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## HEGEL'S NEGATIVE THEOLOGY

To those who are even moderately acquainted with Hegel's *Science of Logic*, which provides the dynamic conceptual framework for the whole of the vast Hegelian "system," it will come as no surprise that the category of "negativity" assumes for Hegel such gigantic proportions in the philosophical endeavour. What this *Logic* seeks to portray throughout its seemingly endless meanderings is the progressive explicitation of the inevitable implications of thought, beginning with the very first and inescapable object of thought, namely Being, and ending with the all-embracing logical Idea, which unites the totality of both Thought and Being by at once articulating all the determinations of being and giving them meaning in the unity of infinite Being, which is the ultimate condition for the possibility of both thought and being.

Crucial to an understanding of the entire Hegelian endeavour, then, is the realization that only if being is infinite, if there is infinite Being, is reality intelligible at all. What this means is not that finite being is not, or is not real, but rather that the very being and intelligibility of the finite is dependent on and contained in the being and intelligibility of the infinite. This is but another way of saying that "infinity" — as negative as the term may seem to be in our language — is not to be understood primarily as the negation of finitude, which would condemn the very concept of infinity to hopeless vagueness, but rather that finitude itself is first and foremost but the negation of infinity. If it is true to say that being is only if being is infinite, then it is *a fortiori* true to say that finite being is only if being is infinite, only if infinite being is.

This is not the place to spell out in detail the philosophical implications of the dialectical relationship of finitude and infinity, which at once negate and imply each other, but the finite-infinite relationship does point up admirably the inevitable theological overtones of all of Hegel's philosophizing. There can be no question that Hegel identifies — terminologically at least — the Infinite and God, the *Christian*

God, who is "absolute Spirit." The point, however, is that Hegel from the very beginning identifies thinking God, knowing God, with authentic thinking and knowing, such that to know at all, in the fullest sense, is to know God, and not to know God is not to know. It is for this reason that, in his Introduction to the *Science of Logic*, Hegel can characterize logic as "the presentation of God, as he is in his eternal Being before the creation of nature or of a single finite spirit."<sup>1</sup> Logic, then, and ultimately the whole of philosophy, which Hegel calls "speculative thinking," is the spelling out of that "presentation of God" which is but another way of saying that the conceptual framework of philosophy is for Hegel "theologic."

In this connection there is a rather mysterious passage in the Preface to Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, which has baffled commentators over the years, but which can also justify characterizing Hegel's philosophy as "negative theology."

The life of God and divine knowledge might well, then, be characterized as Love's self-play. [But] this idea descends to mere edification and even to insipidity, if the sericousness, the pain, the patient labour of the negative is absent from it. *In itself*, of course, that life is undisturbed sameness and oneness with itself, which has no concern with being other or with self-alienation, nor with the overcoming of this self-alienation. This *in-itself*, however, is abstract universality, wherein its nature *to be for itself* and thus the self-movement of form is ignored.<sup>2</sup>

The knowledge which the *Phenomenology* seeks to articulate, then, finds its paradigm in God's self-knowledge. But, to speak of God's self-knowledge without speaking of God's going out of himself in

1. *Wissenschaft der Logik I* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1963), p. 31. Throughout the rest of this paper Hegel's works will be cited according to the following abbreviations, from the editions here indicated.

BS: *Berliner Schriften* (Meiner).

Diff: *Differenz der Fichteschen und Schelling'schen Systems der Philosophie* (Glockner).

EGP: *Einleitung in die Geschichte der Philosophie* (Meiner).

EpW: *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften* (Meiner).

PdG: *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (meiner).

VA: *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik* (Suhrkamp).

VGP: *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie* (Suhrkamp).

VPG: *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte* (Suhrkamp).

VPR: *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion* (Suhrkamp).

WL: *Wissenschaft der Logik* (Meiner).

