Among my own family – and it is a very pious and loyal one…¹

If I had not been brought up in the most extreme orthodoxy and piety, if I had not had drummed into me in church, Sunday school and at home the most direct, unconditional belief in the Bible and in the agreement of the teaching of the Bible with that of the church…²

The final section of my study turns directly to Engels. He has been part of the earlier discussions at various moments, particularly in my treatment of their combined writings. Often neglected as Marx’s lieutenant, we should really reinstate his nickname, ‘the General’.³ In this chapter, I dig into Engels’s reformed past, dealing with his many youthful writings on theology and the Bible. Engels’s texts overflow with biblical references and lengthy treatments. He had obviously devoted a good deal of time to the Bible, and was able to read the New Testament in Greek. It was so much a part of his everyday life that it was

¹. Engels 1844–5, p. 231.
². Engels 1839v, p. 466; Engels 1839w, p. 413.
³. For an excellent study of Engels which restores the originality of the ‘early Engels’, especially of the essays on political economy and the working class in England, see Kouvelakis 2003, pp. 167–231.
impossible for him to avoid the Bible. These early texts by Engels show us a young man of profound Christian convictions struggling with the implications of the debates swirling around the Bible in Germany at the time. They produce a difficult process of self-exorcism, the initial topic with which I deal. However, the ground on which that struggle took place was the Bible, and so I consider at length his response to the age-old problem of the contradictions of the Bible. Finally, I offer a commentary on his essays on Schelling. They were responses to Schelling’s public lectures in Berlin and signal Engels’s rejection of the ossified form of theology that he could no longer find redeemable.

**Engels’s self-exorcism**

May God watch over his disposition, I am often fearful for this otherwise excellent boy.  
4

I can’t eat, drink, sleep, let out a fart, without being confronted by this same accursed lamb-of-God expression.  
5

At one time in his life, Christianity meant a great deal to Engels. The effort to extract himself was a long and difficult one, so much so that we can speak of a process of self-exorcism. While the commitment was very deep, the cuts were longer and scars more livid. They may show up in various ways: as a more doctrinaire atheistic materialism, as awareness that something was indeed lost, 6 or as an abiding interest in matters of religious rebellion or early Christianity.

What was the nature of the early faith that Engels sought to exorcise? Although Marx has ‘of Evangelical faith’ written on his Certificate of Maturity from the Trier Gymnasium 7 and Engels had learned, according to his school-leaving reference, the ‘basic doctrines of the Evangelical Church’, 8 it meant

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4. Engels (senior) 1835, p. 582.
5. Engels 1845f, p. 29; Engels 1845g, p. 27.
6. For example, ‘one can see how fortifying and comforting a religion which has truly become a matter of the heart is, even in its saddest extremes’ (Engels 1839d, p. 31; Engels 1839e, p. 64).
7. Certificate of Maturity for Pupil of the Gymnasium in Trier 1835, p. 643. For the sake of his application for recovery of his German citizenship in 1861, Marx would still write, ‘I... profess the Evangelical religion’ (Marx 1861a, p. 355; Marx 1861b, p. 635).