

## HEGELIAN THEMES IN CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGY

Winfried Corduan\*

It is a premise underlying this paper that a systematic theology cannot help being influenced by one or more philosophical points of view. This philosophical background may express itself in many different ways, ranging from the language used to denote theological terms to the emphasis placed on particular theological categories and their definitions. As long as theology is seen as the task to relate the Biblical message and its historical interpretations in the most suitable cultural expressions, discovering the philosophical framework behind any given theology is of paramount importance in learning to understand it.

This paper will present a preliminary sketch of the possibilities in investigating Hegelian themes in contemporary German theology. Such an analysis, it must be said from the outset, does not mean that any of the theologians mentioned below are Hegelian theologians in the same sense as, for example, D. F. Strauss was in the nineteenth century. But we will show how they took recourse to Hegelian ideas in order to shed light on some theological issues. The problems of the mutability of God and of the natures of Christ, to mention just two, are being elucidated by taking recourse to some thoughts apparently derived from Hegel.

### I. HEGEL'S THEOLOGY

At the risk of belaboring the obvious it must be emphasized right from the start that Hegel, especially in his later mature period, considered religion as more than one facet of human experience among many others.<sup>1</sup> It is no mere cultural accident for Hegel that revealed religion stands on the threshold of Absolute Spirit in his system.<sup>2</sup> Theology is seen not as a phenomenon that must be emptied of all content by the all-devouring specter of abstract philosophy, as Hegel's thought is so frequently represented<sup>3</sup> (a caricature that could with a slim margin of possibility be applied to his youthful manuscripts<sup>4</sup> but that certainly does not

\*Winfried Corduan is assistant professor of religion and philosophy at Taylor University in Upland, Indiana.

<sup>1</sup>There are many introductions to Hegel's thought, some certainly more helpful than others. Let me merely mention two that have influenced my own conception of Hegel: W. Kaufmann, *Hegel: A Reinterpretation* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1965); K. Hartmann, "Hegel: A Non-Metaphysical View," in *Hegel: A Collection of Critical Essays* (ed. A. MacIntyre; Garden City: Doubleday, 1972) 101-124. Throughout this paper all translations from the German, unless otherwise indicated, are my own responsibility.

<sup>2</sup>G. W. F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1952) 553; *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1959), sec. 571.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. H. R. Mackintosh, *Types of Modern Theology* (New York: Scribner's, 1937) 101-117.

<sup>4</sup>Cf. G. W. F. Hegel, "Die Positivität der christlichen Religion," in *Hegels theologische Jugendschriften* (ed. H. Nohl; Tübingen: Mohr, 1907) 137-240.

obtain in his earliest published essays<sup>5</sup>), but rather as the driving force in man's realization of Absolute Spirit. It must be kept in mind that for Hegel the individual stages in the life of the Spirit are as important as the finished result.<sup>6</sup> Hegel's philosophy is a philosophy *of* and *in* process, and to ignore his theological motivations means to reduce his philosophy to lifeless schemata—e. g., the pattern of thesis, antithesis and synthesis, which is often falsely attributed to him but which he himself eschewed.<sup>7</sup>

To give a brief example of the misunderstanding with which Hegel has so often been victimized we can refer to William Wallace's introduction to his translation of the third part of Hegel's *Encyclopedia*. Here Wallace defends the fashionable translation of the German *Geist* with the English "Mind" rather than "Spirit" by asserting that "it is certain that to average English ears the word Spiritual would carry us over the medium line into the proper land of religiosity."<sup>8</sup> This observation is quite correct—but misused. The point is that religion is integral to Hegel rather than alien to him. Let me cite Heidegger in defense of this contention:

The present-day Hegel-renaissance—this prevailing form of thinking—is difficult to retrieve from the grist-mill of the dialectic. It is now merely an empty-running mill because Hegel's basic outlook, his Christian theological metaphysics, has been sacrificed. For in this alone does Hegel's dialectic find its elements and its support.<sup>9</sup>

In presenting a short précis of Hegel's theological ideas, we need to touch on two important features: historicity, and the identity of God and man in the incarnation.<sup>10</sup> Historicity here refers to an understanding on two levels. The first of these is that God is known to man through history. Hegel argues:

It was for awhile the fashion to profess admiration for the wisdom of God, as displayed in animals, plants, and isolated occurrences. But, if it be allowed that Providence manifests itself in such objects and forms of existence, why not also in Universal History?<sup>11</sup>

Hegel then goes on to use this view of history as a basis for a theodicy, in contrast

<sup>5</sup>See G. W. F. Hegel, "Glaube und Wissen oder die Reflexionsphilosophie der Subjectivität," in *Erste Druckschriften* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1956) 221-346.

