zu verschaffen, da wir Deutsche noch keine Nation sind,”) and they would not be a nation for even a long time after Herder’s death (Schick, “The humanistic origins,” 2).
53 The anti-Semitic question is one that really gains relevance after WWII. At his time, he would not have been thought as either an anti-Semite or a philo-Semite, but his general opinion of Jews is best described with this terminology so as to consider how his discussion of Jews changes in a new context.
54 Typically the linguistic and cultural (poetic, dramatic, educational) influence of France on German courts.
55 Herder writes during and closely after the French Revolution, an event followed closely and often admired by German thinkers. However, Herder is weary of this French influence because he believed that it would set a series of political events into motion in what would become Germany that were not organic. Most detrimental is that the overbearing French linguistic and cultural influence further fragmented the former Holy Roman Empire and decreased the chances of its unifying into one nation with one German Nationalcharakter.
diversity, but rather to preserve it. Herder fears that Germans, too, will exile themselves by abandoning rather than developing and adapting the national identity he imagines. While his ultimate hope for the world is encapsulated within his vision of *Humanität*, it is in these warnings against foreign influence that the ground is most fertile for manipulation and misunderstanding.

III. ‘NATION’ AND ‘RELIGION’: MODERN THEORIES REFLECTING ON THE PAST

Herder’s vision of *Humanität* relies on a people understanding its own national identity along with how religion functions to solidify and promote that identity. In order for a people to move toward Herder’s utopian unity, the people must first understand the national identity that unites them and then continue to cultivate that identity. When analyzing the development of a people’s identity towards a particular type of nationalism, it is essential to understand each successive period of the development and its context. Herder wrote in a context much different from that of WWII, the period of German nationalism with which he is most often tied. Because Herder’s theory is complex, one needs a framework within which one can approach the ‘nation’ and ‘religion’ both as separate and as interconnected phenomena. In order to reinterpret Herder and an alternate path his nationalism could have taken, I will reinterpret his nationalism through political scientist Benedict Anderson’s theory of ‘nation’ and sociologist Émile Durkheim’s theory of ‘religion.’ These theorists will not prove that chauvinistic nationalism of the Third Reich is not derived from Herder, rather they may liberate Herder from certain anachronisms so that new understanding of how he sees these concepts develop and interact with one another can arise.

56 This cultivation in the grand scheme moves a nation forward but not every successive movement is an improvement that moves forward in a straight line. Rather, each organic development in a nation’s growth is different from the last in a way that enhances a people’s understanding of its own identity but each one is not undeniable progress.
A. Benedict Anderson’s Imagined Political Community

Of the scholars who dedicate themselves to defining and understanding the phenomena of nation building, Benedict Anderson is perhaps the best known. Anderson proposes first that the nation is “an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.” For many, the “imagined” component is the most innovative in Anderson’s conception because it minimizes and isolates the influence of “ethnographic’ definitions of nationhood,” in so doing; it continues a method first embraced by Ernest Renan years after the Franco-Prussian War. Accordingly, Anderson limits the role of “race, language, or culture” in the conceptualization of this phenomenon: since members of the same nation will not know every other member of the nation, they all must “live the image of their communion” and such cultural externalities illustrate this image but do not control it. In other words, we cannot understand ourselves to be in a social relationship of unity without the imagined element because communities do not exist in which “face-to-face” interaction occurs daily. Anderson realizes that cultural externalities are integral to reaffirming and developing the national identity further in the absence of daily face-to-face interaction in larger communities. Cultural externalities are not false or manufactured; rather they are important indicators of the imagined community that connect a nation to its past but do not completely determine how the nation will function.

Likewise, for Herder, these “ethnographic elements do not arrest the growth of national identity,

57 Anderson, “Imagined Communities,” in The Origins of Nationalism, 49.
58 Considering the case of German identity during the Aufklärung, Anderson’s imagining piece is especially helpful in understanding the process by which Goethezeit thinkers imagine a German culture and identity.
60 Anderson “Imagined Communities,” in The Origins, 49.
61 Ibid.
but rather guide it by expressing a people’s unique experience of their natural environment.\textsuperscript{62}
The ‘imagined’ element is not unique to Anderson,\textsuperscript{63} but he explains the idea with great clarity so as to create a new way of understanding how the nation develops without completely abandoning its cultural externalities. Anderson’s specific approach frees Herder’s theory from the fetters of the Third Reich’s manipulation of German nationalism by allowing one to understand Herder’s own efforts to imagine a German nation.

Anderson further argues that the nation is limited. Herder too, sees certain limitations to the nation due to the natural inability of ‘ethnographic’ determinants to serve all of humanity. National identity is preserved by ‘imagined’ elements and derived from a people’s unique experience, but it can only be extended so far. Herder discusses the ability of Christianity to reach across national boundaries as a “universal religion.”\textsuperscript{64} But, the religion is universal, and thus able to move towards Herder’s vision of \textit{Humanität}, only because it takes on the numerous national determinants within each nation. If a nation were not limited, this adaptive trait would not be as highly valued as it is for Herder. Anderson argues that “no nation imagines itself coterminous with mankind” and that even “the most messianic nationalists do not dream of a day when all the members of the human race will join their nation.”\textsuperscript{65} This reinforces Herder’s theory about the relationship of religion and nation: nation is a limited community while religion is an overarching phenomenon that enhances an identity.\textsuperscript{66} Anderson’s ‘limited’ quality in the formulation of the nation further illuminates Herder’s theory of nationalism by expressing

\textsuperscript{62} These ‘ethnographic’ elements therefore express the conventions a people develops as a result of their particular environment and circumstance, but not a ‘natural’ identity that excludes newcomers. Rather, one only needs to be “imagined” as part of the community as a result of their similarities in these elements or ability to use these elements to express their own identity. This is yet another example in which Herder balances casual determination with organic growth and the power of human efforts with a divine order (Schick, “The humanistic origins”).

\textsuperscript{63} Ernest Gellner and Arnold Smith are among the others who use this general idea of the ‘imagined nation.’

\textsuperscript{64} Herder, “First Dialogue Concerning National Religions,” in \textit{Against}, 104.

\textsuperscript{65} Anderson, “Imagined Communities,” in \textit{The Origins}, 50.

\textsuperscript{66} This phenomenon of religion, can threaten a national identity if it is imposed rather than taken on freely as a new and perhaps better way to express the changing experiences a people has with the sacred and other communities.
something close to Herder’s belief that nations are essentially limited although not exclusive on the basis of ethnographic determinants. It also frees one to explore Herder’s strong views against imperialism by suggesting that a nation is limited, geographically and culturally.

Lastly, Anderson argues for the nation’s “sovereignty” as it is derived from its development during the Enlightenment. He believes that the Enlightenment destroyed “the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm” when humans were “confronted with the living pluralism of…religions.” Therefore, according to Anderson, during this period nations abandoned the idea of rule from above and in the divine choice of human leaders in favor of an authority rooted in the concepts of “freedom” and existing “under God.” Herder regards as dangerous the union between political and orthodox structures, instead believing that the confrontation with living pluralism drives man to recognize the unique nature of religion. Religion works through the nation to push man toward equality not hierarchy.

Anderson’s approach to cultural elements of national identity also does not make nationalism dependent on the political state as other theorists often do, rather, he believes it is dependent upon the nation as a cultural identity. Anderson grounds the nation in an appreciation for the historical realities that help shape a people into a nation. For Anderson, “nationalism has to be understood by aligning it, not with political ideologies, but with the large cultural systems

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68 Ibid.
69 Ibid.
70 State refers to a political system that is set up to govern a people living in a particular geographical region whereas nation is the community that is identified and unified by certain cultural characteristics. Modern-day usage of ‘nation’ or ‘state’ typically refers to the nation-state, a political entity that governs on the basis of a shared culturally identity.
71 Gellner believes, like Anderson, that the Nation is imagined: “nationalism…invents nations where they do not exist.” But, he draws a clear distinction between the nation and all prior concepts of social and ethnic groupings such as ‘clan,’ ‘tribe,’ or ‘ethnicity,’ by not considering the ethnic and cultural elements of the group and considering the nation a “fabrication” and “falsity.” Anderson does not agree with Gellner’s strong opinion about the inorganic nature of the nation or how closely he ties the nation to the state, Anderson does not necessary need the link between culture and political structure (Gellner, Thought and Change 169 and Anderson, “Imagined Communities,” in The Origins of Nationalism).
that preceded it, out of which—as well as against which—it came into being.”\textsuperscript{72} Similarly, Herder’s thought is founded upon the conception of a community that develops steadily, although not always in the way one looking back through history may expect or hope it to progress.

\textit{B. Michael Burleigh on Religion and Nation throughout European History}

While many scholars develop useful conceptions of nation and of nationalism, they often neglect the importance of religion as a significant contributory factor.\textsuperscript{73} More specifically, they fail to account for the ways in which religion may foster the tendency to maintain national identity through nationalistic behavior.\textsuperscript{74} A counter-tendency is evident in the work of historian Michael Burleigh, who argues that religion plays an important role in the formation of national identity and factors prominently in the development and manifestations of nationalistic sentiment but often subsides thereafter. Referring to the many political movements of the Enlightenment and the following century—e.g., the French Revolution, the German Empire, the Third Reich, and the Bolsheviks—Burleigh claims that a common approach to gaining power was through “pseudo-religious pathologies.”\textsuperscript{75} Since religion is essential to a nation’s identity, the manipulation of such notions as ‘rebirth’ and ‘awakening’…[and] perpetual confession and remorseless search for heretics” was an important tool for those seeking to be the benefactors of a transmission of sovereignty.\textsuperscript{76} The intentional evocation of past “sacred” events affirms a nation’s current collective identity and enables these movements to wrest power away from the

\textsuperscript{72} Benedict Anderson, \textit{Imagined Communities} (New York: Verso, 2006), 52.

\textsuperscript{73} Some theorists (Ernest Gellner) put forth a theory of nation that focuses on the nation-state and its economic determinants rather than the ‘nation’ by itself as a cultural entity. However, Anderson’s theory enables one to understand better Herder’s definition of the nation with respect to religion. For someone writing during the Enlightenment about the relationship of language and religion to national identity, an economically-based definition of nation and a state-driven understanding of nationalism are anachronistic.

\textsuperscript{74} That is, behavior that functions to reassure the people of their identity, as a part of a specific community called nation.