2. PdG, p. 20.

this knowledge is to say nothing. Now, for God to go out of himself is to posit being which is other than himself without ceasing to be self-knowing in knowing the posited other. The negative relationship which is inseparable from the self-activity of God as absolute Spirit, then, in no way distinguishes God's knowledge of himself as identical with himself from his knowledge of what is other than himself. This opens the way for Hegel to interpret "spiritually" the principal dogmas of Christian Theology, which he does later in Chapter VII of the *Phenomenology* (Section C: "Religion of Revelation") and in Part III of the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, entitled "Absolute Religion." In both cases the religion of which Hegel speaks is the "Christian Religion." Before going on, however, to what might properly be called Hegel's theology, it might be well to recall how negativity functions in the overall movement of the *Phenomenology*.

In the Introduction Hegel tells us that knowing will ultimately be worthy of the name only if it is "absolute knowing"—whatever that can mean at the beginning of the quest. In investigating the very essence of knowing, however, the beginning quite obviously cannot be "absolute." Rather, it will be the very negation of "absolute knowing," precisely because it is absolutely minimal knowing, the "certainty" of the immediate objects of sensation. The overall movement, then, begins by negating what is inadequate in the first form of knowing—negating what is negative and thus insuring that the forward movement will be positive. Thus, throughout the series of negations, each negation will not only eliminate what is inadequate but also point the way to more and more adequate knowing. The immediacy of sensation will give way to the reflectiveness of "perception"; perception's link with the conditions of sensibility will give way to the abstract universality of "understanding"; understanding's certainty that its supra-sensible object is somehow "out there" will give way to the realization that consciousness must look into itself if it is to find its own "truth."

With the move from consciousness' awareness of itself to a more and more adequate awareness of just what the self of self-consciousness is, the *Phenomenology* begins to expand immeasurably, but the direction of the expansion continues to be dictated by the negating of the inadequacies of each succeeding position. Self-conscious "reason," which progressively discovers the rationality of what it knows, *i.e.*, not merely the rationality of its own subjective thinking, gives way to the more concrete universality of the "we" proper to "spirit," a sort of communal self-conscious reason,

At this point the forward movement of the *Phenomenology* comes, so to speak, to a kind of halt. The "spirit in question will not be adequate, even to itself, short of "absolute Spirit," but this latter is proper to a very special form of consciousness which has its own phenomenology, *i.e.*, religious consciousness, whose object, even in its most primitive forms, is, implicitly at least, "absolute Spirit." Thus, the phenomenology of religious consciousness has its successive stages of adequacy, each attained to by negating the inadequacy of the stage preceding it. Precisely as "religious," consciousness will find its adequacy in the Christian consciousness of revelation. From the point of view of adequacy, however, even Christian religious consciousness, according to Hegel, does not meet the demands of "absolute knowing," since the form under which absolute Spirit is present to religious consciousness is still not "thought" in the fullest sense of the term. Hence the need to articulate in thought the content of Christian revelation. Strictly speaking this articulation should belong to the ultimate stage of the phenomenological process, but what Hegel does is to spell out his theological interpretation as the climax to the penultimate stage, leaving to "absolute knowing" the appropriation of what has thus been spelled out, in such a way that absolute knowing is both a *knowing* of the Absolute and the *presence* of the Absolute in the very knowing.

### Philosophy in a Christian Framework

What has proved disconcerting to many students of Hegel who share neither his Christian faith nor his Christian theology is that he consistently employs a language which is intelligible only to Christians in a context which is acceptable only to Christians. As we have seen this is true not only of his philosophy of religion but also of his phenomenology. What is more it characterizes the whole cast of his philosophical thought. How does one take seriously a philosopher, who proclaims more emphatically than any other the autonomy of human reason and in the very same breath makes that reason fit into the procrustean bed of a theology which is all too clearly trinitarian and incarnational, which reasons in terms of God's self-outpouring in creation, of a disintegrating fall of the human spirit, and of a reintegrating reconciliation through the death of the God-man, which makes the presence of the Holy Spirit in the spirit of man integral to reason's capacity to come to grips with integral truth? One might wish, of course, not to take what Hegel says literally, but not only the two quotations with which we began but the whole of Hegel's theological interpretation would seem to militate against that.