<sup>6</sup>Hegel, *Phänomenologie*, 11.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, 41-48; also Hegel, *Geschichte der Philosophie* (ed. Glockner; Stuttgart: Frommans, 1959) 610. Here is the only time Hegel ever actually mentioned thesis-antithesis-synthesis, and he attributes it to Kant. Then Hegel proceeds to criticize it as *geistlos*. What more evidence could one possibly come up with to refute the idea that this schema characterizes Hegel's philosophy?

<sup>8</sup>W. Wallace, "On the Scope of a Philosophy of Mind," in *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1894) xlix-l.

<sup>9</sup>M. Heidegger, in *Neue Züricher Zeitung* (September 21, 1969), cited in H. Küng, *Menschwerdung Gottes* (Freiburg: Herder, 1970) 510.

<sup>10</sup>For a very interesting treatment of Hegel's theology see S. D. Crites, "The Gospel According to Hegel," *JR* 46 (April 1966) 246-263.

<sup>11</sup>Cited from G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History* (tr. J. Sibree; New York: Colonial, 1899) 15.

to Leibniz's metaphysical way.<sup>12</sup>

On the second level, historicity is the actual involvement of God in history. Certainly Absolute Spirit in its final expression as self-conscious consciousness is essentially atemporal,<sup>13</sup> but the dynamic development leading up to that stage presents us with God (Father, Son and Spirit) in the realm of temporal becoming.<sup>14</sup> The history of God culminates for Hegel in the incarnation, death and resurrection of Christ and the coming of the Spirit. Now as history progresses this culmination must be actualized in humanity.

The second important feature, already alluded to, concerns the sublimation of God and man into Absolute Spirit at the point of Christology. This conception finds its roots in the Hegelian logic of identity-in-difference. The Infinite and finite are contradictory on the level of being. Viewed, however, from the level of the conceptual realm, this difference gives way to the higher reality of the Absolute Spirit. This is the kind of argument that Hegel had in mind in his article of 1802 on "Faith and Knowledge."<sup>15</sup> Here Hegel refers to the mutual implication of pure being and pure nothingness ("*der Abgrund des Nichts, worin alles Sein versinkt*"<sup>16</sup>) as the "death of God," which occurs on the "Speculative Good Friday." This demise, however, is overcome by the necessary resurrection of the "highest totality."<sup>17</sup> It is significant for an appreciation of Hegel that a parallel can be drawn between this appearance of this "highest totality" and the concept of becoming, which is the resolution of being and nothingness from the standpoint of purely logical considerations.<sup>18</sup> Thus the "highest totality" is not static but in the process of becoming.

In his lectures on philosophy of religion, which he gave much later in life, Hegel applied these concepts to actual Christian theology. The incarnation is depicted as the unification of God and man—not just *a* man, nor some vague form of man-in-general, but objectified human spirit.<sup>19</sup> The passion narrative teaches us that this God-Man dies. But again this death is but the preamble to the resurrection and the appearance of Spirit. The significance of this point warrants the inclusion of a rather lengthy quotation from Hegel:

This truth, which men have attained by means of this story, that which has come to their consciousness in this whole story is this: that the Idea of God holds certainty for them, that man has attained *the certainty of unity with God*, that the human is

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 15-16.

<sup>13</sup>G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophie der Religion* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1927), pt. III, 87.

<sup>14</sup>Temporal becoming is of course parallel with historical becoming, and the two are only illustrations of logical becoming. Cf. I. Iljin, *Die Philosophie Hegels als kontemplative Gotteslehre* (Bern: Francke, 1946).

<sup>15</sup>Hegel, *Erste Druckschriften*, 345-346.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Hegel, *Enzyklopädie*, 108-114.