\textsuperscript{75} Michael Burleigh, \textit{Sacred Causes: The Clash of Religion and Politics, from The Great War to The War on Terror} (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2007), xii.

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid.
people. To solidify the collective identity under a particular political leader rather than among the people, a power-seeking entity uses orthodoxy and heresy.

While Burleigh takes a mostly neutral stand with regard to the use of religion for political ends, Herder takes a stronger stance. According to Herder, political leaders whose goal it is to gain power for themselves put an end to any hope of unity and free inquiry through their exploitation of religion.\textsuperscript{77} These leaders recognize the power of and therefore preserve the “first state of zeal” that religion conceives of as an inherently communitarian phenomenon.\textsuperscript{78} This type of political leader uses the “zeal” a people feels in religious experience, which is social unity through recognition of the sacred, to fashion a new unity based on a shared history. A people does not recognize that this unity is fabricated rather than grown, that is organic, because it uses sacred elements of shared religiosity. The use of orthodoxy, a practice Herder categorically opposes, allows a political entity to divide a nation in order to unite a smaller ethnic group of people falsely through fear of difference rather than through organic social necessity. Burleigh investigates mainly the “alliance of throne and altar [that] duly broke down as the temporal power of the Churches was challenged by nation-states which vied for ultimate human loyalties,”\textsuperscript{79} a series of events Herder predicts in decrying the bond between throne and altar.\textsuperscript{80} These movements, Burleigh claims, demonstrate how certain political leaders sought to “metabolize the religious instinct” in order to unite their nation-state under their power rather than the churches’.\textsuperscript{81} Herder recognizes this during his own time\textsuperscript{82} in the actions that take place

\textsuperscript{77} These “political leaders meddle in religious matters” and cause “the end of unity and free enquiry” (Herder, “Letters Concerning…: Fiftieth Letter” in Against, 251).
\textsuperscript{78} Herder, “Letters to Theophron: Sixth Letter,” in Against, 263.
\textsuperscript{79} Burleigh, Sacred Causes, xii.
\textsuperscript{80} Herder, “First Dialogue” in Against, 105.
\textsuperscript{81} Burleigh, Sacred Causes, xiii. Examples of this parasitic relationship between religion and nation are: René Fülöp-Miller comparing the Bolsheviks to the Society of Jesus (Ibid., 75), Mussolini’s 1932 claim that “Fascism is a religious conception in which man in his immanent relationship with a superior law and with an objective Will transcends the particular individual and raises him to conscious membership of a spiritual society’’ (Ibid., 62), and Hitler who claimed he was undertaking a “moral restoration:” “The national government will regard its first and
in other nations; especially Henry VIII’s establishing the Church of England. Burleigh’s perspective, however, sheds light on Herder’s unique fear that German indifference toward their own culture will destabilize German national identity and exile them from themselves to the detriment of all nations. Extensive political and religious changes occur during the Enlightenment and every nation embraces such changes differently. It is through Burleigh’s acceptance of the events as natural that Herder’s strong opposition to such designed exploitations of religion ultimately becomes clear and valuable. The exploitation distorts religion’s natural function and therefore destabilizes rather than enhances national identity.

While helpful in explaining the political exploitation of religion at which Herder hints, Burleigh too easily dismisses the continued presence of the religious imagination in the post-modern world by indicating that it is ultimately replaced by political unity. In the geographical area that later becomes Germany, religion, in Herder’s sense does not cease to be an important part of national identity. Religion continues to be a necessary element in any nation because its socio-sacred character makes it irrereplaceable in the development and maintenance of strong civil society. Burleigh sees the use of religion for political ends as a natural part of the maturation of a people towards true national unity that has abandoned its unnecessary religious impulse. Herder imagines a much more humanistic and social ‘religion’ that is forever necessary to link humans to one another—through recognition of the shared social impulse in response to an experience of the sacred. The conclusion Burleigh comes to is at odds with Herder’s work but it also does not help account for a politico-religious group such as the Jews, whose combined social and religious structure makes religion continually relevant. Burleigh proves that religion has been important in the history of Europe, but his proposal of a parasitic relationship between political

foremost duty to restore the unity of spirit and purpose of our Volk. It will preserve and defend the foundations upon which the power of our nation rests” (Ibid., 110).

82 Before many of the examples Burleigh cites even take place.
and religious identity that ceases doesn’t make sense of what actually occurs. Durkheim and Herder provide a religion that is distinct from orthodoxy and provides a more accurate interpretation of what actually happens to religion and national identity during the Enlightenment. His final approach fails to account for a lasting social religion and thus undervalues the impact that religion, in this sense, truly has in the growing political entities of the West.

C. The Social as Religious- Émile Durkheim

In *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Émile Durkheim develops a social definition of religion:

a religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, i.e., things set apart and forbidden—beliefs and practices which unite in one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them.\(^83\)

When Durkheim uses the term “sacred things,” he has in mind the large, public concerns of the community, those that revolve around “the interests and welfare of an entire group of people.”\(^84\) Durkheim conceives of religion as a social unit, one in which a group of people develop shared experiences of a collective unity, such as the nation, in relation to sacred things.

This theory offers new possibilities for understanding Herder’s nation in terms of collective experience of the sacred. Durkheim allows us to approach the nation as a concept based not on political power and authority but rather as a collection of “ethnographic” indicators often grouped into the idea of culture\(^85\)—as “collective effervescence.” This experience is expressed most visibly through Durkheim’s unified system because these cultural facts develop along with a people and unite them as they develop similar ways of expressing and sharing their experience of the divine. This system unites people into what Durkheim calls a church by

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\(^85\) In Anderson’s terminology, this is also the shared imaginings of limitation and sovereignty.
“requir[ing] us to become its [society’s] servants, forgetting our own interests, and compel[ing] us to endure all sorts of hardships…without which social life would be impossible.”86 “Acts of worship…are not futile or meaningless gestures;” for Durkheim, they “strengthen the ties between the worshipper and his god” but, because god “is merely the symbolic expression of society,” worship actually strengthens the bond between the individual and the society.87 What Durkheim emphasizes in his theory is that “within a crowd moved by a common passion, we become susceptible to feelings and actions of which we are incapable on our own.”88 However, the common experience is not detached from the course of history because there are forces “that are fixed within all sorts of observed practices and traditions” that drive the “moral consciousness,” which in turn brings together that which is in us and that “represents something other than ourselves.”89 This process therefore determines the limits of the social group while also establishing a system of sovereignty within it.

Durkheim goes on to say that a “rush of energy coming to us from the outside” drives “revolutionary or creative epochs” such as the Crusades or the French Revolution through “general effervescence.”90 But “the outside” is not a coexistent movement, rather it is the inherited traditions of a nation that drive it toward unity. He notes, “we speak a language we have not created; we use tools we have not invented; we invoke rights we have not instituted; each generation inherits a treasure trove of knowledge it did not amass itself.”91 When the group inherits these traditions and cultural identifiers, it adapts them in a way that allows them to continue to express the spirit that drives their national character within a changing social and

87 Ibid., 171.
88 Ibid., 157.
89 Ibid., 159.
90 Ibid., 158.
91 Ibid., 159.
physical environment. Durkheim focuses preeminently on the collective experience of a clan and how the “religious force is…the collective and anonymous force of the clan.” Religion, according to Durkheim, “is above all a system of notions by which individuals imagine the society to which they belong and their obscure yet intimate relations with that society.” While he focuses on the collective, he preserves the relevance of the individual as an important part of the religious force that defines the clan or tribe as a collective imagined community, as a nation.

Many criticize this theory of religion, but the resilience of Durkheim’s hypothesis in response to these claims is clear in its value for understanding the relationship between religion and nation. Many of Durkheim’s ideas inform contemporary theories of nations and nationalism; specifically he shares the idea of an “imagined” society with Anderson, albeit with some variance. Foremost among these is that Durkheim, more fervently than Anderson, states the importance of inherited “ethnographic” features that are cultural conventions but are connected to ethnic experience. Durkheim also values language as a more significant “external reality” that enable members of the community to maintain their cerebral connection to the nation in everyday encounters.

Durkheim lays the groundwork for a conception of the nation that is certainly at odds with the fabricated view of the nation and nationalism and their relationship. Durkheim sees a deeper value and purpose in the nation, as well as a stronger connection between pre-national identity and the nation that results from nationalistic fervor that gives the nation a greater path of

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92 This is the “imagining” process that Anderson theorizes, only in terms of religion rather than political and national terms.
94 Ibid., 170-1.
95 Daniel L. Pals outlines three main critiques of Durkheim’s theory: his assumptions (applies a situation found in Australian tribal Totemism to all of human religious experience), the relevance and source of his evidence (Gaston Richard and Arnold van Gennep have harsh words about Durkheim’s theory on this specific type of critique), and reductionism (*Eight Theories of Religion*, 111-4).
97 Durkheim does not completely lose sight of the individual in the process of understanding the dynamics of the whole, he considers briefly, the role of the individual, but typically only within the context of the society.
98 Such as Ernest Gellner’s according to Anderson (“Imagined Communities”).
development and purpose. By coming together in the social and feeling the collective and
general “effervescence” of communal respect for and loyalty to a “god,” i.e. a symbolic
representation of the clan, members of a clan “are regarded as sharing the same essence.”99 “The
clan cannot be defined by its leader…[for] it is at most uncertain and unstable” and “the clan
cannot be defined by the territory it occupies,” so the group shares a “collective name…and the
equally collective emblem” or “the clan can no longer even be imagined.”100

Nationalism is then, in this theory, an organic development of the national identity that is
influenced in part by the physical environment and the leaders of a nation but ultimately
determined by the people of a nation. This expression of national identity, however, must remain
“natural” in the sense that it responds to basic human social needs that are influenced but not
completely or solely determined by the environment.101 The physical environment influences the
nation because it helps determine the symbols and practices that become sacred through the
socio-religious process. The physical environment provides a people with the experiences that
determine the means by which they come together, it determines what is sacred, but it should also
push them out to interpret the experiences of others’ concepts of the sacred.

