I want to talk about two Germans, who lived in the latter half of the eighteenth century, in a very different world from ours—two extraordinary people, who can be recognized for what they are only if I succeed in describing their circumstances to you. But in trying to do this, I want at the same time to present them to you as very relevant people for us. There is a twofold assumption here, which I want to exemplify rather than to argue. It is this: first, these two people are not like us; but second, because they are real people, working out their destiny with immense self-consciousness, they can affect us in a quite definite way, if we let them. The first part of this assumption, that they are not like us, is connected with a view of history which sees people wrestling with their own circumstances, which are always unique and unrepeatable. So I consider it naive and misleading to suppose

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1 This paper was originally written for a conference of the Religious Broadcasting Department of the British Broadcasting Corporation, at which I was invited to speak on something that "had nothing to do with the immediate problems of the radio." I have retained the rather colloquial form, but have added a few bibliographical footnotes. My own study of Hamann, *J. G. Hamann: A study in Christian Existence* (London and New York, 1960), contains a bibliography which is full enough to lead the interested reader further. I am happy to think that in this contribution I am able to pay a fairly direct compliment to our honored colleague, Dr. Philip Merlan, for in a number of essays he had indicated that he shared my love of the eccentric, enigmatic, and lovable figure of Johann Georg Hamann. I list Dr. Merlan's contributions to Hamanniana, so far as I know them: "Parva Hamanniana I. Hamann as a Spokesman of the Middle Class," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 9 (1948), pp. 330–334; "Parva Hamanniana II. Hamann and Schmohl," *ibid.* 10 (1949), pp. 567–574; "Parva Hamanniana III. Hamann and Galiani," *ibid.* 11 (1950), pp. 486–489; "Hamann et les Dialogues de Hume," *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 59 (1954), pp. 285–289; "Johann Georg Hamann," *Claremont Quarterly* 3 (1954), pp. 33–42.
that people are always fundamentally the same, confronting the same kinds of choices, and making the same kinds of decisions, and failing or succeeding in precisely the same way. This part of my assumption I hope to illustrate by the lives of these two. And the other part of the assumption, that such people are nevertheless of immense relevance to us, is connected with a view of history which may be stated quite briefly: history is what happens to people. More precisely, it is what goes on in people now. More precisely still, it is what we are and do.

With these assumptions I want to try to bring these two alive before you.

Johann Georg Hamann (1730–1788) was called in his lifetime the Magus in the north. This does not mean the wizard of the north, but the wise man, who like the wise men of the gospel had seen the star of Bethlehem. Hamann lived for the most part of his life in Königsberg, at that time a busy international sea-port and a lively intellectual centre. Immanuel Kant lived and taught there all his life, and he and Hamann knew and respected one another, after their fashion. But Hamann was a poor and struggling employee in the service of the government. He worked first as a translator, mostly between French and German, for his superiors in the civil service were all Frenchmen, put there by the Solomon of the north, Frederick the Great. Later he was the overseer of the Customs warehouse. All his life was spent in a struggle with material difficulties. He came of a respectable family, of the growing middle classes.

These circumstances of Hamann’s life were not merely fate, but they were destiny. For Hamann chose them. He chose to be of no account. He refused to make himself into a serviceable member of society. This was a decision which arose from his specific Christian experience. And with this remark I am in the thick of as yet unexamined assumptions. These assumptions may be summarized in two assertions, which hold good not only for Hamann but also, I think, with due modifications, for everyone. The first assertion is that there is something which we may call a recognisably Christian experience; and the second is that this experience is expressed in the infinitely various contexts of human existence.

In Hamann’s life the specific Christian experience came in the