

G. W. F. Hegel and the Analysis of Theological Models

I recently returned to the Cathedral of St. John the Divine on New York's Upper West Side. An unfinished monument, it remains continually in a process of becoming, an organism of stone slowly growing and emerging like the lives of those who seek solace in its depths. These searching souls find in their silent companion an instructive friend, for the cathedral unveils the substance under its immaculate veneer, opening its inner structure to the examination of congregants and visitors alike. The rough-hewn stone of the walls sits exposed in all its immensity and strength. Lesser cathedrals cover their internal structures with fine-cut surfaces, hiding the most important part, the rock upon which all else hangs. With an attitude of complete self-acceptance, this church beckons the visitor to admire not only its façade but also its substance, to worship in the midst of both decoration and rough, immovable stone.

Theologies, like cathedrals, have internal structures that shape assertions and guide them toward specific conclusions. This architectural frame determines the placement of ideas, provides the inner expanse necessary for perspective, and shapes the imagination's boundaries and possibilities. Though it often passes unnoticed behind an intricate veneer, this unpolished stone lifts immense weight, directs the viewer's eye, and unites elements within a diversified whole. A theology's internal, architectonic structure is the rough-hewn rock upon which all else hangs.

In the introduction, I identified significant differences at the level of content between the theologies of the cross proposed by T. F. Torrance and Jon Sobrino. I now move to the architectonic level in order to examine the differing structures within which these theologians locate their ideas and the contrasting commitments that guide their claims. To do so, I will first construct a critical framework drawn from G. W. F. Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* consisting of four analytical categories: externality, internality, particularity, universality. I will then use this framework to set forth the formal, architectonic differences

between the theologies of Barth, Sobrino, and Torrance. Given the nature of this discussion, Barth's first, formal move receives primary attention throughout this chapter, leaving his second move, concerning theological content, for later chapters.

In the final passages of his *Phenomenology of Spirit*,¹ Hegel considers the social development of various religious forms, the emergence of the pinnacle of religious development in Christian doctrine, and finally his concept of absolute knowing, which is the discursive, philosophical expression of the content articulated metaphorically by Christian theology. In absolute knowing, the human community² attains the recognition that it alone determines what is to be regarded as authoritative for human identity and social practice. In Hegelian terms, the community has achieved the union of human subject and divine object within the social life of the community. Three distinct moments (Christ's incarnation, Christ's death, and the absolute knowing of the community) constitute Hegel's account of Christianity's development and of the transition from religion to the philosophical awareness of humanity's status as self-authorizing. Although these moments are forms of consciousness that emerge along a dynamic and fluid process from lower to higher levels of self-awareness, certain features emerge in each that facilitate their differentiation and typological categorization.³

In Hegel's conception of Christianity's first developmental stage, characterized by Christ's incarnation, believers affirm a strong sense of God's externality to the human community and perceive Christ's union with God as particular and unique. In the second developmental moment, represented by Christ's death, believers affirm a weakened version of God's externality because their prior conception of Christ's particularity has given way to a belief in God's universal presence in the Christian community through the Holy Spirit. In the third moment, termed "absolute knowing" by Hegel, humanity abandons representational thinking, affirms God's internality within the human

1. G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977). All citations of the *Phenomenology* will include the paragraph number followed by the page number of the English edition. All italics within cited passages are original to the text unless otherwise noted.

2. Throughout this chapter, I will refer to the "human community" rather than to individual humans because Hegel prefers a communal interpretation of human subjectivity. See Robert B. Pippin, *Modernism as a Philosophical Problem: On the Dissatisfactions of European High Culture*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 66.

3. Karl Barth provides an apt warning to those who would attempt to impose a false stability or stasis on Hegel's thought. See Karl Barth, *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century: Its Background & History*, trans. Brian Cozens and John Bowden (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 385.

community, and regards human identity and normative social practice as universally self-constituted by the community's own decision-making processes.

After setting forth these three Hegelian moments, and describing representational thinking, I will argue that Karl Barth's theology provides an example of what may be construed in Hegelian terms as a return to the first moment (externality and particularity) from its opposite in the third moment (internality and universality) in such a way that the features of the first and third moments are dialectically united (externality with internality and particularity with universality). Here I draw primarily, though not exclusively, upon the section in the *Church Dogmatics* entitled "The Mercy and Righteousness of God."⁴ Barth thereby provides a theological option that may be regarded from the standpoint of the *Phenomenology* as a development beyond the absolute knowing of the human community that surpasses Hegel's view of the highest form of human consciousness according to Hegel's own dialectical progression.⁵ I then argue that Torrance's theology shares certain features with Hegel's characterization of the incarnation (externality and particularity), that Sobrino's thought approximates Hegel's absolute knowing (internality and universality), and that the formal structure of Barth's theology uniquely transcends both of these options, which enables him to unite atonement and liberation at the level of theological content, as we will see in later chapters.⁶

G. W. F. HEGEL

I now turn to a brief overview of Hegel's account of Christ's incarnation, Christ's death, representational thinking, and the absolute knowing of the human community in order to construct a framework for analyzing the formal structure of theological models. In order to ensure the soundness of my Hegelian framework of analysis, I will devote detailed attention to relevant

4. Barth, *CD II/1*, 368–406. Implicit in my argument is the claim that Barth follows Scripture, his highest theological criterion, in uniting externality, internality, particularity, and universality.

5. Although I present Barth's theology as a development beyond absolute knowing according to the trajectory of Hegel's *Phenomenology*, I do not offer an immanent critique of absolute knowing by explaining historically why absolute knowing may be unsatisfying on its own terms and would therefore require a further stage of development. Such an analysis would be necessary for a strictly Hegelian rejection of absolute knowing but extends beyond the scope of this project.

6. In constructing an analytical framework from Hegel's thought, I am not identifying or tracing a historical genealogy of influence from Hegel to Barth, Torrance, or Sobrino. Nor am I arguing that Barth self-consciously seeks to surpass Hegel's absolute knowing according to Hegel's own rules.

sections of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Robert Pippin, Terry Pinkard, and Thomas Lewis guide my interpretation of this formidable volume. The fruit of this chapter's labor will be evident in its analytical function throughout the remainder of this book.

HEGEL ON CHRIST'S INCARNATION

Hegel regards the doctrine of the incarnation⁷ as Christianity's greatest contribution to the development of human self-consciousness, and the feature that distinguishes Christianity as the "absolute religion."⁸ According to Hegel, the incarnation provides a vivid metaphorical image of God⁹ entering into, and being united to, human life in the particular existence of Jesus Christ.¹⁰ By this move, Christianity uniquely unites God, the metaphysical object of religious reflection and the highest determining authority of human identity and social practice, with human life in such a way that this authority may now be regarded as localized within humanity itself.¹¹ Christians regard God as the origin of human identity and normative social practice, and they regard the divine and human person of Jesus Christ as the union of this origin and normativity with humanity in a relation that entails no confusion, change, division, or separation.¹² The stage of Christian consciousness depicted by the doctrine of the incarnation is distinguished from subsequent forms of the Christian religion by a strong sense of God's external relation to humanity and by belief in the unique particularity of Christ's union with God.

According to Hegel, the disciples who follow Jesus during his earthly ministry perceive their interaction with him as an immediate encounter with the Absolute.¹³ The incarnation, with its localization of God within humanity, provides the grounds for immediate encounter with the divine.¹⁴ The disciples

7. Barth poignantly describes Hegel's attraction to those theological loci most shunned by post-Enlightenment theologians. See Karl Barth, *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century: Its Background & History*, trans. Brian Cozens and John Bowden (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 396.

8. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, § 759, 459. See Thomas A. Lewis, "Religion and Demythologization in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*," in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 202.

9. In my exposition of Hegel, I will interchangeably refer to God as "the Absolute," "Absolute Spirit," "Spirit," and "the divine Being," thereby conforming to Hegel's terminology in the *Phenomenology*.

10. See Lewis, "Religion and Demythologization," 202.

11. Terry Pinkard argues, "The truth that is gradually articulated in this religion is that God is known as spirit, that what is divine exists only in the human community's self-reflection on the absolute principles governing human life." Hegel's *Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 253.

12. Chalcedonian Definition, 451 CE.

13. Hegel, *Phenomenology*, § 758, 458.

are conscious of the Absolute's presence in Jesus Christ but have not yet attained self-consciousness of the Absolute's presence in the religious community itself. Even so, the disciples, through their perception of Christ as a human person united to God, regard Christ as possessing the "self-consciousness" that is aware of itself as the human location of ultimate determining authority.¹⁵ Christ, therefore, is the first person to achieve, or to be regarded by the religious community as achieving, the self-consciousness that the community will later possess in absolute knowing. Further, through their belief that God is self-consciously present among them in the person of Christ, the disciples express in metaphorical, imagistic form the true content that will later be expressed by absolute knowing in philosophical form. Quite simply, this true content is the claim that God is a human person or "Self."¹⁶ What religion regards as the self-emptying descent of the eternal Son in the incarnation is actually, from the vantage point of Hegel's absolute knowing, the first moment in which the divine being attains "its own highest essence."¹⁷

Hegel significantly modifies the Chalcedonian definition of 451 ce when, in § 759, he writes, "The divine nature is the same as the human, and it is this unity that is beheld."¹⁸ Though he puts forward a more moderate formulation of the relation between Christ's divine and human natures in § 780, one that simply refers to "the divine Being tak[ing] on human nature" such that these two natures "are not separate,"¹⁹ the more radical christological statement of § 759 anticipates the non-metaphysical conception of God presented in the final chapter of the *Phenomenology*.²⁰ Although Chalcedon insists that Christ's divine and human natures remain distinct and unconfused in their union, Hegel's depiction of the incarnation presents the divine as human and the human as divine, thereby positing identity where Chalcedon posits unity in distinction.²¹

14. Hegel writes, "The Self of existent Spirit has . . . the form of complete immediacy . . . God is sensuously and directly beheld as a Self, as an actual individual man; only so is this God self-consciousness." Ibid., § 758, 459.

15. Ibid.

16. Hegel writes, "This incarnation of the divine Being, or the fact that it essentially and directly has the shape of self-consciousness, is the simple content of the absolute religion." Ibid., § 759, 459. According to Terry Pinkard's reading of Hegel, Christianity became the religion "in which humanity could see itself fully reflected." *Hegel's Phenomenology*, 252.