Durkheim believes that “expressing social unity in a material form makes it more
tangible to everyone” in the group by emerging from “the conditions of common life” which
help to “clarify society’s awareness of itself.”102 This “material form” refers to the symbols of
the religion but also the actions of the society—“shouting the same cry, pronouncing the same
words, making the same gesture to the same object”—because “they become and feel as one.”103
Thus, the initial step of the clan is to unite around an object they all experience as sacred,

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99 Durkheim, Elementary Forms, 179.
100 Ibid., 177-8.
101 Durkheim, like Herder, sees a link between the land and the type of culture and nationalism a people develops but
   it is one, albeit an important one, of many determinants.
102 Ibid., 175.
103 Ibid., 175.
through language concerning that object, to develop a system of beliefs and rituals that help maintain and enhance the social experience. There is therefore, a significant link between everyday actions and experiences of the physical environment, the language developed to express that experience to others, and the conceptualization of sacred and profane. The further expressions of loyalty to this system and the sacred object at its center, through a willingness to die among other less extreme displays of devotion, become means by which individuals operate to continually reaffirm the social feeling and ensure that it does not diminish in effect for future generations.

Durkheim emphasizes language in two separate ways, “shouting the same cry, pronouncing the same words,” when explaining the way individuals act and interact in order to “feel as one.” Language is an important element for Durkheim that theorists of nation and nationalism often throw into the “ethnographic/culture” category without sufficient individual treatment. This category either becomes an understated part of the chain that helps to create the concept of nation or is altogether absent. Durkheim best identifies language as a significant part of the development of nation and of its continual value through nationalism, without allowing it to determine national identity, completely. His theory clarifies Herder’s approach so that the idea of Humanität can be understood along with the ideas of identity formation as it relates to language and religion. Anderson and Durkheim together form an intellectual framework that helps us to understand Herder’s ideas and what they imply for the world. It is from their definitions of ‘nation’ and ‘religion,’ respectively, that I approach the controversial question of Herder’s association with the development of racial theories of the nation in Germany in the 20th century.

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104 Language is an extremely important element in the study of German identity regarding Jews in the 18th and 19th centuries because it was not until this time (after hundreds of years in this region) that Jews began to speak and use German instead of Yiddish (and Hebrew on some occasions).
IV. HERDER ON ‘NATION’ AND ‘RELIGION’

Nation, according to Herder is

A great and unweeded garden full of leaves and weeds. Who would dare attending to this gathering place of fooleries and faults as well as of sublimities and virtues without distinction and...condemn other nations?...Obviously it is nature’s predisposition that, just as individuals, also generations and nations shall learn from each other...as long as finally all have learned the difficult lesson: no nation is God’s only chosen one on earth; truth has to be searched by all of them, the garden of the common best has to be built by all.105

The implications for “belonging, identity, citizenship” within Herder’s Nationalcharakter are the very beginnings of the Völker,106 the basis of Herder’s “nations,” but his unique view on its importance during such a universalizing time leads to misinterpretation of his nationalism. Awareness of this identity and growing loyalty to this Volk identity implies recognition of the ‘other’ as something foreign but equal. Political scientist Robert Reinhold Ergang claims that because Herder, in contrast to other Enlightenment thinkers, believed that emphasis on national peculiarities was the path to Humanität, his philosophy of history became “the stepping-stone between the cosmopolitanism of the eighteenth century and the nationalism of the nineteenth.”107 According to Ergang, Herder’s nationalism begins when individuals come together and “a living organic force” appears in human experience as organic units “from the chaos of homogenous matter.”108 It is through the recognition of the uniqueness of one’s group that one can escape chaos and begin to order the world around them, based on social groupings that arise organically, because of social necessity. Such a recognition is not a restricting process meant to elevate one group over another as nationalism in the nineteenth and twentieth century does; rather it is an

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105 Herder, “Letters for the Advancement of Humanity” in “The humanistic origins” (Schick) 5.
106 People, the plural of the word, Volk, that Herder uses when discussing groups of people who develop a national identity together. Therefore, Herder typically uses Volk and Nation in similar contexts in which both arise organically from the family and smaller clans or tribes that unite because of similar identities and experiences with the environment and a similar Geist.
108 Ibid. 86.
example of the natural processes of history that help human beings unearth the divine order of
the world and make sense of their place in the world. Herder very clearly identifies the need for
diversity within a nation as well as the centrality of the equality of all nations working for their
truth. These organic social units become manifest in “a body and a soul” and “the group
becomes a single being, an individuality, a personality.” This national soul moves members of
this now self-conscious single being to express its experience through national religion,
language, poetry, or literature. The expression of these national indicators, driven by Volksgeist,
is nationalism but to continue to progress as a nation should, it must develop a method of
transferring this Nationalcharakter, its identity. It is the religious component of a nation’s
character that holds within it a people’s search for truth and is therefore crucial to understanding
a nation’s need to develop and maintain its national character. Religion allows a people to
explore and interact with the sacred and this history of interaction is preserved in sacred
scripture. Herder believes that poetry, that is sacred scripture, is the best method of educating
younger generations about the past in order to progress towards his vision for Humanität, because poetry contains this search for truth in the language of those who best interpret and
express the heart and spirit of their people, the poets. Herder conceives, therefore, of a system of
education using these very sources that best understand and affirm national identity in order to
drive a nation’s youth toward peaceful interaction with other nations.

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109 The search for truth Herder identifies is related to the impulse to understand both the relationship to the unknown
and the unknowable, that is to the other peoples that are foreign and the phenomena beyond humanity’s reach.
110 Ibid. 87.
111 Herder does not mean poetry to be only sacred scripture but it is the most common example of poetry he
provides. For example, Herder, in The Spirit of Hebrew Poetry (Against, 158-174), discusses the merits of the
Hebrew scriptures as read in their original Hebrew or at least translated with a deep understanding of the Ancient
Hebrew context and the feeling these scriptures intended to transmit. Thus the poetry he mentions refers to The
Bible or other sacred scriptures depending on the context.
112 “History has known good and bad times, periods of beauty and of ugliness. But the better ones are not necessarily
the later ones, though later epochs profit from previous history” (Dupré, Intellectual Foundations, 220).
A people reacts to the experiences the environment forces on them, the physical-geographical experiences as well as the social, but it does not determine for itself how the environment will continue to interact with them.\footnote{Ergang identifies the factors that Herder explains affect the formation of unique nationalities: physical/geographical, environment, education, interactions with other nationalities and tradition (German Nationalism, 87-95).} Education is a process that the people collectively and deliberately create and maintain out of an effort to preserve their collective search for truth. If heeded properly,\footnote{That is, if a people understands its poetry as a guide that traces a people’s intellectual and cultural history and attempts to interpret a people’s major historical events in a way that resonates with the people, by successfully speaking through the Volksgeist.} this poetic education drives a people toward progress\footnote{Progress being the growth of all elements of the garden, neither the weeding that removes essential parts that enrich the national character toward a peaceful search for truth, nor the overtaking of flowers by the weeds that does likewise. The history Herder sees is a human history within the larger natural history of the universe that “follows a meaningful course…its completion is both ideal and a reality in progress” (Dupré, Intellectual Foundations, 221).} within their particular geographical environment and Volksgeist and tradition are the living outcomes of this educational endeavor.

The humanist love of education reaches back to the Renaissance program studia humanitatis, itself a derivative of the Greek παιδεια (paideia) program.\footnote{These programs were designed not as Humanist projects (this term arises only in later history when Friedrich Immanuel Niethammer invents this term) but as projects that enable the imitation of great intellectuals and poets from times past. In the case of the Renaissance, the practice was driven by a desire to imitate “the world of the Greeks and the Romans…something alien” in order to find “the specific immutability of men’s nature” (Schick, “The humanistic origins,” 6).} Rooted in these programs is a desire to find man’s nature by seeking out and translating into one’s own world and experience, the thoughts and culture of a strange and alien people. It is through investigation of something unfamiliar that humanity can begin to see the similarities that lie beneath and are amplified by cultural differences. This investigation also reveals for a people how diversity within a nation enriches an interpretation of the divine order of the world. Each nation, as its identity is formed becomes drawn to a process that creates a transnational moral community through diversity of interpretation of what is moral.\footnote{“All civilizations, however imperfect, have their place in a process that irresistibly moves toward a universal, moral community” and thus “Humanität…is at once a norm of action, an ideal of moral development, a construction of historical perspective, and a world-historical process” (Dupré, Intellectual Foundations, 221).}
communities, a nation often turns to that community’s poetry, because it is here that communities preserve the most important cultural moments. The Italians studied Greek and Roman poetry in order to find this nature in light of the differences between man and animal. Herder is the “New Humanist” who carries on this tradition by making an educational program the central piece of his humanism in the Aufklärung. Man encounters various physical and social experiences that determine his humanity but this determinacy is limited. Unlike animals, man must work towards his humanity consciously and conscientiously. In doing so, man is not limited to his own tradition and environment. One can, as the Humanists do, reach out by acquiring other languages to learn about other nations in other places and times, to discover their answers to the questions that drive them towards humanity. Poetry holds a nation’s tradition, morals, and history and yet still encourages transnational interaction by hinting at a greater unity that is possible beyond the nation. Herder believes that progress is not possible without this next step in the process of the Erziehung because it pushes human beings out of the “enclosed…narrow sphere of their own language.” This process ensures that man is not trapped in his own ‘nature,’ but rather can escape these bounds by understanding and appreciating the links of the Kette der Bildung because they tell his story.

118 These moments are not just military events, but rather events that reflect the communities’ moral values as a reflection of their encounters with the sacred.
119 “Our admiration of [and identification with] this miraculous animal [the chameleon] has its reason in the fact that the way in which man had to lead his life is not determined by his very nature. In contrast, all other living beings are forced by their nature to a certain and predetermined way of being…man always has to hold a certain reflected distance to his actual mode of being…he is not only living, but has to lead his life.” (Schick, “The humanistic origins,” 7).
119 Ibid., 8.
120 “The divine in our human race, therefore, is education towards humanity […]. The education towards it is a work that has to proceed without ceasing otherwise, we descend back into raw bestiality, back into brutality” (Herder, “Letters for the Advancement of Humanity” in “The humanistic origins,” 8.
122 ‘Education.’
124 Kette der Bildung in Herder’s usage typically refers to the ‘chain of education’ by which a culture passes on its experiences, language, morals, history, and religion to younger generations both consciously and subconsciously.
Language unites humans in groups Herder calls “nations” that share common experience and, over time, a common goldene Kette der Bildung.\textsuperscript{126} This educational program consolidates the external and internal realities of several individuals and groups over many years in order to build a common identity and communal standards. Language is the tool that unites people within this group because it inclines people to engage in dialogue and form the Kette der Bildung collectively. This chain forms the basis of one’s understanding of himself and his world. His identity forms through the linguistic communication in the Kette as his language, his history, and his religion become central to his acting in his environment.