<sup>19</sup>Hegel, *Religion*, 141.

unmediatedly present Spirit, and this in such a way, that in this story, as it is grasped by the Spirit, the account of the process itself is what man, the Spirit, is: *in himself God and dead*;—this mediation, by which the humanity is cast off, becomes on the other hand *the return of his being-himself*, and only thus Spirit (italics mine).<sup>20</sup>

The bottom line of the passion story is thus for Hegel not the destruction of God and man, but the liberation of both as Spirit. Hence “in the death of Christ, the finitude of man has been slain for the authentic consciousness of the Spirit.”<sup>21</sup>

As everyone knows, Hegel’s system was for the most part historically unsuccessful. Some philosophies that based themselves loosely on his thought—e. g., those of Karl Marx and Ludwig Feuerbach—accumulated a great amount of influence. But theologies that were Hegelian in a tighter sense—e. g., D. F. Strauss’ or F. C. Baur’s—had a very short life span. Thus Karl Barth was prompted to make his famous statement that for theology Hegel still presents “a great question, a great disappointment, but perhaps still a great promise.”<sup>22</sup> We will now proceed to see whether the Hegelian promise is not very silently becoming more and more fulfilled in this century.

## II. HANS KÜNG: THE ISSUES

One of the most significant attempts at an explicit rejuvenation of an Hegelian metaphysics has been undertaken by Hans Küng in his monumental work, *Menschwerdung Gottes*.<sup>23</sup> As the title implies, the book focuses on the incarnation. The first part is devoted to an extremely detailed tracing of the development of Hegel’s understanding of Christ. In the second part Küng raises the question of what modern theology can learn from an approach influenced by Hegelian metaphysics. Finally, he surveys some examples in modern theology where the line of thought he indicates has been ventured upon already. The thesis of this book is that a new appreciation of Hegel may liberate theology from some of the static categories to which it has become bound.

Ever since the very first inklings of Logos theology, Christian thought has been expressed in terms of Greek philosophical categories. This has been the case both with theology proper where, according to Küng, the depiction has always smacked of Parmenidean immobility, and also with Christology, which has always had great difficulty trying to reconcile the various paradoxes in terms of substances and attributes. Küng, under the catchword “historicity,” contends that Hegel may infuse new life into the theological discussion. He does not argue for a strictly Hegelian theology, but he does maintain that Hegel can teach modern theology some important lessons.

There are three aspects to Küng’s discussion of historicity and God. These are the passibility, dialectic and becoming of God.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 172.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 173.

<sup>22</sup>K. Barth, *Die protestantische Theologie im 19. Jahrhundert* (Zürich: Evangelischer, 1952) 378.

<sup>23</sup>Küng, *Menschwerdung*, 522-610.

<sup>24</sup>Küng’s central references to Hegel are as follows: for passivity, *Phänomenologie*, 20; for the dialectic of attributes, *ibid.*, 529; for becoming, *ibid.*, 20, and *Religion*, 158.

(1) Traditional theology so emphasized the exaltedness of God in his transcendence that it abandoned all ideas of the passibility of God. God cannot suffer. For Küng this remoteness has sterilized theology and denied some important facets of Christianity. With Hegel, Küng wants to see God's involvement with history and man actualized to such an extent that God is not deprived of the possibility of suffering.

(2) Küng charges traditional theology with having been too enamored with Greek metaphysics in its view of the attributes of God. Basing itself on the Parmenidean notion of being, it denied all possibility of a dialectic of attributes in God. Because God was thought of as pure, absolute Being, only the attributes that somehow added to God's solidarity of perfection were admitted. Hegel, on the other hand, saw God as lowering himself and identifying himself with the world, thereby incorporating into himself seemingly contradictory attributes. Küng sees a great amount of value in this conception, especially with regard to the humiliation and incarnation of God in Christ.

(3) Finally, theology has traditionally denied the possibility of becoming in God. God has always been thought of as unchangeable. If God could change, he could not have held all perfections to begin with. Hence, to apply changeability to God would mean to deny his perfection. Küng, once again taking his cue from Hegel, argues that this view is detrimental to understanding God's acts in history. He suggests that we ought to return to a theology in which God is permitted to change—not because of lack of perfection, but precisely because God is perfect and thus can become and change without losing himself. God's fulness guarantees, rather than prevents, the possibility of change in him.