17. Hegel, *Phenomenology*, § 760, 460. This is the case because Hegel regards God as constituted by the human community's own reflection upon its identity and social practice. For humanity to view God for the first time as human is for it to view itself as the "highest essence," as itself constituting the divine authority that determines human identity and normative social practice.

18. Ibid., § 759, 460. See Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology*, 253.

19. Hegel, *Phenomenology*, § 780, 471.

In short, Hegel goes beyond Chalcedon's assertion that God became human by claiming that God is nothing other than human.²² In Hegel's "revealed religion" (that is, Christianity), the identification of divinity with humanity is implicitly realized in a veiled sense through the metaphorical image of Christ's incarnation but must await full realization in the philosophical awareness of absolute knowing.

In spite of God's presence in Jesus, externality marks the relation between God and humanity in Hegel's interpretation of the incarnation.²³ In this embryonic stage of Christianity's development, Christ's followers still view God as metaphysically other than humanity and as present in humanity only in the person of Christ; their affirmation of God's radical otherness occurs in tandem with their affirmation of Christ's unique particularity as the God-man. In spite of Christianity's advancement beyond prior forms of religion due to its location of the Absolute within humanity, the exclusive particularity of Christ as the only person united essentially to God reveals, for Hegel, the persistent alienation between the Christian community and its conception of God. According to Thomas Lewis, in this portion of the *Phenomenology* Christ's unique particularity determines that "the absolute is an other to other human beings – a 'sensuous other,' 'opposed to universal self-consciousness' (407, ¶762)."²⁴ Hegel, therefore, believes that further development is needed in humanity's religious self-understanding and that Christ's death partially overcomes the alienation arising from God's metaphysical otherness and Christ's exclusive particularity.²⁵

20. In his interpretation of Hegel's view of the incarnation, Terry Pinkard even more radically anticipates absolute knowing: "The divine just *is* the human spirit reflecting on itself and establishing *for itself*, through its religious practices, the 'absolute principles' governing human life and doing so necessarily according to the principles of rationality that it itself has historically developed." *Hegel's Phenomenology*, 253, italics in original.

21. Lewis interprets Hegel similarly: "the Incarnation (in Hegel's account) shows this essence [i.e., the divine essence] to be identical with the essence of humanity." Lewis, "Religion and demythologization," 202.

22. See Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology*, 252–54, italics in original.

23. At this stage of development, Christianity's view of God's otherness resembles Terry Pinkard's account of Greek culture's externalization of "life's ground rules," of norm construction, and of identity formation in an earlier section of the *Phenomenology*. *Ibid.*, 251.

24. Lewis, "Religion and demythologization," 202. Lewis goes on to state, "Christ being represented as one particular person renders the rest of humanity alienated from the essence of spirit. Concretely, the idea that one and only one person incarnates the absolute stands in fundamental tension with notions of universality fundamental to modern sensibilities." Lewis, "Religion and Demythologization," 203.

25. Hegel, *Phenomenology*, § 763, 462.

HEGEL ON CHRIST'S DEATH

For Hegel, Christ's death inaugurates the second moment in Christianity's development. In this stage, Christ's particular status gives way to the universal relation of God to the Christian community through the Holy Spirit.²⁶ Christ's death forms a transitional phase in the community's development between the incarnation and the absolute knowing of the community by sharing the former's affirmation of God's externality (that God is independently existent and metaphysically other) and by sharing the latter's assertion of God's universal presence throughout the community.

According to Hegel, Christ's death²⁷ dissolves the uniqueness of Christ's status for his followers by revealing the universality of the divine being's presence throughout the community. The union between God and humanity, introduced through the notion of Christ's incarnation, now expands to include the entire religious community. By dying, Jesus discards the physical immediacy of earthly existence, which the disciples relied upon for their encounter with the Absolute. By rising "in the Spirit," Jesus discloses the Absolute as "the *universal self-consciousness* of the [religious] community."²⁸ The Christian community, which prior to Christ's death relied upon the immediate encounter with Christ, attains partial self-consciousness²⁹ through the recognition that the Spirit it once perceived as active only in Jesus now persists throughout the entire community after Christ's death.³⁰ God, as the determination of human identity and normative social practice, is now regarded as "universally" located within the Christian community itself rather than as limited to the particular person of Jesus Christ.³¹

26. Thomas A. Lewis, "Religion and demythologization," 205.

27. Of Christ's death, Hegel writes that "his '*being*' passes over into '*having been*'. Consciousness, for which God is thus sensuously present, ceases to see and to hear Him; it *has* seen and heard Him . . . just as formerly He rose up for consciousness as a *sensuous existence*, now He has arisen *in the Spirit*." G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, § 763, 462.

28. *Ibid.*

29. The religious community at this point possesses only *partial* self-consciousness because, although it now views God as present universally in the community through the Spirit, it continues to view God as metaphysically other than, and transcendent to, the life of the community itself.

30. According to Hegel, "The death of the Mediator as grasped by the Self is the supersession of his objective existence or his particular being-for-self: this *particular* being-for-self has become a universal self-consciousness." *Phenomenology*, § 785, 476.

31. Hegel writes, "The [absolute] essence has thereby come to be its own Self in its sensuous presence; the immediate existence of actuality has ceased to be something alien and external for the absolute essence, since that existence is superseded, is universal. This death is, therefore, its resurrection as Spirit." *Ibid.*, § 779, 471.

Hegel conflates Christ's death and resurrection in the *Phenomenology* into a single event that is both "the vanishing of the immediate existence known to be absolute Being"³² and the "spiritual resurrection" of the "universal self-consciousness" within the religious community.³³ Christ's death reveals the union of the divine being with the Christian community to a universal extent, and this revelation constitutes and establishes the religious community.³⁴

Hegel is not claiming at this point that religious communities did not exist before the death of Christ, but rather that an essential and qualitative change occurred that differentiates the religious community centered upon Christ's death from all others that precede, or are unrelated to, this event. The Christian community after Christ's death experiences "spiritual resurrection," which entails the recognition that its communal life is united to the divine being in the same way that Christ was believed to be uniquely united to the divine being before his death.³⁵ This recognition of itself as participating in the "self-consciousness" originally limited to Christ constitutes the religious community as Christian and Christianity as the "absolute religion."³⁶

Christ's death and resurrection, therefore, take on a significance for the religious community that transcends their original importance as events in Christ's life. They now function as symbols of the community's unfolding recognition of itself as the locus of Spirit and as the ultimate, determining authority.³⁷ The particularity arising from the strong external relation of God to humanity in the first moment (Christ's incarnation) is now replaced by the universality and weak externality of God's presence within the religious community in the second moment (Christ's death).

In spite of this universality, God's presence is still conceived after Christ's death as, to a certain degree, external to the human community because the

32. This is a reference to Jesus Christ. *Ibid.*, § 763, 462.

33. *Ibid.*, § 784, 475. The resurrected, universal self-consciousness of the religious community regards the union with God once viewed as experienced only by Jesus to now be shared by the entire community. Hegel, *Phenomenology*, § 779, 471.

34. In the following passage by Hegel, the "individual self" refers to Christ who is "transcended" through death: "This Notion of the transcended individual self that is absolute Being immediately expresses, therefore, the establishing of a community." Hegel, *Phenomenology*, § 780, 471.

35. Thomas Lewis, interpreting Hegel, writes, "The resurrection signifies a step beyond the identification of the absolute with a particular sensuous existence; the absolute is no longer represented as immediately existing but as surviving the death of the body." Lewis, "Religion and demythologization," 203.

36. Absolute religion is marked by "the simple content" that "the divine Being . . . essentially and directly has the shape of self-consciousness." Hegel, *Phenomenology*, § 759, 459.

37. Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology*, 256–59.

community continues to conceive of God as metaphysically other than, and unconstrained by, humanity. Yet God's external relation to humanity has been weakened and the transition toward viewing God as constituted by the human community itself, which is Hegel's view of internality, has begun.³⁸

REPRESENTATIONAL THINKING

Hegel argues that the first two moments of the Christian community's consciousness (Christ's incarnation and death) utilize a type of imaginative expression called "representational thinking."³⁹ The third moment (absolute knowing) differs from the prior two moments (Christ's incarnation and death) in that it employs philosophy instead of representational thinking to express its claims. The distinction between the medium by which ideas are expressed and the ideas themselves is at the center of Hegel's argument at this point. Hegel believes that the use of representational thinking as an expressive medium by the first two moments entrenches God's external relation to humanity in the self-perception of the religious community, and to this degree distorts the truth expressed by Christianity. The replacement of representational thought by philosophical analysis constitutes the shift from externality to internality and inaugurates the community's absolute knowing.

Hegel first mentions representational thinking in the "Revealed Religion" section of the *Phenomenology* in § 764, immediately after his discussion of Christ's death in § 763.⁴⁰ For Hegel, representational thinking is a way of conceptualizing God's interaction with humanity through the use of metaphors and narratives that correctly depict the union of the Absolute (that is, God) and humanity, but do so at the cost of distancing the Absolute through images that point beyond humanity.⁴¹ In other words, representational thinking portrays the union of God and humanity but cannot properly express their actual identity. The Christian community possesses the representational thought of Christ's resurrection following his death on the cross and imbues this

38. Hegel writes, "death becomes transfigured from its immediate meaning, viz. the non-being of this particular individual, into the *universality* of the Spirit who dwells in His community, dies in it every day, and is daily resurrected." Hegel, *Phenomenology*, § 784, 475.

39. I will use the term "representational thinking" to translate Hegel's term *vorstellen*, which seems to be preferred in current Hegel scholarship to the awkward term "picture-thinking" used by A.V. Miller in his English translation of the *Phenomenology*. When citing Miller's translation, I will leave his rendering intact unless otherwise noted.

40. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, § 763, 462; § 764, 462–63. According to § 780, the representational image of Christ's death more accurately reflects the actual relation of the community to God than does the image of Christ's incarnation. Hegel, *Phenomenology*, § 780, 472.

resurrection with significance for all of humanity. In Hegelian terms, the particularity of Christ's life is combined with the universality of thought in such a way that this particularity becomes a metaphor, an image, and a narrative believed to possess universal significance for the human community.⁴² The true content symbolized by the representational thought of the resurrection, according to Hegel, is the Absolute's union with all humanity. This content, though, cannot be conceptualized without the negation of Christ's exclusive union with God, a negation which Hegel believes is supplied by the image of Christ's death.⁴³ Through the idea of Christ's death, the religious community experiences "the death of the *abstraction of the divine Being* which is not posited as Self."⁴⁴ In turn, through the image of Christ's resurrection,⁴⁵ the community begins to realize the universal significance of the Absolute Spirit⁴⁶ as that which resides throughout the human community itself.⁴⁷

Although Hegel claims that the content of representational thinking is correct in its conception of the Absolute as united to, inseparable from, and ultimately nothing other than the human community, he argues that the form, or manner of expression, employed by representational thinking remains defective because it continues to externalize the Absolute as something other than the community through its use of religious metaphors and images.⁴⁸ In representational thought, "The *content* is the true content"; yet "Before the true content can also receive its true form for consciousness, a higher formative development of consciousness is necessary."⁴⁹ Representational thought, as the form that contains this true content, remains intrinsically flawed because it does

41. Thomas Lewis describes representational thinking as "a mode of cognition distinct from thought yet capable of cognizing the same object as thought. Whereas philosophy employs the discursive, conceptual language of thinking, religion is closely associated with the imagistic, metaphorical, and allegorical language of representation." Lewis, "Religion and Demythologization in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*," 192.

42. Hegel, *Phenomenology*, § 764, 462–63.

43. *Ibid.*, § 779, 470–71.

44. *Ibid.*, § 785, 476.

45. *Ibid.*, § 779, 471.

46. Hegel writes, "In this way, therefore, Spirit is *self-knowing* Spirit; it knows *itself*; that which is object for it, *is*, or its picture-thought is the true, absolute *content*; as we saw, it expressed Spirit itself. It is at the same time not merely the content of self-consciousness, and not merely object *for it*, but it is also *actual Spirit*." *Ibid.*, § 786, 476.

47. Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology*, 256.

48. *Ibid.*, 260; Lewis, "Religion and demythologization," 194–95.

49. Hegel, *Phenomenology*, § 765, 463. This content is "true" because it is "absolute Spirit" (§ 788, 479) and because it constitutes "absolute content" (§ 796, 484).

not grant the human community knowledge of itself as the self-constitution of Spirit⁵⁰ and fails to overcome “an unreconciled split into a Here and a Beyond.”⁵¹

Hegel’s dissatisfaction with representational thinking is most evident in § 787 of the *Phenomenology*. In spite of its true content, representational thinking gives rise to a “duality” in which the religious community views itself as both spiritually united to and ontologically separate from God because of its conception of God as metaphysically “other.”⁵² The religious community fails to understand itself as it truly is,⁵³ as the location of the Absolute, and therefore as the source of its own authority for determining human identity and normative social practice. The community’s union with an external God remains perpetually incomplete, for the community awaits full reconciliation in a “distant future” that mirrors “the distant past” of the incarnation of Christ.⁵⁴ Christ’s union with the Absolute foreshadows in representational form the church’s own complete union with the Absolute in the future. This conceptualization of “a reconciliation that lies in the beyond”⁵⁵ with a God who is essentially other than and separate from the human community points to the alienation intrinsic to the externalization of God in representational thought.⁵⁶

According to Hegel, the truth expressed by representational thinking is nothing more than distorted truth for, although representational thought presents God as united to humanity, it prevents the community from

50. Hegel writes that “the content of religion proclaims earlier in time than does Science, what *Spirit is*, but only Science is its true knowledge of itself.” *Ibid.*, § 802, 488. Earlier, Hegel argues that in representational thinking, “The object is revealed to it by something alien, and it does not recognize itself in this thought of Spirit, does not recognize the nature of pure self-consciousness.” Hegel, *Phenomenology*, § 771, 466.

51. Hegel, *Phenomenology*, § 765, 463.

52. *Ibid.*, § 787, 477–78.

53. Hegel argues, “The community also does not possess the consciousness of what it is; it is spiritual self-consciousness which is not an object to itself as this self-consciousness . . . but rather, in so far as it is consciousness, it has those picture-thoughts which we have considered.” *Ibid.*, § 787, 477. Hegel then writes, using the pronoun “it” to refer to the divine Being: “the Self does not grasp and truly comprehend it, or does not find it in its *own* action as such.” Hegel, *Phenomenology*, § 787, 478.

54. Hegel, *Phenomenology*, § 787, 478.

55. *Ibid.*

56. Hegel claims that the Absolute “is not elicited by, as it were, unraveling the rich life of Spirit in the community and tracing it back to its original strands, to the ideas, say, of the primitive imperfect community, or even to the utterances of the actual man himself. . . . What results from this impoverishment of Spirit . . . [is] bare externality and singularity, the historical manner of the manifestation in its immediacy and the non-spiritual recollection of a supposed individual figure and of its past.” *Ibid.*, § 766, 463.

recognizing its self-identity with the divine.⁵⁷ Hegel therefore believes that Christianity is unable to overcome alienation from God because of its use of representations that depict God as existing externally to humanity.⁵⁸

HEGEL'S ABSOLUTE KNOWING

In spite of the significant weaknesses of representational thinking, Hegel argues that Christianity contributes to the development of absolute knowing within the consciousness of the human community.⁵⁹ Terry Pinkard interprets absolute knowing in Hegel's thought as "the internal reflection on the social practices of a modern community that takes its authoritative standards to come only from within the structure of the practices it uses to legitimate and authenticate itself."⁶⁰ Although Christianity is intrinsically metaphysical, or at best "quasi-metaphysical,"⁶¹ it enables the human community to begin to view itself as self-derived and self-authorizing. As we have seen, the incarnation as a representational image initiates this process by introducing the idea that God is located within humanity itself. Later, Christ's death as a representational thought enables the community to regard the ultimate source of value as not only located within humanity but also as co-extensive with the religious community. Yet, representational thinking continues to portray God as external to, metaphysically other than, and therefore independent from the life of the community. In order for the community to overcome the externalization of

57. Hegel argues, "self-consciousness misunderstands its own nature, rejects the content as well as the form and . . . degrades the content into a historical pictorial idea and to an heirloom handed down by tradition. In this way, it is only the purely external element in belief that is retained and as something therefore that is dead and cannot be known; but the *inner* element in faith has vanished, because this would be the Notion that knows itself as Notion." *Ibid.*, § 771, 466; Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology*, 260; Lewis, "Religion and demythologization," 203.

58. Hegel describes the alienation that persists in Christian worship in the following way: "one part, the Son, is that which is simple and knows itself to be essential Being, while the other part is the alienation, the externalization of being-for-self which lives only to praise that Being." Hegel, *Phenomenology*, § 776, 469; Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology*, 259; Lewis, "Religion and demythologization," 194–95.

59. Hegel places Christianity within a long historical process in which various "forms of Spirit" arise as the result of prior developments only to be eventually regarded as inadequate by the community because of internally irreconcilable elements and finally superseded by new forms. Pippin calls this process "collective, progressive, historical self-determination." *Modernism as a Philosophical Problem*, 67–68.

60. Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology*, 262; see also 261. This knowledge is "absolute" because "it has no 'object' external to itself that mediates it . . . it is the practice through which the modern community thinks about itself without attempting to posit any metaphysical 'other' . . . that would underwrite those practices." Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology*, 262.

61. Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology*, 260.

God and to recognize that God is internal to itself as the self-reflective decision-making of the community, representational knowledge must be discarded and replaced with the philosophical reasoning⁶² of absolute knowing.

According to Hegel, absolute knowing rejects the externality inherent in representational thinking that prompts the community to search for ultimate value in a metaphysical Beyond or in a God who is Other. Instead, absolute knowing locates the determination of ultimate value within the processes of human sociality. Although the content of representational thinking is absolute Spirit,⁶³ the representational form that expresses this content inevitably construes the divine being as though it were a reified object external to humanity and independent of the knowing subject.⁶⁴ This externalization and objectification of the divine being is nothing other than a form of self-projection⁶⁵ that is inherently alienating. When the human community attains the perspective of absolute knowing, however, it comes to understand the divine being “as a determination of the Self”⁶⁶ and grants true form to the true content expressed by Christianity, the form that is “the Self itself.”⁶⁷ For Hegel,

62. Philosophy provides the “self-mediating” form able to express true content, which is humanity’s character as self-derived and as the locus of the highest determining authority, *ibid.*, 262–63; Pippin, *Modernism as a Philosophical Problem*, 65. Barth argues, “Hegel’s philosophy is the philosophy of *self-confidence*. . . . It is a question of philosophy and thus of the self-confidence of thinking man. Hegel puts his confidence in the idea that this thinking and the things which are thought by him are equivalent, i.e., that his thinking is completely present in the things thought by him, and that the things thought by him are completely present in his thinking.” *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century: Its Background & History*, trans. Brian Cozens and John Bowden (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 377, italics in original.

63. Robert Pippin writes, “Understanding these collective ‘doings,’ understanding what they are, what their point is, and assessing the legitimacy of the self-understanding within which they are done is what Hegel means to cover by the term ‘Spirit.’” *Hegel’s Idealism: The Satisfaction of Self-Consciousness* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 153. He also identifies “Spirit” as, in Hegel’s words, the “‘I’ that is ‘We’ and ‘We’ that is ‘I.’” *Hegel’s Idealism*, 152; Hegel, *Phenomenology*, § 177, 110. See also Pippin, *Hegel’s Idealism*, 170.

64. Hegel, *Phenomenology*, § 788, 479. Later, Hegel writes that “what in religion was *content* or a form of presenting an *other*, is here the *Self’s* own *act*; the Notion requires the *content* to be the *Self’s* own *act*. For this Notion is . . . the knowledge of the *Self’s* act within itself.” Hegel, *Phenomenology*, § 797, 485; Pinkard, *Hegel’s Phenomenology*, 263. Thomas Lewis construes the externality of the divine being in religion as “[t]he difference represented between the subject and object.” Lewis, “Religion and demythologization,” 195.

65. Thomas Lewis argues that these representations “project our own essence beyond us and, in viewing it as other, alienate us from the world around us.” Lewis, “Religion and demythologization,” 192. He also writes, “Rather than recognizing the community’s reflective practices as themselves constituting the absolute essence, religion projects this absolute onto an object conceived as other than [the human community’s] consciousness.” Lewis, “Religion and demythologization,” 195.