The process of passing down customs, information, and language through the Kette is a sacred process, by Durkheimian standards, because these are values of the public. It does not focus its efforts on daily functions of no consequence to the community, instead the Kette informs young members of the community of the standards of the community, and points to the “collective effervescence” of the community’s relation to the divine order of the world. The Kette is itself a process of sacral-ization because it “force[s] [one] to submit to rules of thought and behavior that we have neither devised nor desired, and that are sometimes even contrary to our most basic inclinations and instincts” for the benefit of the communal “social life.”\textsuperscript{127} In other words, Herder’s understanding of how humans progress over time through language further expresses social behavior that functions in Durkheim’s sphere of the sacred. The process is complicated however because “society can exist only in individual minds and through them, it must penetrate and become organized inside us; it becomes an integral part of our being, and in so doing it elevates and enlarges that being.”\textsuperscript{128}

\textsuperscript{126} ‘Golden chain of education.’
\textsuperscript{127} Durkheim, \textit{Elementary Forms}, 154-5.
\textsuperscript{128} Ibid. 157.
of “collective force” and categorize it in our minds, allowing us to interpret the passion “which we are incapable” of experiencing in individuality within the sacred.\textsuperscript{129}

Religion understood as the sacred in this sense is the central piece of the education process that informs a people of their place in the moral order of the universal alongside other peoples and pushes this people to seek to understand other peoples that are therefore equal to them. “Religion is the highest expression of our humanity,” according to Herder, and in accordance with the diversity in Nationalcharakter across time and region, “even the deity…spoke and acted among us in human terms and in a way that was appropriate to each particular period in time.”\textsuperscript{130} Any community only exists, according to Durkheim, as long as it feels “the need at regular intervals to sustain and reaffirm the collective feelings and ideas that constitute its unity and its personality.”\textsuperscript{131} In order to fulfill this need, which enables a nation to survive, a human process of moral education reflects the social and moral characteristics of religion.\textsuperscript{132} This reaffirming of national/collective identity through education about a community’s past is a passive form of nationalism: it uses national poetry, religion, literature, and history to reaffirm a people’s identity relative to others imagined to be a part of that community as well as those foreign to it. Religion has the ability to use the social impulse to unite distinct communities into one nation, which sees itself within the global garden Herder imagines. For Herder, divinity wants to reveal itself, but humans “know no form superior to our own, and those things that move us and make us human have to be thought and felt in human terms.”\textsuperscript{133} Divinity therefore comes to humans in a form that matches the development of their national identity based on the determinants of national character. For example, “nations that

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{129} Ibid. 157.
\item \textsuperscript{130} Herder, “Ideas Toward a Philosophy of History,” in Against, 85.
\item \textsuperscript{131} Durkheim, Elementary Forms, 322.
\item \textsuperscript{132} “This moral remaking can be achieved only by means of meetings, assemblies, or congregations in which individuals, brought into close contact, reaffirm in common their common feelings” (Ibid., 322).
\item \textsuperscript{133} Herder, “Ideas Toward,” in Against, 85.
\end{itemize}
thought in more sensual terms exalted the human form to divine beauty; other nations that
thought in more abstract terms represented the ideal attributes of what is invisible by means of
visible symbols.” 134 Likewise, Durkheim proposes that this process does not have to be
“properly religious ceremonies,” but rather any social moment that brings a community together
in order to celebrate historical and sacred moments from the past. 135 All humans are equal
because all are created in the image of God, but they are not all the same because individuals
react to the world and the divine differently. When individuals make the move to share their
individual experience, they develop a specific vocabulary to explain and share the experience of
the sacred with others for whom the vocabulary can likewise express their experience. Religion
is the essentially collective and organic system of responding to a nation’s experience of a
sacred. However, religion is utterly human because it is about human communities’ efforts to
explain their collective experience in the world that involves a concept of something beyond
their reach. Herder emphasizes throughout his work that religion is not caused by an external
object and that while it is diverse in its forms of practice and belief, it exists in all peoples
everywhere. Religion grows with the emerging identity of a nation and affirms its humanity
through the particular experiences that distinguish that nation. Religion holds within it both the
universalism of human experience of a self-revealing divinity and the particularism of the
method of revelation, which corresponds to a peoples’ distinct experience of the world around
them.

134 Ibid.
135 “What essential difference is there between an assembly of Christians commemorating the principal moments in
the life of Christ, or Jews celebrating either the exodus from Egypt or the giving of the ten commandments, and a
meeting of citizens commemorating the institution of a new moral charter or some great event in national life?”
(Durkheim, Elementary Forms, 322).
As a people develops a way of talking about their experience of the sacred in their environment, their language becomes sacred and an important element in their identity.\(^{136}\) As a major component of the educational program of Herder’s “new Humanist’ thought, religion functions not only as a symbol of the national character but also as a system of action. Herder’s vision of *Humanität* is one that leads all nations towards a unified moral community\(^{137}\) and each particular religion enunciates certain moral expectations for its *Volk*. As a cross-national phenomenon, religion functions to preserve the existing *Nationalcharakter* and build it towards a moral community—it drives progress. But, through the progress of history religion also becomes integrated into the political structures as a source of power through identity politics.

**V. HERDER’S GERMANY**

Enlightenment Germany was a diverse collection of political entities, socio-economically, religiously, and linguistically. Other European nations were religiously diverse at this moment in history, but Germany bears an especially unique circumstance because of its varying levels of fragmentation—religious and political. The courts of many dukes and noblemen in the fallen Holy Roman Empire, including that of Fredrick the Great, used French as the official court language. Likewise, Latin remained the official language of the Catholic churches across Germany while Lutheran and Reformed Churches used German and Jews used Hebrew, German, or Yiddish.\(^{138}\) This division in the language used to experience or discuss the sacred produced confusing and overlapping linguistic boundaries for German Catholics as well as between Catholics and non-Catholics. While the sacred became a part of the social experience of everyday life for many Protestants and Jews through the German language, German remained

\(^{136}\) Language becomes linked to religion through sacred language because it also allows a people to share experience and belief in sacred truths across generations and national boundaries.

\(^{137}\) Dupré, *Intellectual Foundations*, 221.

\(^{138}\) Jews in this geographical region did not begin to speak German until sometime during Herder’s lifetime, instead using Yiddish aside from Hebrew in religious holidays, events, celebrations, or prayers.
profane for most Catholics. Some regions and territories were more religiously homogenous than others were and with this came the necessity for political structures to become more secular. Great economic disparities between “Germans” even within the same physical locale, political territory, linguistic group, or religious structure further divided these vast collections of people. These divisions, coupled with little or no civil societal structure, resulted in a people exiled from itself. With such multi-layered fragmentation, the people of this region began to lose their connections to the cultural externalities that drove their progress toward nationhood and Humanität. By losing the cultural elements of religion and language, which explain a people’s relationship to the land as a continual movement through history, this exile makes possible a fabrication of cultural identity to replace the lost expression of their experience of the divine.

Among the various pieces of this dispersed empire, few things united the people beyond imposed political structures. However, moving out of the eighteenth century, the growing standard of language used to share everyday experiences began to rebuild the exiled Germans. The vernacular translation of the Bible by Martin Luther and Johannes Gutenberg’s subsequent invention of the printing press enabled mass production and distribution of this translation to all parts of the former empire. The Luther translation united a people divided by doctrinal and political structures through a standardizing influence in the German language itself. As people encounter the translation and begin to incorporate its language into everyday encounters with others, a more unified German language begins to enable Germans to share their experience of the world with a larger audience. Soon thereafter, the increased accessibility and use of this sacred poetry and history, the Bible, ensured the German language was uniquely embedded in the people’s hearts and minds. The people’s connection to the Bible, however varied doctrinally, unified the people through a new standard language. But it was because of the organic development and social capabilities facilitated by the shared German language that the Bible was
able to unite this eclectic group of peoples by transcending socio-economic, religious, and geographical differences.

Because of the many intellectual and political events that transpired during this time, religion is often overlooked as a significant factor in understanding the development of nation and nationalism among the fragmented Germanic duchies and cities. Durkheim argues out of the example of “Christianity, at least in its Catholic form,” that “religion cannot…be reduced to a single cult but consists of a system of cults that have a certain autonomy.”\(^{139}\) The idea that “religion is not necessarily contained in a single and consistent idea, and cannot be reduced to a unique principle…it is a whole formed from distinct and relatively individualized parts” helps explain the religious diversity in Germany.\(^{140}\) In particular, Durkheim’s view of religion clarifies the collective value and influence of what we designate as separate “religions” to join as one whole.\(^{141}\) But, in order to understand religion’s role in Enlightenment Germany and its connection to nation, one must understand language as a cultural fact that joins the two and holds them together.

A. Herder’s ‘Treatise on the Origin of Language’ in the German Context

In his Treatise on the Origin of Language, Herder examines the rise of language in human beings as opposed to its lack of development in animals. He argues that “the powers of the human soul embrace the whole world” while animals experience a smaller world.\(^{142}\) It thus proceeds that “the smaller the sphere of the animals, the less is their need for language.”\(^{143}\) The larger the sphere in which an animal exists, the more it has a need for language and because

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\(^{139}\) Elementary Forms, p. 40.

\(^{140}\) Ibid.

\(^{141}\) Ibid.


\(^{143}\) Ibid.
humans experience the entire world, it has the greatest need for language.\textsuperscript{144} That is, their development of language must be “appropriate to the sphere of its need and its activities, to the organization of the sense, to the direction of its conceptions, and to the strength of its desires.”\textsuperscript{145} For Herder, the skill of linguistic communication is not one of “nature” or instinct, it is developed out of the necessity experienced in freedom. It is unique to humans because animals are bound by instinct while humans experience a freedom tempered but not entirely determined by their physical environments. In this freedom, Herder continues, humans have Besonnenheit, reflective discernment, and so they invent and develop language as a way to better reflect upon their being and their actions. For animals, “senses overpower, and the instincts overwhelm” when they see another being or object while for humans, “the reflective soul searches for a distinguishing mark” in an object.\textsuperscript{146} In essence, language is created by humans out of free, independent conscious reflection on the world in which man exists not out of “cries of emotion” or instinct.\textsuperscript{147} For Herder, language is an organic representation of man’s experience with his environment and his need to reflect on himself, in relation to the sacred and to other humans.