All of these ideas, applied to theology proper, must be applied to Christology a fortiori. Küng believes that this more dynamic theology will strengthen the viability of the Christian's conception of Jesus Christ.

### III. PANNENBERG: HISTORICITY

Having now armed ourselves with a quick summary of Hegel's theology as well as Küng's explicit utilization thereof, we are ready to go on and investigate some theologians in whom we may find Hegelian themes applied more implicitly. Wolfhart Pannenberg espouses a theology in which the theme of the becoming of God receives a fresh interpretation.<sup>25</sup> His thought is geared around the concept of history as revelation of God. Like Hegel, he wants to see history as a purposeful unfolding of the experience of the Absolute. As God is supremely manifested at the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the resurrection then becomes the vantage point from which all history must be observed. Further, as the focal point of God's revelation in history the resurrection also foreshadows the final goal of history, the ultimate self-expression of God. Thus we have here the basic presupposition of an Hegelian theology, the history of God.

### IV. BARTH AND RAHNER: THE GOD-MAN

Karl Barth and Karl Rahner may be treated together in one section because some very similar principles underlie both of their theologies. Specifically, both men pivot a large part of their theologies on the understanding of Jesus Christ as

<sup>25</sup>W. Pannenberg, *Offenbarung als Geschichte* (KD, Beiheft 1) 1965.

God-Man. The incarnation with its concomitant views of God and man is of utmost importance to both of them.

Once again, disclaimers by these theologians against saying the same thing as Hegel must be acknowledged and accepted. But whether Hegel has been the model for their concepts is a very different question. We must not be too credulous when we hear, for example, Gollwitzer say with regard to Barth's use of the term "dialectic" that Barth "never meant by it a dialectic according to Hegel's model, an overcoming panoramic outlook used as a method, thus a triumph of thinking over the contradictions of reality."<sup>26</sup> Hopefully it was seen already above in this paper that there was far more to the Hegelian dialectic than the synthesizing activity of the mind over opposites in the world. It involved the humiliation and death of the God-Man, thereby granting the liberation of man and the triumph of Absolute Spirit over finite spirit. Gollwitzer's statement is then not really apropos to begin with, and possible parallels between Barth and Hegel cannot be dismissed so readily.

Hans Urs von Balthasar has shown quite conclusively that Barth uses the concepts of German idealism.<sup>27</sup> He goes on to show, again with cogency, that Barth's message is by no means identical with that of the idealist philosophers. This must be granted, of course, but it does not take away from the fact that Barth's theological ideas apparently wear the same linguistic clothes as Hegel's philosophical ideas. Then, to quote von Balthasar:

The question is whether this (certainly critical) utilization of the categories does not presuppose certain intra-theological inclinations and tendencies on the part of Barth, which as such herald a dubious and one-sided conception of revelation, which conception then expresses itself secondarily in the utilization of just this philosophy.<sup>28</sup>

Ignoring all criticisms of Barth implied in the above quotation, we are now approaching the gist of our inquiry concerning Barth. Although Barth is writing theology, he cannot help using philosophical terminology. And this terminology in turn cannot be separated from the concepts it was used to express. But then to find Hegelian themes occurring in Barth need not only not surprise us; it even ought to be expected.

Barth's theology has often, usually critically, been labeled as a "Christomonism." Whether this label is justified or not, it is true that for Barth all reality must be seen from the vantage point of Jesus Christ. This is true for the doctrines of creation and redemption, but it is especially significant in the realm of anthropology. Just as much as for Barth the true reality of God can only be known in Christ, so can the true nature and destiny of man only be known in him.<sup>29</sup> Thus

<sup>26</sup>H. Gollwitzer, "Einleitung" to K. Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik* (Munich & Hamburg: Siebenstern, 1965) 15.

<sup>27</sup>H. U. von Balthasar, *Karl Barth* (Cologne: Hegner, 1962) 229.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, 253.

<sup>29</sup>To pinpoint just one example of a theme that runs through all of his theology see Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, III, 4 (Zürich: EVZ) 45-46.