66. Hegel, *Phenomenology*, § 788, 479–80.

“the Self” of the human community, and not a metaphysically transcendent God, is “the self-assured Spirit that *acts*; the Self accomplishes the life of absolute Spirit.”⁶⁸ According to Pinkard’s interpretation, absolute knowing is able to “clearly articulate what religion merely symbolically shows.”⁶⁹

The absolute knowing of the human community “is not only the intuition of the Divine but the Divine’s intuition of itself,”⁷⁰ for the distinction between human subject and divine object dissolves in the identification of the human community with the divine. Indeed, the human community now recognizes that the object of its knowledge is nothing other than its own communal life and thereby attains self-consciousness.⁷¹ God, or the absolute Spirit, is localized within humanity and constituted by humanity; in Pinkard’s explanation of Hegel, the divine is “identical” to “self-founding humanity.”⁷² In this way the externality of representational thinking, which views God as other than the human community, gives way to the internality and universality of philosophical reason,⁷³ which views God as embedded within the community’s self-derived identity and social practices. Hegel writes, “This last shape of Spirit—the Spirit which at the same time gives its complete and true content the form of the Self . . . this is absolute knowing.”⁷⁴ Pinkard interprets this “awareness of spirit as spirit”⁷⁵ as referring to “the human community’s recognition that it is only the community’s linguistic and cultural practices and the socially instituted structures of mutual recognition that provide the grounds for determining who one is.”⁷⁶

67. *Ibid.*, § 796, 484.

68. *Ibid.* Later, Hegel writes, “As its [i.e., Spirit’s] fulfilment consists in perfectly *knowing* what it is, in knowing its substance, this knowing is its *withdrawal into itself* in which it abandons its outer existence.” *Phenomenology*, § 808, 492.

69. Pinkard, *Hegel’s Phenomenology*, 263.

70. Hegel, *Phenomenology*, § 795, 483. Barth argues that, in Hegel’s thought, “the act of [human] thinking . . . is identical with the event of reason, or the concept or the idea or the mind. With Hegel all those things are synonymous, and indeed they are all synonyms for the reality of all reality, which is one and the same as God.” *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century*, 384. Barth recognizes that Hegel regards self-knowledge to be knowledge of God and that he posits a relation of identity between God and human rational processes. *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century*, 377, 381, 388–89, 404–5.

71. Hegel, *Phenomenology*, § 795, 483–84.

72. Pinkard, *Hegel’s Phenomenology*, 255; see also 254. Pippin speaks of the “self-forming” character of the “collective, historical subject” that Hegel envisions. *Modernism as a Philosophical Problem*, 66.

73. Pippin, *Modernism as a Philosophical Problem*, 64.

74. Hegel, *Phenomenology*, § 798, 485.

75. Pinkard, *Hegel’s Phenomenology*, 252.

The discursive, philosophical reason that is central to absolute knowing is the key to understanding the universality achieved in this final chapter of the *Phenomenology*.⁷⁷ Hegel's earlier discussion of the unhappy consciousness in § 197 to § 230,⁷⁸ and his hints regarding how the dissatisfactions of the unhappy consciousness may be resolved, provide insight into how reason enables the emergence of a specific form of universality in absolute knowing.⁷⁹ Pippin argues convincingly that the only way the division between particular individuals and universal legislating authority may be resolved is through the recognition that an identity exists "between reason and reality."⁸⁰ Not only is reason identified with reality, but reason enables the replacement of the particularization of authority, originally assigned to Jesus Christ, with the universalizing of determinative authority within the human community through the recognition of the community's shared possession of reason and mutual participation in reasoning activities.⁸¹ A "universal will"⁸² thus replaces the divine will revealed in Jesus Christ, and this universal will is constituted by the reasoning processes of the human community.

Pinkard describes the manifestation of universal reason within the community as "the idea that by appealing to impersonal reason alone human agents can discover what truly counts for them as knowledge, and that they have the means to affirm for themselves that what counts *for them* really is what counts *in itself*, and that *reason* – not pure faith or reliance on mediator–priests – can give an account of itself that, unlike its predecessors, does not undermine itself."⁸³ In a similar fashion, Pippin regards Hegel's notion of universality as related to "some kind of developing like-mindedness (which he ultimately calls 'Absolute Spirit')."⁸⁴ Therefore, what was originally regarded as the uniquely

76. Ibid. Though humanity only attains absolute knowing in modernity, Pippin reminds us that all prior stages of human development throughout history must be regarded from the Hegelian perspective as "self-supporting or self-grounding," even though the human community was unaware of this fact prior to modernity. Indeed, the emergence of absolute knowing is profoundly dependent upon pre-modern forms of consciousness, such as Christianity. *Modernism as a Philosophical Problem*, 70.

77. Barth suggests that universality in Hegel must be understood in terms of confidence in "universal human reason, the reason known and available to everyone." *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century*, 377–78.

78. Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 119–38.

79. The universality of reason emerges as the solution to the unhappy consciousness in § 230 of the *Phenomenology* in preparation for Hegel's subsequent chapter entitled "Reason." Ibid., § 230, 137–38.

80. Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism*, 166.

81. Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology*, 77–78.

82. Ibid., 77.

83. Ibid., 78.

authoritative, particular will of Jesus Christ is viewed in absolute knowing as the universal will of the community. The particular wills of individuals, originally viewed by Christianity as unessential, changeable, and non-authoritative, now are viewed as the components that together constitute the universal will of the community. Exclusively unique particularity, as originally attributed to Jesus Christ by his disciples, has been subsumed and dissolved within the authoritative universality of the community.⁸⁵

Hegel's three stages (Christ's incarnation, Christ's death, and the community's absolute knowing) are distinguished by their differing expressions of externality, internality, particularity, and universality. The stage symbolized by Christ's incarnation is marked by *externality* and *particularity*. Christ's death negates this particularity by introducing *universality* while still maintaining God's *externality*. The community's absolute knowing goes further by embracing *internality* along with *universality*.

KARL BARTH AND THE UNION OF HEGEL'S CATEGORIES

Karl Barth offers a theological model unaccounted for by Hegel and one which, in certain ways, may be regarded as a development beyond absolute knowing. We have seen that Hegel's three moments, namely Christ's incarnation, Christ's death, and the community's absolute knowing, are distinguished primarily by their differing expressions of externality, internality, particularity, and universality. The following discussion analyzes Barth's thought in light of these Hegelian categories by focusing primarily, though not exclusively, on "The Mercy and Righteousness of God"⁸⁶ in preparation for a detailed exposition of this passage in the next chapter. I will argue that Barth, rather than choosing to affirm only one side of each relation, succeeds in uniting externality with internality, and particularity with universality, in such a way that he overcomes the tendency toward mutual exclusivity that these categories exhibit in Hegel's *Phenomenology*.

Since Barth's affirmation of two of these Hegelian categories is indisputable, namely his assertion of God's externality in terms of divine aseity⁸⁷ and of Christ's exclusively unique particularity,⁸⁸ I will devote more attention

84. Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism*, 155.

85. Hegel speaks of the "particular" becoming the "universal and essential will." Hegel, *Phenomenology*, § 230, 138. See also Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism*, 155.

86. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics II/1*, trans. W. B. Johnston et al., ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1957), 368–406.

at this time to establishing Barth's use of internality and universality. However, this examination of internality and universality in Barth's theology is not meant to be exhaustive. In this chapter I will merely indicate that these four categories are present in his thought. In the remainder of this volume, Barth's nuanced use of these categories will unfold with greater precision.

The important thing to observe at this juncture is that Barth unites the dialectical categories that Hegel separates. By so doing, Barth succeeds in uniting Hegel's view of immediacy (incarnation) with certain features of its negation (absolute knowing) and thereby produces a form of Christian theology that advances beyond absolute knowing in accordance with Hegel's own pattern of immediacy (incarnation), negation (absolute knowing), and ascendant return (Barth, "The Mercy and Righteousness of God").⁸⁹

BARTH AND HEGELIAN EXTERNALITY

Barth clearly affirms God's existence as external to humanity and as independent in itself, which the theological tradition refers to as God's aseity.⁹⁰ In this respect, Barth's theology stands in allegiance to the very tradition that Hegel

87. One example of Barth's numerous affirmations of divine aseity is his statement that God "is the One who is free from all origination, conditioning or determination from without, by that which is not Himself." *Ibid.*, 307.

88. George Hunsinger, "Karl Barth's Christology: Its Basic Chalcedonian Character (1999)," in *Disruptive Grace: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000).

89. My argument at this point is similar to the second, "weaker" class of arguments described by Robert Pippin as the type of argument employed by Hegel himself: "To consider some Notional criterion, B, justifiable not in some absolute or realist sense, but because B improves on A, the best hitherto available option, can be taken in one of two ways. One way, by far the stronger, is to argue that, given the internal difficulties of A, B is the only possible resolution of those difficulties, and so represents a 'necessary' correction of A. The weaker argument is that B *does* resolve the inadequacies of A in the appropriate way, and issues a challenge to any potential objector to provide a better resolution." *Hegel's Idealism*, 108, italics in original. Pippin goes on to argue that "a good deal of what is important about [Hegel's] idealism . . . can be defended with the latter, weaker account. I shall only be interested in such a demonstration in what follows, and so in the plausibility rather than the necessity of Hegel's various claims." *Hegel's Idealism*, 108. As in Pippin's reading of Hegel, I am simply demonstrating the plausibility, and not the necessity, of reading Barth as a development beyond Hegel's absolute knowing.

90. As John Webster suggests, "One of the ways in which the *Dogmatics* can be construed is as a massively ramified reassertion of the aseity of God." *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 2. Elsewhere Webster argues that "the fundamental principle of the theological epistemology is divine aseity." *Barth's Moral Theology: Human Action in Barth's Thought* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 136.

attempts to surpass through absolute knowing. While God's otherness to humanity is found throughout Barth's theology, it plays a crucial role in his treatment of God's mercy and righteousness in *CD II/1*.⁹¹ At this point, I will briefly indicate the ways Barth's affirmation of God's externality to and independence from humanity is described in a few passages drawn from *CD II/1*. I will reserve a detailed account of God's mercy and righteousness for the next chapter.