What is very clear about Hegel's reasoning is that, unlike Kant, he does not limit its scope to a finite content, thus handing over the infinite content which is the divine to a human religious response, *i.e.*, faith, which is discontinuous with reason. Hegel's philosophy of religion is not so much concerned, as in Kant's with the subjective mode of religious consciousness as it is with the objective content of that consciousness and with the rationality of that content. Thus we can say that, for Hegel, it is essential to the integrity of human consciousness that it be religious, that it be consciousness of the Absolute, the Infinite, who is God. It is, furthermore, essential to the consciousness of God that it be theological, *i.e.*, a thought out consciousness, if it is to be authentically human. But, a thinking which is not philosophical is not, properly speaking, theological (concerned with a rational account — "logos" — of God and the divine-human relationship), because, as Hegel sees it, only philosophical thought is supremely rational. Philosophical thinking, however, will be supremely rational only if its object is the supremely rational, absolute Spirit, and this means — along traditional theological lines — that knowledge of God makes sense only if its paradigm is God's own absolute knowing, which is absolute precisely because both the knowing and the known are absolute, *i.e.*, God himself — the paradigm of authentic knowing is God's absolute self-knowing.

Hegel was constantly at odds with the "theologians" of his day — most of whom were Kantian in their attitude toward reason. He was in his approach closer to the medieval Scholastics (and to the negative theology of the German mystics), whose philosophy was continuous with their theology — and with their faith — who did not have to contend with the opinion that reason had to hold off from the divine.<sup>3</sup> "What is theology," he says, "without a knowledge of God? Just what a philosophy is without the same, sounding brass and tinkling cymbal."<sup>4</sup> It is a question, too, of knowing God as he is in himself, not merely of knowing the countless predicates men have attributed to him,<sup>5</sup> not of applying to the "Incomprehensible" the categories of abstract "understanding," which are inadequate to him.<sup>6</sup> The medieval theologians, he felt, were nearer to the truth than were his contemporaries, because their thinking was both theology and speculative philosophy. There is, then, a danger that insistence on the

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3. See *BS*, p. 80.

4. *BS*, p. 81.

5. *VPR* II, pp. 224-225.

6. *BS*, p. 351.

incomprehensibility of God will degrade theology from a doctrine of God to a "historical" knowledge of what has been *said* about God — presumably by people who did not quite *know* what they were saying!

The problem, of course, is that for merely finite thinking what religion says of God is so rife with contradictions that abstract understanding simply stands aghast before divine truth. The danger, then is that, precisely because of these contradictions, religious truth will be presented in such a way that the contradictions are not resolved but merely shunted aside.<sup>7</sup> Here it is that the contradiction of "sameness" and "otherness" in the infinite comes in, the mutual negation of finitude and infinity, which does not negate in such a way as to cancel out. Thus, although the finite and the infinite are related to each other negatively, it is, nevertheless, necessary to assert that to say finite is to say infinite, without which the finite would not be, and to say infinite is to say finite, without which the infinite would not be intelligible. Finite reality — nature and spirit — is other than infinite reality — God, absolute Spirit — not because the finite stands over-against God independently, but because God who is infinite "others" himself in the finite.<sup>8</sup>

### The Human as "Incarnation" of the Divine

Once more we are back to the Christian context within which alone Hegel's philosophical thinking on God is intelligible. The central "mystery" of the Christian religion, from the point of view of its revelatory character, is the Incarnation. God who is Spirit, if he is to reveal himself — and self-revelation is integral to the very being of spirit — can reveal himself only to the being who is spirit. In one sense we can say that the very being of man as spirit *is* divine revelation, but the paradigm of divine self-revelation is to be found in the divine-human, the God-man, who, Hegel assures us, is Jesus Christ.<sup>9</sup> He by no means intends to deny that Jesus is a person who is truly human nor that, as human, he is an individual to whom can be assigned a place in the temporal course of history, but he is insistent that the truth of Jesus Christ is not exhausted in his humanity — nor is the truth of any human individual exhausted in its finitude. It is not enough to know *who* Christ *was*; we must also know *what* Christ *is*, *i.e.*, a human

7. *Diff*, pp. 60–61.