Jesus Christ, at the core of Barth's theology, unifies God and man.<sup>30</sup> This is certainly a far cry from Hegel's flamboyant understanding of the incarnation. But even if Barth himself denied it, the parallel is there and can neither be ignored in understanding Barth nor seen as pure coincidence.

If a possible parallel can be discerned between Barth and Hegel, it becomes far more evident in the thought of Karl Rahner. For Rahner, as was true for Barth, man is who he is because God has become man in the incarnation. The incarnation presents the highest pinnacle in the identification of man and God. From the point of view of man, man can participate in God's grace because in Christ, the union of God and man, grace was bestowed on man. From the side of God, God, though unchangeable in himself, can change and undergo becoming as he is united to an other—i. e., to man.<sup>31</sup> Thus we have here not only the dynamic, possibly Hegel-based view of God of the kind of theology advocated by Küng, but also a theology of union of God and man, which appears to hark back directly to Hegel. It is not that for Rahner every man participates in deity to the same extent as Jesus of Nazareth, but due to the incarnation every man now has the possibility of participating in God to some extent.<sup>32</sup> It is clear, then, that Küng is quite justified when he contends that "the great mind which stands in the background of this . . . Christology . . . is (next to Heideggerian influence) none other than Hegel. Rahner's occasional safeguards against Hegel in subordinate clauses only work to enhance this."<sup>33</sup>

As would be expected, this view of Christology and anthropology has implications for his entire theology. For, to cite an example, this possible divinization of man then allows Rahner to say that when man gets to know himself in his true reality he will encounter the grace of God in Jesus Christ. This is the basis of Rahner's celebrated doctrine of the "anonymous Christian."<sup>34</sup> In fact Rahner goes so far as to say that the experience of man is equivalent to the experience of God<sup>35</sup>—truly an audacious assertion, and certainly one which he could not make without at least some Hegelian influence.

In order to shed a little more light on such extraordinary claims made by Rahner, we need to add some words about his conception of subjectivity. Now undoubtedly Rahner relied here to the greatest extent on Heidegger, but this use of Heidegger's categories at all was made possible by the influence of Hegel (most likely even on Heidegger himself). For Rahner, the traditional distinction be-

<sup>30</sup>Cf. on this point R. P. Scharlemann, "Theological Models and Their Construction," *JR* 53 (1973) 74. See also J. H. Rilliet, "Notion de révélation et christologie dans la 'Dogmatique' de Karl Barth," *RTP* 32 (1944) 124-140, where Rilliet makes the point that Barth was influenced by Hegel quite strongly.

<sup>31</sup>K. Rahner, "Jesus Christus, systematisch," *LTK* 5 (eds. J. Höfer and K. Rahner; Freiburg: Herder, 1956-1965) 956. Cf. Küng's analysis in *Menschwerdung*, 648-652.

<sup>32</sup>K. Rahner, *Schriften zur Theologie* (Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1964), 6. 545-555.

<sup>33</sup>Küng, *Menschwerdung*, 649.

<sup>34</sup>Rahner, *Schriften*, 5. 136-159; 7. 187-213; 10. 531-547.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, 10. 133-145.

tween a knowing subject and its external object of perception does not hold true. The object is always primarily identical with the subject. Only secondarily, by way of the *Vorgriff*, can external existence be ascribed to the object.<sup>36</sup> Although this feature has usually been ascribed to a Kantian (or perhaps more accurately Marechallian) inversion, such an explanation is not entirely accurate with regard to the facts. Kant's inversion applies only to the categories. The objects themselves, though knowable only through the internal categories of the mind, remain external nonetheless as the founts of sense stimuli. A true subject-object identification is first found in Fichte where, however, perception remained at the level of internalization by the ego. For a full unification of the knower with the known we must turn to Hegel. Witness this paragraph from his "Preface to the Phenomenology":

Because . . . the substance is in itself subject, all content is its own reflection in itself. The subsistence or substance of an existence is self-identity; for its non-identity with itself would be its dissolution. But self-identity is pure abstraction; but this is thinking.<sup>37</sup>

Then in the actual subsequent text Hegel proceeds to show that all consciousness is self-consciousness.<sup>38</sup>

Rahner also insists on the primary unity of subject and object, and does so under this slogan: "To be is to be known."<sup>39</sup> The similarity to Hegel's subjective Spirit is striking and obvious. Though perhaps it may not be due to an unmediated causal link, yet it clearly is not coincidental either. Thus we see Hegelian themes in Rahner on two levels. First, we have the use of subjectivity where the knower and the known become identical. This paved the way for the second level: Man, the knower, is united with God, the known, by way of mediation through the incarnation. If the object of knowledge is God, knowledge of man is then equivalent to knowledge of God for both of these reasons: First, because the known is never alien to the knower; second, because God and man are already united in the God-Man. Both ideas are strongly reminiscent of Hegel.