In the section of *CD II/1* entitled, "The Being of God in Act,"⁹² Barth argues that God's character in eternity is the same as God's character made known to us through revelation.⁹³ Revelation discloses God's loving action toward us, and yet "He is this loving God *without us* as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in the freedom of the Lord, who has His life from Himself."⁹⁴ While our only source of knowledge of God is available "where God Himself gives us Himself to see,"⁹⁵ namely in Jesus Christ,⁹⁶ this knowledge from revelation truly discloses God's actual and eternal existence. For Barth, God is "free event, free act and free life,"⁹⁷ and as such lives in complete and unconstrained self-sufficiency. God, therefore, exists in radical externality to humanity without any intrinsic or necessary connection to creation. In short, there exists no shared order of being between God and the world.⁹⁸

God's aseity provides the presupposition of Barth's discussion of God's eternal perfections in *CD II/1*, "The Mercy and Righteousness of God."⁹⁹ While these perfections are revealed to us through Jesus Christ, they pre-exist the incarnation within the eternal being and act of the triune God. As such, God in Godself is merciful and righteous apart from God's historical dealings with humanity, yet only through God's reconciling work in Jesus Christ may we

91. Barth, *CD II/1*, 368–406.

92. *Ibid.*, 257–72.

93. *Ibid.*, 257.

94. *Ibid.*, 257, italics added.

95. *Ibid.*, 261.

96. Barth writes, "What God is as God . . . the *essentia* or 'essence' of God, is something which we shall encounter either at the place where God deals with us as Lord and Saviour, or not at all." *Ibid.*

97. *Ibid.*, 264.

98. Christopher A. Franks provides a helpful summary of Barth's view of God's external existence to the created world. Christopher A. Franks, "The Simplicity of the Living God: Aquinas, Barth, and Some Philosophers," *Modern Theology* 21, no. 2 (2005): 293–97. Keith E. Johnson discusses Barth's view of God's otherness to creation in terms of "transcendence as distinction" and "transcendence as incomprehensibility." Keith E. Johnson, "Divine Transcendence, Religious Pluralism and Barth's Doctrine of God," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 5, no. 2 (2003): 205–13.

99. Barth, *CD II/1*, 368–406.

learn of God's mercy and righteousness. God's perfections, therefore, do not depend for their existence upon their manifestation in relation to humanity but are made known through this manifestation as the perfections they are in eternity.

Barth's view of God's existence as independent from humanity differs from Hegel's externality in that Barth claims that God freely chooses in eternity to bind Godself to humanity.¹⁰⁰ Further, Eberhard Busch draws from *CD IV/1* to argue that for Barth, "There is no humanlessness in God."¹⁰¹ In this way, humanity exists in greater internality to God in Barth's view of God's aseity than in Hegel's view of God's externality.

BARTH AND HEGELIAN PARTICULARITY

Hegel's category of particularity, as found in his account of Christianity, refers to the classical understanding of the uniqueness of Christ's person. Barth affirms the Chalcedonian claim that Christ is both fully God and fully human and views this assertion as central to the reconciliation accomplished by Christ on the cross. Although Christ shares our human nature, and has entered into the depths of the human condition, Christ is qualitatively and exclusively unique as the only person to be both God and human. Otherwise, Christ's life, suffering, and death would be indistinguishable from the countless other lives, sufferings, and deaths that occur in contexts marked by similar forms of oppression and injustice. For Barth, Christ's death carries eternal ramifications precisely because of Christ's uniqueness as both God and human.¹⁰² In *CD II/1*, "The Mercy and Righteousness of God," Barth writes, "He who on the cross took upon Himself and suffered the wrath of God was no other than God's own Son, and therefore the eternal God Himself in the unity with human nature which He freely accepted in His transcendent mercy."¹⁰³ Once again, Barth's affirmation of Christ's exclusive uniqueness places him in allegiance to the tradition that Hegel attempts to supersede through absolute knowing.

In addition to the uniqueness of Christ's person, Barth affirms the unique status of Christ's crucifixion in relation to all other instances of human suffering and death. For Barth, Christ uniquely achieves reconciliation between God and

100. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III/2, trans. G. W. Bromiley et al., ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1960), 218.

101. Eberhard Busch, *The Great Passion: An Introduction to Karl Barth's Theology*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 87. See also Karl Barth, "The Humanity of God," in *The Humanity of God* (Richmond: John Knox, 1960).

102. Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/1, 396–406.

103. *Ibid.*, 397.

humanity.¹⁰⁴ Christ's suffering, therefore, carries a significance and universal relevance that cannot be matched by any other instance of human suffering.¹⁰⁵

In spite of this uniqueness, however, we will see that Barth also believes a crucial connection exists between Christ's cross and all other experiences of human suffering, whose significance Christ reveals.¹⁰⁶ In this way, Barth affirms both the exclusivity of Christ's experience and its connection to other instances of human suffering and death.

BARTH AND HEGELIAN INTERNALITY

We have seen that in Hegel's discussion of absolute knowing in the *Phenomenology*, he presents the divine being as identical to the processes by which the human community determines its own identity and normative social practice. By contrast, Karl Barth regards God as the authoritative source of human identity and normative social practice while also claiming that the processes by which God establishes and reveals this identity and ethical normativity include humanity. In other words, because of God's aseity and absolute freedom Barth unites a strong view of God's external relation to humanity with a strong view of God's internal relation to humanity in the establishment and revelation of human identity and ethical normativity. In order to demonstrate this, I will sketch Barth's account of God's merciful act of turning toward distressed humanity and the relation of internality that this reveals.

God's action toward Israel, and toward all humanity in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, displays God's mercy. In the Old Testament, God turns toward the "harassed and oppressed people of Israel . . . especially the poor, the widows and orphans, the weak and defenceless."¹⁰⁷ In the incarnation God in Christ turns toward sinners who, in light of God's righteousness, are "widows and orphans who cannot procure right for themselves."¹⁰⁸ Barth argues, "God's righteousness . . . is disclosed as help and salvation, as a saving divine intervention for man directed only to the poor, the wretched and the helpless as such."¹⁰⁹ The salvation of believers is dependent on God acting for them because, in and of themselves, they are helpless and unable to achieve reconciliation with God. God's merciful action toward humanity in this way establishes a deep bond between the believer and all those in need:

104. *Ibid.*, 396–406.

105. *Ibid.*, 373–74, 394.

106. *Ibid.*, 394–96.

107. Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/1, 386.

108. *Ibid.*, 387.

[T]here follows from this character of faith a political attitude, decisively determined by the fact that man is made responsible to all those who are poor and wretched in his eyes . . . he is summoned on his part to espouse the cause of those who suffer wrong. Why? Because in them it is manifested to him what he himself is in the sight of God; because the living, gracious, merciful action of God towards him consists in the fact that God Himself . . . procures right for him, the poor and wretched.¹¹⁰

Concretely, this ethical demand is revealed in God's act of reconciliation in Christ. A "political responsibility" and a "political attitude" necessarily arise for the Christian, which cannot be rejected without the rejection of Christ's atoning work.¹¹¹ Conversely, the atonement for sin accomplished by Christ on the cross cannot be affirmed without also affirming this political stance. In short, humanity's justification and union with God through Christ's atoning work on the cross are inseparable from the revelation of mercy as a binding ethical norm.¹¹²

To what extent, though, does the revelation of this ethical norm relate to Hegel's account of internality? Internality, for Hegel, refers to the immanent presence of the divine being within humanity as that which is ultimately authoritative in establishing human identity and normative social practice. When the Absolute is recognized as internal, according to Hegel, God is no longer viewed as metaphysically other. The human community then recognizes

109. Ibid. Barth writes earlier, "The free inclination of God to His creature, denoted in the biblical witness by grace, takes place under the presupposition that the creature is in distress and that God's intention is to espouse his cause and to grant him assistance in his extremity." Barth, *CD II/1*, 369. Of God's suffering as a result of our distress, Barth writes that "the very heart of this misery, our revolt against Him . . . is in fact the object of His own participation, His care, His suffering, and therefore also His assistance and intervention. Before we are touched or can be touched by any pain . . . we have to do with the God who Himself suffers pain because of our sin and guilt, for whom it is not an alien thing but His own intimate concern." Barth, *CD II/1*, 373.

110. Barth, *CD II/1*, 387. For more on Barth's view of God's advocacy for the poor, see Karl Barth, "Poverty," in *Against the Stream: Shorter Post-War Writings, 1946–52*, ed. Ronald Gregor Smith (New York: Philosophical Library, 1954). Elsewhere Barth writes, "Better that [the Christian congregation] stand up for the weak three times too often than one time too less, better to raise its voice unpleasantly loud where justice and freedom are endangered than to be pleasantly silent!" Quoted in Frank Jehle, *Ever Against the Stream: The Politics of Karl Barth, 1906–1968*, trans. Richard and Martha Burnett (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 81.

111. Barth writes that the Christian "cannot avoid the question of human rights. He can only will and affirm a state which is based on justice. By any other political attitude he rejects the divine justification." Barth, *CD II/1*, 387.

its own decision-making processes as the source of its own identity and normative practice and thereby self-consciously assumes responsibility for the formation of this identity and practice. In short, humanity in the stage of absolute knowing regards itself as God. Initially it appears that neither Barth nor any other thinker attempting to maintain faithfulness to Scripture and to the ecumenical creeds could assent to anything like Hegelian internality. Indeed, Barth never moves away from the traditional view of God's externality in his assertion of God's aseity, for he regards God as completely unconstrained in God's freedom and he affirms an eternal distinction between God and creation.

Yet for Barth, the revelation of the ethical norm of mercy is internal to humanity to the degree that Christ's work of reconciliation is internal to humanity. In "The Mercy and Righteousness of God," Barth argues that "God's condemning and punishing righteousness" was borne "for us" by Jesus Christ in such a way that it also "did really fall on . . . our sin and us as sinners."¹¹³ The paradoxical nature of this claim is striking. How can Barth argue that Christ bears God's wrath in our place in order to spare us the complete destruction that this wrath entails and at the same time claim that this wrath "really" falls on "our sin and us as sinners"?¹¹⁴

The incarnation is Barth's solution to this riddle. As God, Jesus Christ is able bear our condemnation and punishment for sin in such a way that we are not destroyed.¹¹⁵ As human, Jesus Christ is able to do so within our humanity, as the Human representing all humanity before God.¹¹⁶ Christ bears God's wrath in our human nature in such a way that God regards the condemnation and punishment borne by Christ "as though" it has been borne by us.¹¹⁷ In this way, Christ's work of atonement, and the revelation of ethical normativity that

112. Such reasoning permeates Barth's ethical discourse. Stanley Hauerwas agrees: "[F]or Barth, unlike Bultmann, ethics can be done only in the context of dogmatics, for it is only within the circle of the being and activity of God that the ethical question of man's determination can be raised with proper seriousness." *Character and the Christian Life: A Study in Theological Ethics* (San Antonio: Trinity University, 1985), 137. Robert Willis observes, "The [Christian] community is thus designed to provide the model of genuine creaturely action." *The Ethics of Karl Barth* (Leiden: Brill, 1971), 306. John Webster argues, "Because the theme of the *Church Dogmatics* is *this* God in covenant with humanity, the *Dogmatics* is intrinsically an ethical dogmatics, and includes description of the human covenant partner as agent." *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 4, italics in original.