8. *VPR* II, pp. 44, 200–201.

9. Lest it be thought that Hegel is over-rationalizing the Incarnation, he nowhere asserts that reason by itself could come to the conclusion that *this* one man, Jesus Christ, is God. *Only* revelation could make that known.

individual inseparable from the divine nature, the paradigm of God's self-revelation in human nature.<sup>10</sup> Let those who insist that God is "incomprehensible" say what this "self-revelation" in Jesus Christ could possibly mean!

In all of this we can see that, although for Hegel philosophy, "speculative thinking," is not by itself capable of *discovering* the truth of God's self-revelation, it is an indispensable hermeneutic instrument for opening up the *meaning* of that self-revelation. If philosophy is indeed to be "science of God," which Hegel claims it is, then faith is indispensable to it; but, by the same token, philosophy is indispensable to the understanding of what faith believes—a *progressive* understanding.

When Hegel speaks of divine self-revelation, then, he refers primarily not to the *words* of the Bible but to the *story* these words tell, and the story is essentially that of God's being in the world as "God-man," the synthesis of the divine and the human, the infinite and the finite.<sup>11</sup>

In one sense, as we have seen, Hegel's entire philosophy can be called a philosophy of God, since to know is, ultimately, to know God. In a other sense, however, Hegel's philosophy is from beginning to end a philosophy of man, a response, so to speak, to the Delphic oracle's "know thyself" self-knowledge and knowledge of God are not to be separated. Thus, there is no contradiction in the bipolar description of the Hegelian philosophical endeavour: to know man fully is to know ourselves in the light of our knowledge of God; to know God adequately is to know him as the spiritual process of self-determination which culminates in God's relationship to the world and man. The "story" of this is told in the Bible; the "speculative re-enactment" of it is the "theological" interpretation of the story

Now, the "speculative re-enactment" can be carried out in two ways: (1) "phenomenologically," by retracing the process of God-consciousness which begins with the incarnational event and then

10. See *EGP*, p. 174.

11. It could seem, from this, that Hegel sees divine self-revelation in scripture as confined to the New Testament. He does not, it is true, explicitly treat of the Old Testament as part of "Christian revelation," but, since he does look also to the Church "Fathers" and the teaching of the Church for the content of the revelation, there is no reason to say that he does *not* see the advent of the God-man in history as the *culmination* of the Bible story, in which story, then, the Old Testament is integral to the whole revelation.

articulating the implications — trinitarian, creational, and redemptive<sup>12</sup> of this event, the articulation contained in the seventh chapter of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*; or (2) “logically,” by looking first to the inner life of the divine Spirit who, in knowing himself, “generates” his own perfect — and, therefore, infinite — image, the Son, and in the mutual love of Father and Son “breathes” the infinite Spirit. The rest follows “logically” from this: (a) the inner life of the divine Spirit expressing itself outwardly in the creation of the world and of finite Spirit; (b) the movement of the finite away from the infinite in the fragmenting “Fall” as preparing for and pointing to the reintegrating incarnational event, which articulates itself in (c) the reconciling self-sacrifice of the God-man and (d) in the elevation of the finite spirit through the “indwelling” of the infinite divine Spirit.

It scarcely seems necessary here to enter into a detailed examination of what Hegel calls his “spiritual” interpretation of five principal tenets of the Christian Creed — Trinity, Creation, Fall, Incarnation and Reconciliation — since I have already done that in another place.<sup>13</sup> What is more important here is to discuss the “speculative” import of the interpretation he gives. Whether or not this systematization of salvation history, in which all events are “moments” of one continuous movement, can prove fruitful in coming to grips with religious mystery we can leave to the theologians — or historians of theology — to answer. That, despite its sometimes quite fanciful exegesis, it tells us a great deal about Hegel’s conception of the progressive “spiritualization” of human reality, precisely in its relation to the “absolute Spirit” who is God, is unmistakable. It is also quite clear that Hegel means to be taken seriously when he claims to be articulating the moments of this process “religiously,” no matter how many may dispute how “religious” it all is. No one denies that he has provided us with a fascinating, grandiose, and in some ways compelling panoramic vision of human development in the “image” of God.