The relevance of this theory to religion and nation begins in Herder’s claim that ratio et oratio, ‘reason and speech,’\textsuperscript{148} are dependent upon one another; thinking and language coexist and one cannot presuppose the other. Language is the “external distinguishing character of our species” while reason is our “internal one.”\textsuperscript{149} In his experience of the world, language becomes a way for man to interpret and receive “divine instruction,” for which language and reason are

\textsuperscript{144} This is especially meaningful to Europeans during the eighteenth and nineteenth century, when they were able to explore and investigate more and more of the world in a variety of ways previously unavailable to them.
\textsuperscript{145} Ibid., 67.
\textsuperscript{146} Ibid., 72.
\textsuperscript{147} Ibid., 74.
\textsuperscript{148} Herder also references the Greek word αλογος (alogos) later in discussing this point. He does so to consider how the negation of alogos means both “without language” and “without reason,” proving to Herder than Near Eastern societies viewed reason and language as the same (Ibid., 76). In this argument, Herder shows that reason and language are of the same idea for all ancient Near East societies; they believed the two to be completely dependent on one another and therefore they share the same word. This identifies them and explains them best because they cannot be separated within the human experience.
\textsuperscript{149} Ibid., 76.
both required. But, “God did not in any way invent any language for human beings…[humans] have always invented language themselves by means of their own powers, albeit under a superior guidance.” If humans had received language from God, they would never have learned how to use reason for they would have been merely “parrots”—repeating without thinking. As parrots, repeating without thinking, there would be no personal reflection, therefore no social impulse, and thus no progress towards a flourishing garden. Herder conceives of the development of language occurring completely in the human sphere without interference from God but within a general divinely inspired order. Man, unable to reach beyond his own sphere of existence, recognizes that the struggle he faces in trying to make sense of his circumstance requires some sort of social action. When man reaches out of his individuality, he seeks to better understand the sacred by placing his experience in the context of others’ experience. Together, a new sacred is formed out of human necessity for a divine order driving chaos towards order. However, the move to the sacred occurs by human choice not by forced divine action. Religion is the organic result that arises out of the invention and unconscious development of language. It develops because the new access to reason, drives man to understand the environment around him through reflection on himself and on other humans.

Lastly, Herder believes that this “new, self-made sense of the human mind…constitutes a means of relationship” because the inclination to develop a dialogue when one has language is immediate. Herder then develops four “principal laws of human nature and of the human race” to expand on this idea:

1. Human beings are free-thinking and active beings whose powers operate in a continuous progression. This is why they are creatures of language…

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150 Ibid., 75.
151 Ibid., 75.
152 Ibid., 76.
153 Ibid., 76.
2. Humans beings are by nature gregarious, social creatures. It is therefore natural, essential, and necessary for them that their language continuously develop…

3. Just as it was impossible for the entire human race to remain as one homogenous group, it was impossible for the race to retain one language. There followed, then, the formation of diverse national languages…

4. In all probability the human race constitutes one progressive whole that stems from one source and forms one vast household. The same can be said about all languages and about the entire change of human development [Kette der Bildung]…

Herder believes that humans are meant to be in relationship with one another and this relationship grows into communities out of families. This growth is evident in the chain, which is a method of education based in the developing religious life of a community reaching for truth. He argues that those vocal communication-based relationships grow out of one household but that language is limited in its potential and practical reach because these diverse national languages form in response to groups’ particular needs and experiences. Therefore, nations form as a result of the limited nature of language; one can only be in relation with a limited number of people and share the same Kette der Bildung to variable but limited lengths. Herder’s treatment of language demonstrates the organic but inventive character of human development from individual internal and external experience to social relationships based on the need to share one’s experience of the world with others.

B. Language and National Identity in Exile

For communities or peoples in exile, the sacred experience of community, the “collective force,” is diminished or lost. Sacred language preserves the “collective effervescence” for these nations because it separates, linguistically and thus socially, their experience of the everyday world in a foreign culture from the religious or sacred experience of their own culture. This is why “exilic nationalism is found among many immigrant groups, particularly where religion and distinctive linguistic use are united” like Ancient Hebrew for Jews, a phenomenon with which

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154 Ibid., 77.
Herder is very interested.\textsuperscript{155} Benedict Anderson claims that the nation is an “imagined community” but Llywelyn rightly points out that “nationality…is not only imagined and invented,” that it grows organically from some deeper sense of identity within a particular group of people and that is has real externalities.\textsuperscript{156} To the degree that many religious groups identify themselves in terms of a larger body of people i.e., Judaism and the \textit{qahal Yahweh}, Christianity and the \textit{ekklesia}, and Islam and the \textit{Ummah}, Llywelyn argues that this indicates “a conviction that human individual identity is more fully realized…within and through the larger body.”\textsuperscript{157}

Therefore, nationality is linked to an individual presence within the larger, sacred society. After the initial human invention of language, one no longer invents a nation and imagines oneself within it out of social necessity, one is born within a nation defined by several real externalities that express the uniqueness of a specific group of people. The concept of nation was not created consciously in order to give man an identity, rather it is the result of a particular group’s coming into contact with a group or natural phenomenon that is other and needing a framework with which to understand itself. The identity of a nation is present in its language and its religion but it only needs to call it a nation when it experiences another that is similar in biological elements to the human species but different in language and religion. Especially in exilic situations, the process of preserving these externalities that define the nation\textsuperscript{158} become very obvious forms of nationalism. The active preservation and affirmation of these sacred cultural facts maintain the religious and social uniqueness of the group through practice and thought.

When Herder’s work is analyzed within a theoretical framework that allows for an interpretation of history accounting for the organic confluence of religion, language, and national identity to form a nation, Herder departs from the developmental trajectory of German

\textsuperscript{155} Dorian Llywelyn, \textit{Toward a Catholic Theology of Nationality} (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010), 54.
\textsuperscript{156} Ibid., 57.
\textsuperscript{157} Ibid., 63.
\textsuperscript{158} Sacred language and sacred customs.
nationalism, as it is commonly understood. Using Durkheim to understand the implications of \textit{Humanit"at} within late eighteenth century Germany, the organic, peaceful, and self-reflective qualities of nationalism become clear. Instead of the “culture of excess” which allegedly led to two world wars, Herder has a vision of the world that is based in the need and desire to relate to one another about our own experiences with the physical world around us. The aggressive, elitist culture of extreme German Nationalism in the early twentieth century is a break from, not a continuation of, Herder’s vision. Herder did not believe there would be an absence of conflict, but he did insist that through peaceful understanding and equality, diversity would drive men toward his vision of \textit{Humanit"at}; unity within each national garden and the larger Garden of Nations.\footnote{A metaphor used often by Herder to describe his hope of a peaceful world of distinct but equal nations, it is mentioned throughout his works but perhaps most expanded upon in \textit{First Dialogue Concerning Religion} p. 105 in \textit{Against} and in the \textit{Letters for the Advancement of Humanity} p. 5 in “The humanistic origins.”} In exilic situations, nations are able to engage in nationalism through preservation of sacred language that allows a distinct, but non-aggressive, means of communication within the group in contrast to the other. Each nation would likewise preserve its national identity, not through destruction or occupation, but rather through social exchange of shared notions of the sacred and of man’s relation to the divine order of the world. Exiled peoples, however, are at a greater risk of diverging from the organic development of their national identity. As their identity begins to slip away in a foreign land, inexplicable by their \textit{Kette}, they seek more intentional and often fabricated methods of retaining their identity. This stifles their growth as a people within a new nation, invites aggression from their host peoples, and alienates a people such that their social impulse is negated and they turn inward. Herder often speaks of these peaceful visions, but it is the harsh, seemingly extreme nationalist passages that cause consternation for anyone seeking to understand Herder’s link to German Nationalism after his death.\footnote{Such passages (Herder, “Conclusions,” p. 142, “First Dialogue Concerning National Religions,” p. 102, “Concerning the Divinity and Use of the Bible (Romans15:4-13): Part One,” p. 206 in \textit{Against}) would be those...}
VI. Herder and German Jews

There is no doubt among German Nationalists or modern scholars that Herder dealt extensively with the “age-old problem of Jewish existence.” As F.M. Barnard explains, references to the Jews can be found scattered throughout many of Herder’s works in addition to the more systematic treatment that he gave in his investigations into the origins of language and literature, and his more specifically theological and historical writings. Further, “few non-Jews have revealed as deep an insight into the riddle of Israel’s continued existence, or derived as much inspiration from it as” has Herder. Despite Barnard’s claim that Herder reveals deep insight into the “continued existence” of Israel, few of Herder’s “references” and insight are clear on the modern Jewish ‘question.’ Instead, Herder appears to seek to understand mostly ancient Jews and their ties to the ancient Hebraic language and the religion that it expressed and sustained. But as Barnard indicates, it is through the knowledge that Herder’s work with ancient Jews reveals that his opinions about and solutions for an exiled modern Israel can be unearthed. For Herder, the study of the Jewish people “came to represent…an event of the greatest possible significance in the history of mankind, a phenomenon that was as unique in the realm of nature as it was in the annals of political endeavor” and had implications beyond one people. Likewise, their scripture “was not merely intended for…spiritual edification [rather] it was a human and historical document” that was of the utmost importance for studying this people and the event so crucial to the history of mankind that they represented. Although Herder was a Lutheran pastor, he views religion and sacred scripture in terms of their significance on the human plane of existence much like Durkheim.

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chastising Germans for valuing French drama, literature, and language over the German and those that highlight the need for Germans to affirm their own identity through German language, literature, and especially poetry.

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162 Ibid.
164 The people Israel.
165 Ibid.
Bible is a document that contains poetry in response to beliefs about a sacred beyond that exemplifies the socializing process of various groups of people in different ways throughout history. The Jewish history and religion, and the poetry that links these cultural facts to their modern status as a people, are the primary ways Herder seeks to understand the ‘nation.’ The “father of modern nationalism,” then is a humanist whose nationalism leads to his peaceful ideal: Humanität.