113. Barth, *CD* II/1, 396.

114. *Ibid.*

115. Barth states, "Because it was the Son of God, i.e., God Himself, who took our place on Good Friday, what had necessarily to happen—because God is righteous—could happen there . . . without causing our annihilation." *Ibid.*, 399.

atonement entails, occurs internally to humanity by virtue of God's entrance into and assumption of humanity in Christ. This, though, is the *revelation* of mercy as an ethical norm, not its establishment. We must now consider the establishment of this norm in the free and unconstrained decision of God in eternity as both external to and internal to humanity.

At this point Barth's doctrine of election comes into view. For Barth, human identity and normative social practice as they are concretely revealed in Christ's work of atonement in *CD* II/1, "The Mercy and Righteousness of God," are established in God's free and eternal decision to become human in Jesus Christ, to elect humanity in Jesus Christ, and to be God for humanity.¹¹⁸ Humanity is internal to the process that determines normativity because humanity is the passive¹¹⁹ recipient of the norm-determining divine action. In other words, humanity's internal role within the establishment of human identity and normative social practice is constituted by its function as the object of God's mercy.¹²⁰

Humanity, though, is the object of God's mercy *in Jesus Christ*. As the elected Human, Jesus represents humanity before God and, as the electing God, Jesus turns toward humanity in mercy, thereby establishing human identity and normative social practice.¹²¹ As such, the constitution of this identity and practice not only occurs within God as part of God's free and eternal decision external to humanity,¹²² but also occurs inseparably from humanity in Jesus

116. Barth argues that Jesus Christ is "our Representative and Guarantor towards God. He could be the fully accredited Representative not only of the divine Judge, but also of the judged: of fallen Adam in his sin; of the whole of sinful humanity; of each individual sinner in all his being and sinning. Because He was God's Son, He could take humanity to Himself in such a way that in it He was the Advocate for God to us and to God for us all—this one man for every man." *Ibid.*, 402.

117. *Ibid.*, 396–97, 398–406. This "as though" must not be interpreted as fictional. Rather, it carries the sense of "as good as." Christ's bearing of our punishment is "as good as," or "as effective as," it had been borne by us. I thank George Hunsinger for this insight.

118. Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/2, 3, 140–42. See also Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/1, 45. The concrete demonstration of God's mercy in Christ's life, death, and resurrection is the temporal and material form of God's eternal decision of election in which God mercifully turns toward humanity and chooses to be God for humanity. For this reason, Barth claims that "the covenant of grace which is from the beginning" is "the presupposition of the atonement." Barth, *CD* IV/1, 45.

119. When arguing that Christ's union with humanity in the incarnation enables human life and action, John Webster suggests that "Barth proposes a fundamental *passivity* as anthropologically basic." *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation*, 94, italics in original.

120. Humanity is the eternal object of God's free electing love in Jesus Christ. Barth, *CD* III/2, 218.

121. Regarding human identity, see Adam Neder, "A Differentiated Fellowship of Action: Participation in Christ in Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics*" (Dissertation, Princeton Theological Seminary, 2005), 115–16.

Christ as the object of the divine decision. In Jesus Christ, God in mercy turns to humanity, thereby constituting humanity's identity as the object of God's mercy.¹²³ For this reason, "The covenant fulfilled in time is a covenant resolved and established in God Himself before all time. There was no time when God was not the Covenant-partner of man."¹²⁴

Humanity's role in the establishment of this covenant is not only that of a passive recipient. As the "Covenant-partner" of God, humanity also actively participates in the establishment of this eternal covenant through Jesus Christ. For Barth, Jesus is the Human who in himself, by virtue of his humanity, effectively represents the entire human community before God.¹²⁵ This does not mean that Jesus is the communal human Subject in a Hegelian sense, in which the human community projects a communal subjectivity that is nothing more than the self-constituted history of human practices deriving from the community itself. Rather, Jesus Christ, by virtue of his unique status as God and human in his electing and reconciling action, represents and includes all human subjectivity within himself as humanity's representative¹²⁶ without himself being reduced to humanity's communal self-consciousness. Jesus Christ as both God and human unites Hegelian externality and internality inseparably within himself.

122. In addition to deriving its externality from the divine aseity as the unconstrained, free decision of God, election also is external to humanity because it occurs in eternity and therefore pre-exists humanity. Barth argues, "And God Himself is already God, and God for us, before this becomes a particular event for any man, before it is actualised in a particular relationship between God and a man." Barth, *CD II/2*, 556. Elsewhere Barth writes, "The grace of God in which it comes and is made over to us is the grace of Jesus Christ, that is, the grace in which God from all eternity has chosen man (all men) in this One, in which He has bound Himself to man—before man even existed—in this One. He, Jesus Christ, is the One who accomplishes the sovereign act in which God has made true and actual in time the decree of His election by making atonement, in which He has introduced the new being of all men." Barth, *CD IV/1*, 91–92.

123. Barth states that God "wills man, His man, elected man, man predestined as the witness to His glory and the object of His love. In this man, but only in him. He wills humanity and every individual man and what we may describe as the idea of humanity." Barth, *CD II/2*, 140–41. Humanity owes its existence to God's election. Barth writes, "the being of man . . . is not preceded by anything apart from God in His Word, but owes its character as being solely to God in His Word. . . . Being summoned, it derives only from God, from His election, and therefore from the Word which reveals this election. It is to this alone that man owes his being." Barth, *CD III/2*, 152.

124. Barth, *CD III/2*, 218; *CD II/1*, 386.

125. Barth, *CD II/1*, 402.

126. Barth writes, "Because He was God's Son, He could take humanity to Himself in such a way that in it He was the Advocate for God to us and to God for us all—this one man for every man." *Ibid.*

At this point we may discern clear differences between Hegel and Barth regarding internality. Hegel's view of internality locates the processes of norm construction within humanity as a self-derived and self-constituting activity. Barth, however, reverses this relation by locating humanity within the processes of norm construction—processes that may not be reduced to the human community and that are determined by God's relation to humanity in Jesus Christ. For Hegel, internality signals the active participation of humanity in the determination of its own norms. For Barth, however, internality refers to both the passive incorporation of humanity within the processes of norm construction, as the object of God's mercy, and humanity's active participation through the action of Jesus Christ as humanity's representative before God. Finally, Hegel sharply distinguishes externality and internality in a relation of mutual exclusivity, while Barth brings externality and internality together within Christ's person in a relation of unity and distinction.

BARTH AND HEGELIAN UNIVERSALITY

We have seen that Hegel contrasts the religious community's belief in the particularity of Jesus Christ after the incarnation with its belief in God's universal presence within the religious community through the Holy Spirit after Christ's death. Universality becomes even more pronounced in absolute knowing, according to Hegel, for the human community recognizes that its decision-making processes determine human identity and normative social practice and that its members universally share responsibility for this norm construction.

As is the case with regard to externality and internality, Barth refuses to maintain Hegel's relation of mutual exclusivity between particularity and universality. Barth carefully affirms Chalcedon's understanding of Christ's unique particularity as the only person who is both God and human. Yet to this affirmation of Christ's uniqueness Barth adds an element of universality in relation to the establishment and revelation of human identity and normative social practice. Unlike Hegel's view of universality as shared responsibility for self-constituted norm construction, Barth's universality points to the incorporation of all of humanity as the object of God's mercy within the norm construction entailed by God's eternal decision of election and Christ's atoning work of reconciliation.¹²⁷ Humanity as a whole is "poor and wretched before God."¹²⁸ Barth writes, "When we encounter divine righteousness *we are all* like

127. John Webster writes, "A less than robust account of the perfection of the person and work of Christ almost inevitably undermines his universality or catholicity, disturbing the deep sense that all times and occasions are the seasons of his mercy." *Barth's Moral Theology*, 148–49.

the people of Israel, menaced and altogether lost according to its own strength. *We are all* widows and orphans who cannot procure right for themselves.”¹²⁹ As the object of God’s mercy, humanity as a whole is passively incorporated within the establishment and revelation of human identity and normative social practice.

Likewise, Barth regards humanity as universally represented by Christ in his active role of establishing and revealing human identity and normative social practice through election and reconciliation. In this way, as we saw with regard to Barth’s version of internality, Barth’s depiction of universality contains both a passive and an active aspect.

There is an additional way in Barth’s thought that humanity universally participates in the revelation of human identity and normative social practice. The “political responsibility” that universally belongs to every member of the human community as the object of God’s mercy means that Christians must acknowledge their responsibility “to all those who are poor and wretched in [their] eyes” and that they must “espouse the cause of those who suffer wrong.”¹³⁰ Christians discover that all people are given an active task in this world that is the analogical echo of God’s act of mercy toward humanity that originally determined human identity and normative social practice. As they recognize this fact, Christians respond by reflecting in their own actions, and therefore in the proper order and asymmetry intrinsic to Christian discipleship, the merciful turning of God toward those in need.

The entire human community, as the object of God’s mercy, is called to live according to “the human righteousness required by God and established in obedience . . . [which] has necessarily the character of a vindication of right in favour of the threatened innocent, the oppressed poor, widows, orphans and aliens.”¹³¹ Christians quickly learn that their lives of costly obedience are marked by suffering, the suffering of the cross,¹³² which functions as “a token” and “a witness”¹³³ to the cross of Jesus Christ and the reconciliation he there accomplished between God and humanity. Christ’s unique particularity is preserved,¹³⁴ and yet a universal demand is placed upon humanity that is

128. Barth, *Church Dogmatics II/1*, 387.

129. *Ibid.*, 387, italics added. See also Karl Barth, “Poverty,” in *Against the Stream*, 245–46.