### Theology and “Speculative” Philosophy

It is, perhaps, more difficult to go along with Hegel when he describes this very same development — with two changes in the order of presentation — in terms of “logical necessity.” We must try to

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12. It is instructive that Hegel does not employ the term “redemption” (*Erlösung*), but rather the more dialectical “reconciliation” (*Versöhnung*).
  13. Quentin Lauer, S.J., *Essays in Hegelian Dialectic* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1977), Ch. 5, “Human Autonomy and Religious Affirmation in Hegel,” pp. 89–106.



recall, however, just what "logical necessity" means for Hegel. That it is not the *psychological* necessity of thinking in a certain way should be obvious enough. But it is also not the necessity of formal-logical or mathematical entailment, which both regulates and even compels the assent of subjective thinking. Rather, it is the sort of necessity one finds in the "moments" of organic process. In addition, it should be noted that Hegel is not speaking of the kind of necessity which could be discovered or seen by the logically functioning mind antecedently to the revelation of its content. Given the revelation, however, Hegel claims to "see in" it (*speculare*) the rational necessity of the movement described.

When we turn now to the "logically" first of the mysteries concerning God, the revelation that the inner life of God as infinite Spirit requires a triplicity of "persons," related to each other as (negatively) *different* and yet (positively) *the same*, we can say that the words of the New Testament make it abundantly clear that this was the belief of the primitive Christian community. The words, however, are not by themselves the revelation of the truth — nor the truth of the revelation — it is the *events* of "incarnation" and "outpouring" of the Spirit (also throwing light on the event of "creation"), which, through the testimony of the indwelling Spirit reveal the triplicity of "persons" in God. It is the same indwelling Spirit who guides the theological articulation of the inner life of God — an articulation which is possible only for speculative thinking. Reason, then, can "see" the rational necessity that where there is question of infinite divine Spirit, there must be infinite three-in-oneness — but reason cannot see this independently of divine self-revelation, to which the testimony of the indwelling Spirit is integral. What God has revealed of himself is the true "Idea" of God, who cannot be other than "triune."<sup>14</sup>

We can now begin to understand what Hegel means by saying that speculative philosophy "comprehends" (*begreift*) the Idea which the Christian religion "presents" to faith. The uniquely Christian doctrine of the Trinity is the model of spiritual comprehension of the truly real, in comprehending which philosophy learns what it is to comprehend. "In the Christian religion the absolute Being is represented but not comprehended as absolute";<sup>15</sup> the grasp is not yet adequately "spiritual" — in the sense that imagination still constitutes part of its thinking. "In fact philosophy does nothing else but

14. See *EpW*, Nos. 182, 381.

15. *VGP* II, pp. 408-409.

comprehend this Idea proper to Christianity."<sup>16</sup> There follows in this text from the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* one more attempt to express "speculatively" the dogma of the Trinity, Hegel's conviction being that "speculative" philosophy can "conceive" of God only as triune. This expresses the truth that where "Persons" are infinite, their difference from each other does not contradict their sameness with each other; each is "absorbed in" its own other through the "love" which constitutes both their *distinction* and their *unity*.<sup>17</sup>