Herder does not intend for his nationalism to be used to create a chauvinistic nation such as Nazi Germany, but his words are not impervious to nefarious use. Indeed, his words develop romantic nationalism, but a humanistic theory of nationalism based in religion\textsuperscript{166} offers an alternate path to the building of a German national character that is like a garden full of diverse plants. Herder’s writings indeed allow for the development of a system of beliefs that grows out of romanticized visions of a shared past to authenticate the existence of a particular nation, make the nation distinct and limited, and cultivate feelings such as pride and unity that can become wicked, parasitic nationalism.

As a social group continues to expand, it encounters various other cultures with different languages, religions, poetry, and opinions, which are all shaped by a different physical environment and historical events. As Herder explains this progress in history,

\begin{quote}
    nations migrate; languages mix with other languages and change, human beings come into contact with new things; their tendencies assume different directions, their strivings take on different purposes; new archetypes influence the structure of their images and ideas; even that tiny part of the body, the tongue, moves differently, and the ear becomes accustomed to new sounds…poetry assumes different forms not only among diverse nations but also within one people.\textsuperscript{167}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{166} Religion illustrates a people’s changing collective identity through time, provides collectively determined moral structures, and explains the way nationalism, as an expression of difference, should lead a people toward peace and equality.

\textsuperscript{167} Herder “Conclusions Drawn from the Comparison of the Poetry of Diverse Peoples of Ancient and Modern Times,” in Against, 141.
According to Anderson’s theory, the nation is limited to certain linguistic and cultural constraints that vary due to physical environments and a people’s growth within and interaction with that environment. Therefore, these constraints are not the same for every nation. In response to the experience of this ‘other’ or many ‘others,’ a group begins to define itself more vigorously for the very preservation of itself as a culture. It must preserve itself as a culture, society, tribe, or in the modern era, a nation, which has a unique bond with its history and Kette. This bond explains how humans respond to particular environmental phenomenon and circumstances.

Durkheim explains how societies, tribes, or groups have a totem, derived from their environment, that symbolizes the entire group. It makes an “imagined community” a reality by giving it some physical representation to rally around and to provide participants with certainty in their existence together. But nations move, as Herder observes, and other events influence a nation’s identity over time. A nation relies on imaginings of the shared past recorded in poetry that track the development of this community through time to its present moment.

Under increasing threats to national solidarity and intersection with religious movements, nationalism grows in response to the need to define oneself constantly, within a larger group, in the face of some group perceived of as ‘other.’ I return to the Protestant Reformation in order to demonstrate how Herder’s relationship to German confessionalism further informs how Herder envisions the relationship between nation and religion in Germany. Due in part to the Protestant Reformation, nationalism developed across Europe “in three ways: by generating new modes of imagining and constructing social and political relationships, promoting literacy in and standardization of vernacular languages, and bringing polity and culture into a tighter alignment.”168 After a people secures its identity as well as the limits of that identity, a religious event provides this people with the opportunity to experiment with “new models of political

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community.” The Protestant Reformation in Germany, for example, provided “egalitarian potential” that opened new avenues of community for a fragmented people. This egalitarianism sparked new social and political organization by means of the “notion of the priesthood of all believers; the individualism involved in the emphasis on the direct study of scripture; and the direct and unmediated relationship between individuals and God.” Because of its effect on the political structure of Germany, the “confessionalization” which involved Catholic, Lutheran, and Calvinist churches “involved the fusion of politics and religion through the emergence of territorial churches that were subordinated…to secular political control.” Herder fears this very process when he cautions, “look what became of Henry VIII’s Church of England, and look what became of every other exclusive church…they rot as they live.” He warned against the oligarchic and exclusivist idea of a national religion being controlled by a government whether one ruler or many. Herder believed that “national” implied not a top-down institutionalized system of control but rather, as I have repeatedly noted, a living and organic social development. According to him, “Luther wanted to give religion to his German people—the pure, free religion of the conscientiousness of mind and heart.” Like language and the development of national identity, religion grows as a support and expression of national identity because it expresses a particular peoples’ response to the world around them as they develop this “sense of ‘awe before the gods, sacred commitment’,” religion. But, because of religion’s close bond to national identity, secular authorities use religion to direct “a distinctive organization of sameness…cultural [and religious] homogeneity within political units,” to create

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169 Ibid.
170 Ibid.
171 Ibid.
172 Ibid., 9. Despite the results of the Reformation, Luther had no intention of causing such political shifts.
174 Ibid.
175 Ibid., 101.
nationalism by “plac[ing] religion ‘in a competitive, comparative field’.”¹⁷⁶ The
confessionalization of religion, its competitive pluralistic development, breaks up the ideal of
one vast Christendom and replaces it with “a world of distinct, bounded nations” whose religious
homogeneity now determined the survival of a nation by setting a new standard of identity and
foreignness. The German people moved closer to the ideal national garden of diversity with
Luther’s Reformation. Herder feared the very moves made shortly after these developments by
political secular authorities to capitalize on the power of religion and vitiate its liberating
potential. The nationalism Herder develops as a step toward Humanität is stifled by this political
move although he is given credit for the very nationalism that destroyed his beloved ideal. It is
thus in this vein that extreme nationalists misinterpret and actually work against Herder’s
theories and hopes.

Some scholars have observed that “the racial theorists liked to link themselves with
famous persons of the German past…to have their authorities taken from the most brilliant
period of German spiritual culture in the late eighteenth and beginning nineteenth century.”¹⁷⁷ It
is necessary to link the present nation with a peoples’ past, to live out the development of a
nation from a group of people to its present state. For example, a racist and pan-Germanic
author¹⁷⁸ even “refers repeatedly to Herder as an authority on anti-Jewish feeling” because
Herder, despite “‘his outspoken humanism’, “¹⁷⁹ believes that Jews allowed their language and
culture to become überfremdet, ‘overly foreign.’¹⁸⁰ Herder does often speak of the corruption of
the German Volk because of foreign influence and claims that “any secondary, foreign, and
fashionable language of the ruling class is hypocrisy, deception, falsehood” because it cannot

¹⁷⁶ Brubaker, Four Approaches, 10.
¹⁷⁸ Houston S. Chamberlain.
¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 3.
¹⁸⁰ From über most often, and here, meaning ‘over(ly)’ and fremd meaning ‘foreign’ or ‘alien’—thus this adjective
implies a state of cultural and linguistic degeneration that is overrun with foreignness so that is has little value in and
of itself.
convey the *Volksgeist*.\textsuperscript{181} Specifically, Herder refers to modern Jews as “*ein fremdes Asiatisches Volk*”\textsuperscript{182} and counts them in with the Roma and the Sinti; groups which he criticized because they “wander all over Europe…[and] are not organically bound to a specific land, and thus lack the organic integrity, the *Sittlichkeit*\textsuperscript{183} of other inhabitants of Europe.”\textsuperscript{184} Out of context, this language does exactly what extreme chauvinistic nationalists want it to do.

Herder’s language is often understood as harsh criticism of modern European Jews, and thus is used as part of the foundation of anti-Semitic movements and ideologies. Yet, it is clear that Herder dedicates much time and effort to understanding and identifying with this race and religion, which he seems to devalue.\textsuperscript{185} Investigation into Herder’s comments and opinions regarding Jews and Judaism reveals harsh language indeed, but only as an indication that Jews are victims of corruption of their culture because of the “many wrongs…inflicted [up]on the Jews” by Gentiles. It is evidence of Herder’s efforts to demonstrate to Jews and non-Jews the severity of this inorganic corruption for all of humanity and the cultural, religious, and ultimately political unrest this generates. But, these quotations are not merely out of their literary and theoretical context, they go against Herder’s very historical context and the care he takes in studying the development of a *Volk* into a *Nation* and the interrelation of religion, language, and political and social organization. Herder made efforts to better understand the Jews, both ancient and modern, to seek a path to the *Humanität* he so desired in the Germanic lands and the world.

\textsuperscript{181} Herder, “First Dialogue” in *Against*, 102.
\textsuperscript{183} ‘morality’ from the word *Sitten* meaning ‘conventions, manners, or morals’—it implies more than a codified morality, but also a shared socialized system of mannerisms and social interaction principles.
\textsuperscript{184} Ibid., 71.
\textsuperscript{185} Such indications of personal and professional attachment to the fair study of Jews and Judaism include: the great influence of his great mentor Johann Gottfried Hamann and his close professional and personal ties with the great Haskalah leader, Moses Mendelssohn. “Mendelssohn clearly recognized and greatly admired Herder’s ability of self-identification with the experience of other people in different periods of history, of penetrating into the spirit of historical events” and likewise, Herder “had great admiration for Mendelssohn” (Barnard, *The Hebrews*, 534).
For many scholars looking at Herder’s work, this “Jewish question…was not at heart a religious, but a national and political issue” and thus “required a political solution.”\(^{186}\) However, the political situation exists only because of the religious reality that proves to a foreign people and the host people that a difference exists, which is incommensurable within the same geographical region if self-identity has been weakened in some way. The Enlightenment sought to overcome this difference with universally applied values, a practice Herder thought was a new cultural version of imperialism that oversimplified and undervalued the vast differences in humanity. Despite his ideas about Christianity as the “dew” that reaches nations at their heart, through their language, he “rejected categorically” the conversion of Jews to Christianity—it was “as futile as it was presumptuous.”\(^{187}\) Christianity was a ‘dew’ because in German religious history, Christianity took many forms that, for Herder, express different but equally valuable elements that make up the German national character. If Jews converted to Christianity they would lose their sacred language altogether, that which ties them despite physical distance, to their sacred national center and the garden would be without a necessary component. While he was a thinker of the Enlightenment, he also believed that toleration of Jews\(^ {188}\) would work as a political solution only if a distinction was made between their “emancipation and complete assimilation.”\(^ {189}\) Herder believes that “the decline of Hebrew nationhood” derives from “the fact that the Jewish people was not able to attain maturity in its ‘political culture’ in its own land.”\(^ {190}\) Herder thus argues that the solution lies in the ability of the Jewish people to “regain their self-respect, their honour, their own true national character.”\(^ {191}\) Herder turns to the ancient Hebrews because he realizes the need to distinguish traits, ideas, and responses to the physical