130. Barth, *CD II/1*, 387.

131. *Ibid.*, 386.

132. *Ibid.*, 405–6.

133. *Ibid.*, 395.

134. Christ’s cross remains unique and unrepeatable; the Christian’s cross is merely an analogy of Christ’s cross *ibid.*, 405.

recognized by the Christian community and expressed in its obedient service to those in need. In this way, Barth unites Hegelian particularity and universality.

At this point we can see that Barth reverses the direction of Hegel's representational thinking and thereby employs a different manner of expression or descriptive mode for the transmission of content than that found in either Hegel's revealed religion (descriptive mode: representational thinking) or absolute knowing (descriptive mode: discursive philosophy).¹³⁵ For Hegel, religious ideas such as Christ's incarnation, death, and resurrection are simply metaphors and representations of truths embodied by the human community's own life and practice. Our images of a transcendent God, and of Christ's cross, are projections of relations and realities that are actually determined by the human community itself. For Barth, however, the Christian's life becomes the image, analogy, and reflection of the determinative reality found in Jesus Christ. Ethical practice, such as turning toward those in need and the unavoidable suffering that this entails, is itself the representation of the determinative reality of God's merciful turning toward humanity and the suffering of Christ's cross that God's mercy entails.¹³⁶ In Barth's words, the Christian's life becomes "a token" and "a witness"¹³⁷ of a greater reality that transcends the life and scope of the human community. In this way, Hegel's metaphors (Christ's incarnation, death, and resurrection) are Barth's determinative realities, and Hegel's determinative realities (the practices of the human community) are Barth's analogies. Later in this volume, we will return to the analogical character of Christian life in Barth's thought.

BEYOND ABSOLUTE KNOWING

Throughout Hegel's *Phenomenology* there is a repeated pattern, a "movement of *consciousness*,"¹³⁸ in which a form of consciousness encounters its opposite through a process of differentiation or "self-othering."¹³⁹ The original form of consciousness then undergoes further development as a result of this encounter

135. Barth's proposal also differs from the perspective that one would have within Hegel's "revealed religion" due to Barth's, and Scripture's, union of externality, internality, particularity, and universality. For more on Barth's use of language, see Hunsinger, "Beyond Literalism and Expressivism: Karl Barth's Hermeneutical Realism," 209–223.

136. For a helpful summary of various criticisms of Barth's use of analogy to determine ethical guidelines, see Nigel Biggar, *The Hastening that Waits: Karl Barth's Ethics* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), 180–82.

137. Barth, *CD III/1*, 395.

138. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, § 788, 479.

139. *Ibid.*, § 18, 10.

for it “supersede[s]”¹⁴⁰ the differentiated form and incorporates its opposite within itself so that it achieves “the mediation of its self-othering with itself”¹⁴¹ and “communion with itself in *its* otherness.”¹⁴² In short, this process is one of self-differentiation and then of uniting differentiated components on a higher plane. The dynamic completion of this process produces a more comprehensive account of reality: “Only this self-*restoring* sameness, or this reflection in otherness within itself—not an *original* or *immediate* unity as such—is the True.”¹⁴³

We find this pattern operative in Hegel’s account of the development of religion and the transition to absolute knowing. The first stage, the incarnation of Christ, exhibits the immediacy found in the initial stage of Hegel’s new forms of consciousness, an emergent understanding that must be overcome by further development. This is an immediacy based on the direct encounter with Jesus Christ, who in his exclusive particularity represents an external God to us. The second stage, the death of Christ, constitutes the transitional movement between the incarnation and absolute knowing in which the immediacy of the incarnation (externality and particularity) is transformed into its negative form,¹⁴⁴ namely the otherness of absolute knowing (internality and universality). Though Hegel accounts for the supersession of externality and particularity, he does not foresee the supersession of internality and universality and the resulting dialectical union in distinction of externality with internality and particularity with universality, as set forth in Barth’s theology.

This final union in Barth’s thought may be viewed, according to Hegel’s “movement of consciousness,” as a completion of the process that begins with immediacy (incarnation), moves on to the negation of immediacy (absolute knowing), and then returns to immediacy from its negation in a higher dialectical union that contains the features of both immediacy and its negation (externality and internality, particularity and universality). In this way, Barth’s theology depicts a completion of Hegel’s “process of . . . becoming,” unforeseen

140. *Ibid.*, § 788, 479.

141. *Ibid.*, § 18, 10.

142. *Ibid.*, § 788, 479.

143. *Ibid.*, § 18, 10.

144. This second moment, symbolized for Hegel by Christ’s death, is not the complete negation of the first moment but is the beginning of the *process* of negation, which reaches completion only in absolute knowing. As such, the second moment is a transitional phase between the incarnation and absolute knowing, and absolute knowing alone is the full negation of the immediacy of the incarnation. I therefore interpret the following statement by Hegel in regard to Christ’s death as referring to the beginning of this process of negation rather than to its completion: “In the vanishing of the immediate existence known to be absolute Being the immediacy receives its negative moment.” *Ibid.*, § 763, 462.

by Hegel, that fulfills Hegel's description of "the circle that presupposes its end as its goal, having its end also as its beginning."¹⁴⁵ Barth's argument in *CD* II/1, "The Mercy and Righteousness of God," therefore, accounts more thoroughly for "the totality of [consciousness's] moments"¹⁴⁶ and provides a more comprehensive final stage to Hegel's "movement of consciousness" than Hegel's own absolute knowing by surpassing Hegel's view of the highest form of human consciousness according to Hegel's own dialectical progression.

HEGELIAN EVALUATION OF T. F. TORRANCE

In spite of the many commonalities shared between the theologies of T. F. Torrance and Karl Barth, important differences emerge when Torrance is subjected to a Hegelian analysis. Torrance clearly depicts Christ's assumption of flesh,¹⁴⁷ as well as the church's union with Christ,¹⁴⁸ and to this degree may not be accused of neglecting or undermining Barth's radical view of the internal relation between Christ and humanity. Christ assumes human nature, according to Torrance, in such a way that Christ is the one Man acting on behalf of all humans, who accomplishes "the redemption of human existence" within "the weakness and frailty of human creaturehood."¹⁴⁹

Further, Torrance connects the mission of the church, as the Body of Christ, to Christ's work of atonement in such a way that the life of the church becomes "cruciform"¹⁵⁰ and the members of the church sacramentally represent the body and blood of Christ through their own costly service in mission.¹⁵¹ He also argues that Christ's ministry, which is characterized "by deeds of love and compassion in the healing and succouring of sick and suffering and outcast human beings," provides the "source and ground" of the church's merciful ministry to those in need.¹⁵² In this way, the inner logic of the atonement

145. *Ibid.*, § 18, 10.

146. *Ibid.*, § 788, 479.

147. For example, see Thomas F. Torrance, "The Atonement and the Oneness of the Church," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 7 (1954): 250.

148. Torrance notes that "the oneness of the Church is grounded in the incorporating and atoning action of Christ." *Ibid.*, 246. He goes on to argue that Christ made the church "one Body with Himself" and that "The Twelve were thus the Many inhering in the One." Torrance, "The Atonement and the Oneness of the Church," 248, 266. According to Torrance, there exists an ontological union between Christ and the Church. "The Atonement and the Oneness of the Church," 254–55.

149. Thomas F. Torrance, "Service in Jesus Christ," in *Service in Christ: Essays Presented to Karl Barth on his 80th Birthday*, ed. James I. McCord and T. H. L. Parker (London: Epworth, 1966), 4.

150. Torrance, "The Atonement and the Oneness of the Church," 259.

151. *Ibid.*, 265, 267.

determines the normative life and service of the church lived out in obedience to Christ.

Yet something is missing. In order to shed light upon Torrance's divergence from Barth, I will bring Torrance into conversation with Hegel and will argue that Torrance insufficiently develops internality and universality in regard to the sociopolitical life of the human community.

INTERNALITY

Hegel's discussion of the movement of Christianity from Christ's incarnation to Christ's death and, finally, to absolute knowing provides a helpful framework for evaluating Torrance's theology in *The Mediation of Christ*. Given Torrance's emphasis upon the eternal and spiritual implications of the cross, Torrance approximates at a formal level Hegel's description of the Christian faith represented by the incarnation.

In this stage of Hegel's *Phenomenology*, as we have seen, God is conceived as external to the human community with the exception of Jesus Christ, who as God and human is the particular and unique presence of God within humanity. In a similar fashion, Torrance consistently presents God's reconciling activity as external to sociopolitical reality by portraying the central, determinative features of the atonement as located beyond the daily life of the human community in spite of his efforts to ground Christ's work within the highly abstract, ontological category of "human nature." The results of this disconnection are evident throughout his writings, most clearly in his rejection of political interpretations of the cross and in his negative view of Christian sociopolitical action.¹⁵³ God is related to the Christian community in a predominantly spiritual, transcendent manner. The relevance of the cross remains primarily spiritual in such a way that other aspects, in particular the sociopolitical dynamics of human life, recede into the background. Elsewhere, he uses the language of liberation but interprets it spiritually to refer to freedom from the guilt of sin.¹⁵⁴ Even when commenting on Mic. 6:8,¹⁵⁵ Torrance

152. Torrance, "Service in Jesus Christ," 4.

153. Thomas F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 2nd ed. (Colorado Springs: Helmers & Howard, 1992), 30–31; Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation: Essays towards Evangelical and Catholic Unity in East and West* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1996), 277–78, 290; Torrance, "Service in Jesus Christ," 11–12.

154. Torrance writes, "At the Cross God puts the clock back. He restores the years that the locust has eaten, for He breaks the power of guilt and liberates man from the determinism of a guilty past." Thomas F. Torrance, "The Atonement and the Oneness of the Church," *SJT* 7 (1954): 262. Although this article was written before the development of liberation theologies, Torrance's focus upon the spiritual aspect of the cross to the exclusion of sociopolitical realities is evident.

interprets God's mercy and justice in terms of atonement for sin and overlooks the deep sociopolitical significance of this passage.¹⁵⁶

Torrance draws nearer to Barth in an article written to celebrate Barth's eightieth birthday, entitled "Service in Jesus Christ." There, Torrance affirms the necessity of Christian acts of mercy in analogy to the mercy of God.¹⁵⁷ Although the church should address social injustice,¹⁵⁸ Torrance rejects the use of sociopolitical power by Christians as a temptation to "assimilat[e] to the forms of this world" and to "compromis[e] [the church's] real nature as the Body of Jesus Christ."¹⁵⁹ Visible human affliction cannot compare to "the real sting of . . . misery" caused by sin.¹⁶⁰ For this reason, Torrance portrays Christ's miracles of healing in spiritual terms, as "a struggle with evil will" and as a confrontation with sin,¹⁶¹ without also examining their temporal, material dimension as acts directed toward the urgent relief of human distress.¹⁶² He thereby minimizes the temporal, material character of human suffering and reduces it to near insignificance as a minor element eclipsed by the overshadowing presence of sin.