A brief mention must be made here of Paul Tillich, whose basic categories are definitely derived from Schelling. Tillich, however, frequently and consciously invokes Hegelian ideas—especially, e. g., with reference to the dialectic of opposites within the Godhead.<sup>40</sup> Still, Tillich's insistence on the otherness of the Absolute, his abhorrence of the thought that the Absolute might in any way be conjoined to the finite other than as its Ground, the denial of any finite knowledge of the Absolute other than by symbols—all these points make it obvious that any

<sup>36</sup>K. Rahner, *Geist in Welt* (2nd ed.; Munich: Kösel, 1957) 88 and *passim*.

<sup>37</sup>This translation taken from W. Kaufmann, *Hegel: Texts and Commentary* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1965) 82.

<sup>38</sup>Hegel, *Phänomenologie*, *passim* (esp. 129).

<sup>39</sup>K. Rahner, *Hörer des Wortes* (2nd ed.; Munich: Kösel, 1963) 47-62.

<sup>40</sup>P. Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (Chicago: University Press, 1951), 1. 274-275.

large-scale comparison with Hegel would be carrying things too far.

## V. ALTIZER'S ECHO

A further understanding of the role of Hegel in modern German theology may be gained by contrasting it with the treatment Hegel received by the American theologian, Thomas J. J. Altizer. Altizer makes very free use of Hegelian terminology and many Hegelian concepts. To a great extent Hegel's influence on him is indisputable. However, Altizer's claim that the crux of his theology—viz., the death of God in the manner in which he presents it—is derived from Hegel must be denied.

Altizer identifies the death of God with the kenosis and death of Jesus Christ. This view of the death of God, certainly not foreign to Hegel at first glance, is then couched in Hegelian terminology. To quote Altizer:

Apart from what Hegel called the process of absolute negativity, there lies no way of apprehending the ontological reality of the incarnation, and unless the incarnation is known as effecting an absolute negation of the primordial or essential Being of God, there can be no knowledge that God is love.<sup>41</sup>

The problem arises when one sees how differently from Hegel Altizer actually handles the death of God. It turns out that what Altizer has actually given us here is, as it were, half an Hegelian theology. Let us recall the meaning of the death of God for Hegel: It was always the first step in the realization of Absolute Spirit. Absolute Spirit was not known in the annihilation of pure Being, but subsequent to it. The God-Man died, but only to give way to the coming of the Spirit in the resurrection. For Altizer the resurrection is an irrelevant metaphor, and God remains dead.

It follows, then, that Thielicke is right when he charges that God-is-dead theologians misappropriate Hegel insofar as they fail to see that for Hegel God's death is only a moment in the ongoing development of Spirit and God's final realization. Küng, though charging him with not taking the issue seriously enough, agrees with Thielicke. It is clear from the foregoing that Altizer has a skewed version of Hegelian theology for his model because he does not follow the Hegelian scheme conscientiously and have the "Speculative Good Friday" succeeded by the coming of the Spirit in absolute religion. In Hegel negation and alienation are always merely thresholds for a new becoming, but Altizer left off with the negation, hence presenting us with a caricature of Hegelian thought.

There is a very popular argument to the effect that the death-of-God movement presented the logical outcome of neo-orthodox theology. It is contended that the more modern theology emphasized the remoteness of God, the more it paved the way for the total denial of God. Such an argument may have some merit, but we can now see that if it is applied at all it will still not hold for many modern thinkers—namely, those who are influenced by Hegel. Even though Barth may have held to a very strong doctrine of the otherness of God, this was always tempered by the immanence of Jesus Christ who is true God and true man. The kenosis is always logically followed by the exaltation. It may be argued then that what we really have in death-of-God theology is not the logical conclusion

<sup>41</sup>T. J. J. Altizer, *The Gospel of Christian Atheism* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966) 69.

but an unwarranted truncation of neo-orthodox theology. Hence it is no wonder that as of this writing death-of-God theology has vanished into obscurity while modern Trinitarian theology is still going strong.