\(^{186}\) Ibid.
\(^{187}\) Ibid.
\(^{188}\) Sentiments shared mostly by Montesquieu, Voltaire, Mendelssohn, and Lessing.
\(^{189}\) Ibid.
\(^{190}\) Ibid., 345.
\(^{191}\) Ibid., 534.
environment that are “indigenous”\textsuperscript{192} to the Jewish \textit{Volk} and those which “were forced upon the Jews by a hostile environment.”\textsuperscript{193} As a “\textit{fremdes asiatisches Volk},” wandering through Europe, the Jews’ culture was corrupted more and more while \textit{Humanität} as a whole suffered.\textsuperscript{194} Conversion is not a viable solution for Herder because it would eliminate the Jewish \textit{Volk}, something Herder absolutely does not want. Herder does not want this because the improvement of the world towards Herder’s vision of \textit{Humanität} depends upon the successful development of each \textit{Nation} towards its ‘political culture.’ Even more importantly, Herder values the ancient Hebrew \textit{Nation} in particular because it demonstrates closer ties to common man and the ordinary experience with the physical environment and reactions to historical events.\textsuperscript{195} As Herder explains the progress of history,\textsuperscript{196} one sees that he explains in part the situation of the Jews in Germany. Nations do migrate and their cultural externalities undergo changes to reflect their new experience. The diversity in Germany among Christians and between Christians and Jews was not bad or undesirable. Instead, what was concerning to Herder was that a nation can constantly migrate and yet not feel the urges to reinterpret itself in a new environment. It begins to lose its sense of self because it either abandons or overvalues its tradition such that interactions with other nations or peoples becomes hopeless. Such an identity crisis hinders the organic movement toward \textit{Humanität} and can even lead that people to be either an aggressor or a victim depending on which other peoples and nations it meets.

Herder believed:

\textsuperscript{192} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{193} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{194} A \textit{Volk} that does not move toward its national character harms all of humanity because all cultures are connected and equal. When one diverts from the full development of its national character, to express its \textit{Volksgeist}, other \textit{Völker} become corrupted often through aggression against this foreign people that arises from fear of aggression by the foreign people.
\textsuperscript{195} While Herder admires Greek and Roman culture, he believes that their poetry elevates the hero over common man, in other words, it is further from man’s experience with his environment and therefore further from the people’s \textit{Volksgeist}. It is the Hebrew poetry of the Jewish scriptures that Herder identified as the most beautiful poetry. Herder elevates the Hebrew ‘poetic’ scriptures because they best capture the feeling of their \textit{Nation} as a whole while the Greco-Roman tradition expresses only the culture of the elite and educated class.
\textsuperscript{196} See definition on p. 41, the block quote from Herder.
In order to judge a nation, one must enter its time, its own country, the sphere of its way of thinking and feeling. One must see how its people lived, how they were educated, what sort of objects they saw, what sort of things they loved passionately, the nature of their climate, their skies, the structure of their voices, their dance, and their music. One must get to know all of this, not as strangers or enemies, but as their brothers and compatriots. Thus, in order to understand what a poet, or anyone, is saying one must understand his context completely before judging or abusing his work. This is the first mistake that anti-Jewish authors and political leaders, German nationalists in the 20th century, and many scholars to this day have made in working with Herder—they take his words out of context. Herder recognized that his own preferences, his own beliefs, and his own interpretations of the world around him were determined by his natural environment and period in history—his link in the Kette as well as his place in the garden of Germany. Just as “people judge and rank poets according to their own favorite notions, according to the kind of poets they have known, according to the effect this or that poet has had on them,” scholars like Herder make arguments based on their own experiences, no matter how objective they may attempt to become. Therefore, by taking select phrases and ideas out of context, they misuse Herder’s ideas and observations without losing the effect of his powerful language.

Herder lived at a time of cultural, linguistic, and religious division. Germany did not exist as a single political unit. Instead, the geographical area included a collection of various former tribal groups and state governments with varying allegiances and morality. According to Herder, “only the Germans have been tempted to overemphasize excessively the merits of foreign peoples, especially of the French and of the English, thereby neglecting themselves.” Herder wrote harshly about Jews in Germany for the sake of the German Nationalcharakter as well as

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199 Herder, “Conclusions,” in Against, 142. This is also what he has in mind when discussing the “language of the ruling class” in his “First Dialogue.”
that of the Jewish Volk. “The positive traits that Herder associates with Volk consist of Bildung and Sittlichkeit, [they] require it to be organically rooted...[and] free from any impure cultural mixing” because the Sitten of a Volk is formed when “Bildung, culture (art, literature) and climate-geography all operate together.”

By Herder’s conception, Yiddish symbolized this very degeneration because it was a “trauriges Gemisch,” sad mix, of languages that no longer connected Jews to their culture, to their religion, or to their homeland. The same was true of the Sinti and the Roma because these three peoples were “living amongst Germans or other peoples” and thus “could be nothing but unsittlich” as is evidenced by their ability to “speak nothing but a corrupt “jargon.”

This mixing is unhealthy, according to Herder, because it corrupts the Volksgeist such that a people is unable to channel this Geist through language. Unable to maintain an understanding of its character, the Volk cannot share in communion because their language no longer expresses the Geist as a reflection of the formation of their national identity through the variety of forces that drive identity formation.

The process of education, which Herder values so deeply, is reflected in a nation’s development as well as through its religion. A nation’s religion illustrates the types of forces that have acted upon it and both how it has maintained and innovated its national character. The categories of religion in Herder’s thought are “simple, ancient” religions that “expose the bosom of the human race” and are nearest the Volksgeist, those which “expose the mind of the founder of a nation,” and those “curio-collection” religions that are “created by the poet” and are the “most recent.”

The ancient Hebrews clearly express his first category, because they express most evidently the “bosom of the human race,” their religion is very clearly tied to this bosom.

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201 Ibid., 74.
202 This is largely because they have no Bildung/Erziehung which allows them to learn their national character and carry it from one generation to the next.
But, it is the religion that continues to grow organically through these temporal categories while maintaining characteristics of each that Herder seems to favor most. He sees Christianity as a great religion because it allows a people to express and expose its “bosom” and clearly reflects the mind of its founders, which include Jesus and Luther for German Christianity. However, German Christianity is polluted with outside cultural and poetic influences that threaten the ability of the German Volk to develop. The national language is “thought of as containing and protecting important elements of identity” and thus when the national language is lost in this process of developing a nation’s religion, the political culture is incomplete and can be dangerous.

One of the ways scholars have misinterpreted or misused Herder and the romantic nationalism movement, which derives from him, is to exclude “either his cultural relativism or his understanding of culture as a Gestalt,” instead they interpret “national cultures…as static, essential realities.” Durkheim’s theory of religion clarifies Herder’s vision. Religion and other cultural elements develop within a society through participants; they are not static. The culture changes through shared conceptions of sacrality and profanity and thus the identity of the group, which is protected and embodied within a language, grows from the religious inclination. This organic growth through religion and its connection to social identity through (sacred) language as is evidenced for Herder in the three categories of religion are examples of the key to Israel’s “national survival…[and] the role of sacred ideas and beliefs in the transmission of social cultures and national traditions.” The transmission of this culture and tradition is what continues to establish an organically bound community rather than a pseudo-nation founded upon the desire for political power. Political actors in Nazi Germany inappropriately used such

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204 Frederick Barth quoted in Llywelyn, 53.
205 Gestalt is a “shape,” “figure,” or “form.”
206 Llywelyn, Catholic Theology, 55.
207 Barnard, Herder and Israel, 25.
identifiers as race or institutionalized orthodoxy to remove religion from the people and in so
doing destroy rather than encourage the survival of a true German nation, as it is admired by
Herder; it loses its organic quality.208

VII. POETRY AND RELIGION—THE LINK THAT DRIVES PROGRESS

Herder concludes that it is through a nation’s most ancient poetry that one is able to study
“the genius of a language” and national character.209 Unlike his counterparts during the
Enlightenment, Herder sees great purpose and feels great joy when working with what his
opponents called the “poor, barbaric” language of the ancient Hebrews210 because when studied
“in human terms,” it opens one to the experiences of an ancient people.211 It is an essential part
of one’s education to understand the past that has led one to their present identity and it is the
poet who best captures this history. However, Herder interestingly refers to the Hebrew
scriptures as “poetry,” even those books considered to be prose. Herder understands poetry to be
the written expression of a Volk’s religious experience—their social experience of a divine as a
community. Poetry is “action, presentation, passion, song, rhythm” and thus utilizes more verbs
than prose, according to Herder.212 Hebrew, according to Herder, can turn most of its parts of
speech into verbs but it maintains a logical connection so that it is not only action.213 Thus,
Hebrew is already a more poetic language and because poetry is used to explain the deepest
truths of a nation, the ancient Hebrew’s sacred scriptures are his primary example. Being

208 Religion is expressed by politicians and military leaders rather than the poets who seek to express the nation’s experience of the sacred, as a matured religion should. It also lacks a simple ancient quality and expressed the mind of the political nation’s founder, not religion’s.
209 Herder explains in this essay how the Bible is the foundation of theology and that in order to understand the New Testament, one must first understand the Old Testament, which is full of “such a rich variety of stories, images, characters, and scenes!” (“The Spirit,” in Against, 158).
210 Partially because of the influence of his mentor Johann George Hamann.
211 Herder says here of ancient Hebrew that “it took a long time before I acquired a taste for its beauties and then gradually came to consider it, as I now do, to be a sacred language, the mother of our most precious knowledge and of that early education of the human race—an education that spread within but a small portion of the earth and came to us undeservedly (Ibid., 158-9).
212 “The more this language is able to make nouns into verbs, the more poetic it is. A noun always presents only the subject at hand in a lifeless way; the verb puts it in action” (Herder, “The Spirit,” in Against, 161).
213 Ibid.
“animated with spirit,” poetry is inextricably linked with religion, as a mode of educating a people about their character and identity.

Due to the failure of Jews to continue to rely on their educational system through their sacred poetry and aggression against them by foreign forces, this link has been broken. Herder recognizes, however, a similar series of events beginning to transpire in his own homeland. He is equally critical of Germans themselves for letting foreign influences overtake not only the courts of the ruling class but also the churches, schools, and other centers of culture. Herder explains that

The Germans should be reproached for the unwavering indifference with which they neglect and ignore the best poets of their own language in their schools and in the education of their young in general. No other neighboring nation does this. Through what means is our taste, our style of writing, supposed to develop? Through what means is our language supposed to take on structure and rules…Through what means are we supposed to acquire patriotism and love of country except through our country’s language, except through the most excellent thoughts and feelings that are expressed in this language and lie like a treasure within it?214

Herder is concerned that this “excessive” importation of foreign culture, which elevates especially French and English culture over German,215 threatens the education of German children such that they understand neither their language nor their identity because they do not understand German poetry.