In stark contrast, as we will see in chapter four, Barth argues that Christ rarely addresses the sins of the people he heals but rather directs his immediate concern toward their suffering.¹⁶³ Where Barth addresses both sin and suffering, Torrance continually attempts to strike beneath suffering by concentrating exclusively on sin. Torrance's intense ontological focus may have limited his vision at this point, for traditional ontological categories cannot easily account for the sociopolitical dynamics of human community that often give rise to unjust suffering.¹⁶⁴ Torrance's theology bypasses the social dynamics of human life even as he attempts to address every aspect of "human existence"¹⁶⁵ and "being."¹⁶⁶ In effect, his doctrine of atonement remains external to the sociopolitical structure of human community and lacks the fully developed internality that shapes the ethical implications of Barth's theology of the cross.

155. "He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"

156. Thomas F. Torrance, "The Prophet Micah and His Famous Saying," *EvQ* 24 (1952): 209.

157. Torrance, "Service in Jesus Christ," 1–3.

158. *Ibid.*, 11.

159. *Ibid.*, 12.

160. *Ibid.*, 14, see also 10.

161. *Ibid.*, 10; see also 5, 7.

162. "Now, what distressed God so deeply . . . is not simply [man's] sickness and pain, nor even the torment of anxiety that gnaws at his inner being, but the fact that in his hostility to God man has become possessed of sin in his very mind and is caught in the toils of a vast evil will." *Ibid.*, 5; see also 7, 8, 10.

163. Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/2, 221–24.

UNIVERSALITY

Torrance's position also incompletely accounts for Barthian universality in two ways. For Hegel, universality refers not only to the participation of all individuals in the community's processes of self-constitution but also to the universal scope of human activities that come under the range of human self-reflection. No part of human life remains outside the community's reasoning activities or processes of self-determination. For Barth, universality refers not only to the inclusion of all people within God's determining action in Christ but also to the entirety of human life that is determined by this divine action.

In contrast, as we have seen, Torrance views Christ's reconciling work as only indirectly affecting the social and political dynamics of human life by undercutting them and confronting the sin at their root. Torrance further distances Christ's work from human social life by rejecting attempts to identify sociopolitical significance in Christ's death, a move that would seem to invalidate efforts to construct a distinctly Christian ethical theory. By doing so, he fails to acknowledge that Christ's reconciling work directly impinges upon every area of human life, including the sociopolitical, and that the atonement bears urgent significance for the ethical life of the human community.

Second, while Torrance would agree that humanity as a whole is the object of God's mercy and that Christ's representation of humanity before God bears significance for every human life, he fails to recognize the necessary sociopolitical responsibility that follows from these assertions, which is the task every person receives as the object of God's mercy to bestow mercy upon all others in need. Where Barth universalizes the ethical demand of the cross by arguing that all people are to show mercy to those in need, Torrance limits this demand to Christians.¹⁶⁷ I will return to this limitation and its relation to Torrance's rejection of Christian sociopolitical action in chapter four.

Torrance's error seems to be that he disallows the full soteriological implications of his otherwise careful Christology. The unfortunate result is that Torrance's position, with its underdeveloped internality and universality, resembles at a strictly formal level Hegel's account of incarnation and thereby

164. Torrance's ontological focus permeates his writings. Drawing examples from a single paragraph, he speaks of "privation of being," God's "eternal being," Christ's "divine nature and human nature," humanity's "spiritual and physical being," and the reclamation of our "human nature" in Christ. Torrance, "Service in Jesus Christ," 7. I do not dispute Torrance's ontological claims, yet his overwhelming focus on ontology tends to obscure elements that cannot easily be reduced to his ontological categories, such as the social life of the human community.

165. *Ibid.*, 4.

166. *Ibid.*, 6.

167. Torrance, "Service in Jesus Christ," 1, 2, 9.

obscures the relation between the doctrine of atonement and the sociopolitical life of the human community. In this way, Torrance's theology contrasts significantly with Barth's thought.

HEGELIAN EVALUATION OF JON SOBRINO

Jon Sobrino, on the other hand, excessively universalizes and internalizes God's effective presence within the human community.

UNIVERSALITY

For Sobrino, the contemporary experiences of the community determine the aspects of the Christian narrative that are of greatest instrumental relevance for achieving the community's independently determined ends. As a result, humans become functionally equivalent to Jesus Christ as bearers of salvation. Sobrino's hermeneutical circle, as we saw in the introduction, prioritizes the contemporary experiences of suffering in Latin America to the extent that this affliction provides the interpretive criteria for analyzing Scripture. Sobrino argues, "The crucified peoples of the Third World are today the great theological setting, the *locus*, in which to understand the cross of Jesus."¹⁶⁸

However, the interpretation of Christ's cross through the hermeneutic of contemporary experiences of suffering limits the significance that may be attached by Christ's cross to the historical meaning of these contemporary crosses. In other words, the salvific significance of Christ's cross is circumscribed by the temporal and material limitations of the contemporary human experiences that determine this significance. A self-confirming process then emerges in which the community finds in the Christian narrative that which it previously determined to be relevant and passes over, as non-authoritative, those aspects of Scripture that might call its internal life or practices into question. The Christian narrative becomes merely instrumental to the attempt to achieve previously determined ends. Christ's cross is then mined for its historically and existentially liberative significance, which is then assigned to the contemporary context that initiated this circular hermeneutical movement. The result is that the salvation associated with Christ's cross is represented in terms of the contemporary struggles of the human community, while the current, unjust sufferings of the martyred victims of oppression are represented as transmitting

168. Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator: A Historical-Theological Reading of Jesus of Nazareth*, trans. Francis McDonagh and Paul Burns (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1993), 196; see also 195, 251.

historical salvation in the same way that Christ's suffering and death bestow salvation.

The salvation offered by Christ and the salvation offered by the crucified people are inseparable and mutually entailing for Sobrino. In Hegelian terms, Christ's particularity has given way to the universality of God's union with humanity. As such, the authority for determining human identity and normative social practice has been universalized throughout the human community, and contemporary experiences of suffering are given a weight practically identical to Christ's affliction.

INTERNALITY

While Sobrino does not deny that God exists externally to the human community, and indeed he often implies God's external existence in *Jesus the Liberator*, there is nonetheless a strong trajectory toward internality throughout this volume. This is most clearly evident in his discussion of salvation in terms of liberation and of the transmission of this salvation through historically embedded means. In addition, his depiction of the crucified people as their own agents of liberation reveals a profoundly immanent relation between God, as the source of salvation, and the human community, which is made up of those who achieve their own liberative salvation and that of others. Instead of encountering humanity from the outside, as One who is radically other than the human community, God in Sobrino's thought arises to a significant degree from within the community. To this extent, Sobrino exhibits Hegelian internality.

We may conclude that Sobrino's emphasis upon universality and internality leaves externality (God's aseity) and particularity (Christ's exclusive uniqueness) underdeveloped. Sobrino thereby approximates at a formal level Hegel's absolute knowing.

CONCLUSION

In Torrance, particularity without sufficiently developed internality to human sociopolitical life collapses into an exaggerated externality in which God bears only an indirect relation to sociopolitical realities. The result is Torrance's almost exclusive emphasis upon the eternal and spiritual aspect of the cross. At the same time, Torrance's externality without adequate universality collapses

into a particularity that insufficiently articulates the temporal and material relevance of Christ's person and work for every sociopolitical context.

Conversely, in Sobrino, universality without adequately developed externality grounded in God's otherness collapses into an internality that regards the historical life of the human community to be of greatest determinative significance. This leads to the marginalization of the eternal and spiritual aspect of the cross and to Sobrino's rejection of atonement for sin. At the same time, Sobrino's internality without adequate particularity collapses into a universality that assigns equivalent weight to Christ's suffering and the afflictions of people today, thereby jettisoning the exclusive uniqueness of Christ's person and work.

For these reasons, in Torrance and Sobrino, the distinctions between externality and particularity (Torrance) and between internality and universality (Sobrino) blur in such a way that they become largely superfluous. Barth's theology, however, reveals that these categories are not redundant by uniting while distinguishing externality, internality, particularity, and universality. The Hegelian analysis set forth in this chapter enables us to differentiate the theologies of Torrance, Sobrino, and Barth by revealing Torrance's formal approximation of Hegel's view of the incarnation, Sobrino's approximation of Hegel's absolute knowing, and Barth's development beyond Hegel's absolute knowing. Barth's thought is therefore distinct from the theologies of Hegel, Torrance, and Sobrino, for it brings together within a relation of unity and distinction the Hegelian categories of externality, internality, particularity, and universality.

I began this chapter by providing an account of the developmental stages that constitute Christianity and the transition to absolute knowing in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. I depicted Hegel's view of Christ's incarnation as marked by externality and particularity, his account of Christ's death as distinguished by externality and universality, and his conception of absolute knowing as characterized by internality and universality. I argued that although Hegel separates these categories (externality from internality and particularity from universality), Barth succeeds in bringing them together within a relation of unity and distinction. By uniting these categories, Barth provides a plausible development beyond Hegel's absolute knowing when viewed in light of Hegel's process of immediacy, negation, and ascendant return. Finally, I analyzed Torrance and Sobrino in light of Hegel and argued that Torrance's theology formally approximates Hegel's view of incarnation and that Sobrino's thought resembles Hegel's absolute knowing. This formal analysis prepares us to achieve a deeper understanding of how Barth's theology integrates

atonement and liberation. Barth's theology does not provide a middle term between Torrance and Sobrino, as if they each were two extremes to which Barth supplies the Aristotelian mean. Rather, Barth's thought surpasses, in the Hegelian sense, the theologies of Torrance and Sobrino in the same way that Barth provides a development beyond absolute knowing and each of Hegel's preceding stages of consciousness.