## VI. SOME CONSIDERATIONS

By way of appraisal, two questions need to be raised: (1) Is it theologically proper to incorporate themes from Hegel? (2) To what extent is it necessary?

The first of these questions can only receive a very general answer. We stipulated at the outset of this paper that the relationship between philosophy and theology is not necessarily an alien or hostile one. As a matter of fact, we noted that it is not possible to avoid incorporating a philosophical framework into one's theology. Of course at no time will the thoughtful theologian merely accept a philosophical system without critical examination as to how well this philosophy conveys his theological message. But then again he may not be completely free in whatever philosophy he chooses. If a philosophy is strongly tied in with his whole culture, he may involuntarily and even unwittingly use its concepts. This was the case with Plato in the eleventh century, empiricism and pragmatism in modern America, and idealism in modern Germany. This fact makes it easy to say that inherently it may be quite proper to incorporate Hegelian themes into theology, either because one's culture makes this inevitable or because the theologian is convinced that Hegel provides the best philosophical vehicle for his message.

This brings us to the second question: To what extent is it necessary to resort to Hegel because he provides a better framework for modern theology than classical metaphysics? This is, of course, the line of argument that we already saw advanced by Hans Küng. Another theologian who receives high praise in this matter from Küng is Eberhard Jüngel. Jüngel also contends that classical metaphysics has done an inadequate job as a basis for theology. Though he does not ask outright for a starting point with Hegel, it is clear that a dynamic philosophy like Hegel's underlies Jüngel's theology when, for instance, he argues for love as an ontological mode for God. In following Barth, he asks for a rejection of the "traditional metaphysical concept of God, according to which He cannot suffer." Jüngel feels that this is necessary in order to do justice to the Christian belief in a living God who is intimately involved with human history.

Now the scope of this paper does not allow for a treatment of the theological issues involved. There are some controversial issues here—for example, the notion of the passibility of God. But generally it is quite safe to say that a theology that does not allow for God's actions in time and history is not truly Christian at all. A metaphysics that would attempt to restrain God into the static inactivity of Xenophanes' immovable sphere could indeed come under this contemporary critique. But it appears that traditional metaphysics has been dismissed too readily.

There may have been a widespread misunderstanding of classical metaphysical categories. When the Thomist, for instance, maintains that God is Pure Act, devoid of all potency, this does not mean that God is incapable of interaction. Rather it does mean that God need not change in order to interact. It must be realized that the Thomistic notion of being as actuality means precisely that to be is not to recoil passively on oneself but to be engaged in the *act* of outward-directed existence. This is the reason that Aristotle's view of God as Final Cause

was displaced from its primary position in Christianity by the view of God as First Efficient Cause. For God to be Pure Act is to be in an acting, positive relationship with reality as we know it.

Jüngel attempted to expose a false dilemma when he asked whether becoming must always mean erosion. He argued that we do not have to choose between either a static God on the one hand or an acting, yet becoming and eroding, God on the other hand. This is an important point, worthy of much further discussion. But it is not the most important point in this context. There is in fact another false dilemma, this one propounded by Jüngel, Küng and others. This is the disjunction between a traditional and static God and an acting and changing God. We must raise the question whether to act always means to change and to become. Classical metaphysics has argued that God is here the exception: God does act in history, in the incarnation, at the cross, at the resurrection, etc. He acts in a real way but does not thereby undergo change and becoming because he does not need to. His completion of perfections, rather than encapsulating God in a disinfected remote transcendence, allows God to rule the world and lend it some of his goodness without his either depleting himself or transforming himself. By this manner of argument classical metaphysics demands an acting God rather than preventing such a conception. Hence it may be concluded that unless it were shown conclusively by Scriptural exegesis that through acting God does indeed change, there is no warrant to forsake classical metaphysics and attach oneself to the philosophical framework of G. W. F. Hegel.



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