Poetry is the key that brings and holds together a people’s identity; it expresses their experience and their ideals to educate people about rules, morality, language, and identity. For Herder, “poetry embodie[s] the imperfections and the perfections of a nation, poetry [is] a mirror of a nation’s sentiments, the expression of its highest aspirations” and thus it is through poetry that “we learn about its [a nation’s] way of thinking, its desires, and wants, the ways it rejoiced,

214 Herder, “Conclusions,” in Against, 143.
215 Ibid.
and the ways it was guided either by its principles or its inclinations." Herder believes that poets’ work should be valued and used because “they have thought in its [the nation’s] language; they have used their imaginations within its context; they have felt the needs of the nation in which they were raised, and to those needs they have addressed themselves.” Therefore, it is the poets who observe and record the sacred identity of a people in their work and can best express to that people and to others how it thinks, functions, and progresses. Therefore even a German translation of foreign poetry, while valuable and somewhat helpful in understanding that other nation, should not be preferred over one’s own national poetry. Herder believes poetry is a much better method of understanding the Geist of a people than “the misleading and pathetic method of studying their political and military history,” which only reveals its aggression and the corruption of the culture by politicians.

Germany is mostly Christian during Herder’s time, which means that it uses the Bible for much of its education and training of its youth in literacy and in moral action and orthodox thought (Catholics and Protestants). As Herder explains throughout his work, there is a necessary link between poetry and religion, for sacred scripture is the poetry of a nation. It is through the eminently social and religious poetry that the identity of the nation as an experience with the sacred is most excellently expressed. But for Herder, the Hebrew Scriptures especially are sacred poetry, they explain the thoughts, desires, experiences, and rules of the Ancient Hebrews and their deepest, truest meaning can only be reached through its original language—Hebrew.

\[^{216}\text{Ibid.}\]
\[^{217}\text{Ibid.}\]
\[^{218}\text{Herder exemplifies this role himself in his “interpretation of the first chapter of Genesis in relation to the description of the sky before the dawn,” titled The Oldest Document of the Human Race (1774, 76). Herder uses his own translation of the Hebrew texts and re-characterizes them with the Bild und Empfindung, “image and feeling,” of the Ancient Hebrews. To translate this poetry, Herder organizes his direct translation of the Hebrew words into German around by an expansion of the text. This includes explanation, interpretation, and a sort of engagement with the reader, through questions, that translates not just the words but also the emotion and sacred meaning as it relates to the history and identity of the Ancient Hebrews. The goal of this is to translate their context to the German, so that their poetry does not lose its value and deep and multi-layered meaning in the translating process (Against, 107-111).}\]
\[^{219}\text{Herder, “Conclusions,” in Against, 143.}\]
Ancient Hebrew poetry is also valued for its distinctiveness and resistance to efforts meant to universalize man’s experience with the divine order of the world. He argues that “the natural form of the scriptures, for a true genuine theology, cannot exist without a grasp of the languages and the Bible.” So Herder understands that in order for Germans to understand their own poetry and source of theology, the New Testament, they must understand the Old Testament in its own linguistic and cultural context.

Herder fears that a people will undervalue the importance of poetry, which is inherently religious, or even worse consciously manipulate the truths it seeks to reveal for selfish purposes. If one recklessly translates these scriptures, the poetic value is lost and it loses its value as a central tool in determining national character. If a people therefore does not embrace and even rejects this means of transferring the social values that define their own nation, then a people’s national character becomes foreign even to itself and with the shared concepts of the sacred, true, organic community is lost. This process is destructive to this nation because it leads to its eventual decay but it drives the nation to act in ways that are detrimental to the survival of other nations as well. Significant dedication to learning one’s national poetry as well as others’ is an exploration into the religious elements of a nation. It is also this process of education, which can save a nation from self-destruction through the loss of its cultural community. This education, however, can easily be corrupted and drive a nation to self-aggrandizement. By overvaluing its own cultural externalities, a nation attempts to eliminate every other national identity within it.

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220 Herder admires that the Hebrews write about common man, rather than posit grand theories about all of mankind and impose this theory on everyone.
222 We are safe to assume that Herder then feels it is not only appropriate but necessary to do likewise with the Greek New Testament, taking into account the complexities of the lives of the authors of this newer sacred text. He most often discusses the importance of this process because he believes the biggest threat to the Kette that educates the German people is missing the link between the Old Testament and the New, and one must start with the Old since it precedes the New. After one is successful in understanding the Bild und Empfindung, image and feeling, of the Old than one can move onto investigation of the New.
223 Herder warns his reader, “do not begin too quickly to translate or even criticize and mutilate the text….we still need a whole series of resources before we are prepared to present a detailed critique of the text” (Ibid., 251).
and near it. Herder believed that the educational process would prevent this very future from unfolding, but it is clear from German history that it is a potential path.

**VIII. CONCLUSION**

This interpretation of Herder’s work on nationalism recognizes religion as an essential component in his theory that reveals an alternative path for the development of German nationalism. This alternative path, one of mutual respect and celebrated difference, answers the negative uses of Herder’s thought since his death. Herder was always concerned primarily with the mutual respect and understanding between nations that can help the world move toward his vision of *Humanität*. One should love one’s nation and contribute to its character, but this love should not thwart the general trend towards global unity that the multiplicity of national character encourages.224 Soleiman the Magnificent,225 is the type of national and religious leader whom Herder envisions leading a nation toward this goal. Herder identifies this popular Enlightenment paradigm226 because he demonstrates just the type of promotion of religious diversity within one national identity Herder espouses throughout his work. Soleiman serves as the historical example of a solution to this seemingly impossible task of uniting such a range of religious identities within a single nation, and further to drive that nation towards peace with other nations.

Hope in this ‘beautiful garden’ through a leader who establishes a national appreciation of national poetry is the natural progression of Herder’s theory because it is “poetry [that] rouses the ideal of happiness, of beauty and of integrity…the most perfect expression of the language,

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224 According to Herder, “no love of country should prevent us from recognizing everywhere the good that can be increasingly produced only in the great progressions of times and peoples” (Herder, “Conclusions,” in *Against*, 143).
225 “that sultan of old who rejoiced over the many religions in his kingdom, each glorifying God in its own way…it was like a beautiful, colorful meadow in which all kinds of flowers blossomed” (Ibid.).
226 Soleiman is also used by G.E. Lessing in *Nathan the Wise* and was generally well known in Enlightenment Germany for his ‘tolerance’ of various religious traditions within his kingdom.
the senses, and one’s entire being.”⁴²²⁷ Because poets “speak in a way that reaches one’s innermost being,” their work is able to “represent…an intellectual, ethical, and eternal background right into one’s very being, right into one’s soul.”⁴²²⁸ It is thus obvious to Herder that if one’s own poetry is embraced and loved then progress is “inevitable in this succession of poetry throughout history, just as it is in every succession of the continual workings of nature.”⁴²²⁹ Herder believes that this progress moves forward in line with a divine order of the world that moves, through individual human action within a nation, from chaos to unity.⁴²³⁰ The progress is not rapid nor is it always as one may expect: it is through the rise and fall of nations that all nations learn to value movement toward a peaceful garden of nations. A true Enlightenment thinker, Herder claims that through humanity’s progression, “light imposes itself upon every blind force; reason and goodness impose themselves on every lawless force.”⁴²³¹ Understanding and goodness are inextricably linked for Herder, as nations embrace their experience and culture as it is expressed in poetry and use it to educate their people of rules, ethics and morality.

Religion functions first to express a people’s innermost being and second to establish the very basis for a movement out of one’s individual or familial experience of the sacred into a social and national experience. Religion is the basis of political arrangements, morality, and the formation of a unified organic national identity, not the basis of division, chauvinism, and hyper-aggressive racism. The Nazi movement is based on ideas entirely different from the Humanität Herder idealizes and promotes. Nazism uses religion like a parasite uses it host, depriving it of all the influence and power it wields in order to use such power for its own ends. Meanwhile, in

²²⁷ Ibid., 146.
²²⁸ Ibid.
²²⁹ Ibid.
³⁰ Herder sees this progress moving “from chaos to order, an inner increase and enhancement of forces in ever-expanding limits according to laws of harmony and order which are increasingly observed” (Herder, “God, Some Conversations: Fifth Conversation,” in Against, 138).
²³¹ Ibid.
Herder’s conception, a nation arises organically as the result of a growing religious sentiment that pushes people to seek unity with others within the same, although diversely interpreted, presence of the divine in the world. Hitler too acts as a parasite, using all the good in religion along with a significant knowledge of the national character of his audience in order to manipulate that very character for aggression and excess rather than peace and unity. Hitler cannot be the type of leader Herder idealized, Soleiman the Magnificent, because he destroys both literally and figuratively the garden of nations, which Soleiman nurtures and exalts.

The ethnic-based nationalism, to which many scholars and political leaders throughout history have tied Herder, is ultimately non-existent in Herder’s conceptions. Herder warned that if the German people lost any more of their linguistic and religious identity, they would exile themselves and a German nation would fail to evolve. The rise and fall of nations is inevitable yet tragic for Herder, but he sees an opportunity to imagine a German nation so that it will not live out such a fate. The chauvinistic nationalism of Nazi Germany, which Herder is said to have initiated in the Enlightenment, is Herder’s greatest fears come to fruition. As the German people abandoned their linguistic and religious ties, their national identity faded such that a political force was able to move in and provide a false and imposed ethnic unity upon them. This imposed unity impeded the development of religion, which affirms unique national identity and drives the nation toward \textit{Humanität} through understanding not imperialism. Every nation represents differing values and thus brings to light distinct parts of human experience of the world and its divine order. Religion enables the various nations to express these distinctions within a larger unity such that nations complement rather than challenge each other in the search for truth. The eventual progression of each nation toward a peaceful, organic religiosity ensures that every nation contributes equally to the richness of the Garden of Nations.
Bibliography