The theme of "love" becomes crucially important when we turn now to the theology of "creation." More than once Hegel has been accused of making creation "necessary" and thus of limiting both divine freedom and divine infinity. Where, however, the necessity in question is that of *love*, even though it be called "rational necessity," it is at least legitimate to ask whether the "necessity" of which Hegel speaks is the same as the "necessity" in the minds of his accusers. We might begin by recalling that, according to Hegel, the "categories" of finite thought are not applicable to God at all; they can only distort our view of God. If God, then, can be said to create, "creation" must be an activity peculiar to God alone, to absolute Spirit, infinite Spirit, pure Spirit; it must be purely spiritual activity, infinite activity, infinitely *free*—self-determining—activity.<sup>18</sup> In addition, infinite spiritual activity in God cannot be other than the purely spiritual activity whereby (wherein) God is what he is. But, the activity wherein God is what he is is the "spiritual" activity of "knowing" himself—the Father "generating" the Son—and the activity of "loving" himself—the Father and Son "breathing" the Spirit (of love). If we are to say, then, that what God creates—nature and finite spirit—is *other* than God, which we must, if creation is to make any sense at all, we must also say that there can be no *other* of God, except insofar as God "others" himself, the paradigm of which is the "self-othering" we have already seen in God's trinitarian life. What God *does*, however, cannot be other than what God *is*, and thus the necessity of God's *being* must somehow be equated with the necessity of God's *doing*, which, to Hegel, means the necessity of "self-othering."<sup>19</sup> But, and this is most important, the self-othering which is the creation of the finite is the giving of being which, as we saw before, precisely

16. *Ibid.*, p. 409.

17. *VPR* II, pp. 233–234.

18. See *VPR* I, p. 144; *EpW*, Nos. 128, 163; *VA* I, p. 481; *BS*, pp. 350–351.

19. See *VPR* II, p. 55.

because it is infinite personal giving, is not a "giving-away" which would in any way limit the giver. It may be that the language Hegel employs in stating his position is difficult to understand, but a careful reading of it reveals that it is not so terribly different from traditional theological teaching about God's creative activity — so long as we realize that only abstract "understanding" will find insuperable contradictions in it — which it must also find in the traditional teaching.

### God and Man

When we turn from the thinking of Hegel on the general concept of creation to the very specialized concept of the creation of man, finite spirit, we find that, once again, he takes quite seriously the traditional teaching that man has been created by God in God's own image.<sup>20</sup> In one sense this means that, since man is a finite image of the infinite, man is a faulted image. In another sense, however, it means that the human task is to realize that image of the divine to the fullest of human capacity. It is in the light of this that we must seek to understand what Hegel has to say about the theological doctrine of the "Fall." It might come as a surprise that Hegel should see even in this a "logical necessity," but we have to remember that his interpretation is not moral, as it would seem to be when the Fall is described under the rubric of "Original Sin." What Hegel is trying to get across is (a) that in creating a rational spirit, God "others" himself in a being who, although finite, is *capax infiniti* and thus capable of "imaging" the infinite.<sup>21</sup> But (b) precisely because this is so, the first movement, so to speak, of finite spirit is a declaration of independence which is at once a falling away from its truth as "image" of the infinite and an inchoate realization of its intrinsic dignity as spirit. It is for this reason that Hegel can see the "Fall" as logically necessary in the march toward the realization of human spirit as authentically spirit, the move from mere immersion in nature, from in-nocence (*Schuldlosigkeit*) to awareness of the negative potential of spirit, which is essential to the positive realization of what it is to be spirit in the image of the divine.<sup>22</sup>

Precisely because, however, the initial attempt to realize man's true reality as spirit involves a separation of the "image" from the

20. See *BS*, p. 187.

21. See *EpN*, No. 441.

22. See the long *Zusatz* to No. 24 of the "Logic," in *EpW* (Suhrkamp); also *VPG*, pp. 389-390.

reality of which it is the image, a further revelation becomes necessary, a revelation of the essential unity of the divine (infinite) and the human (finite), and this is accomplished in the incarnation of the divine Spirit in finite human nature, which can be seen as a sort of negation of the divine in order to affirm the dignity of the human (Pauline *kenosis*). Precisely because creation is not an *event* which occurred in the past but is to be seen as an enduring relationship of the divine and the human, the entry of the divine Spirit into time in the form of an individual human becomes necessary for the realization of the truth of the human. As Hegel sees it, the Incarnation can be characterized as the infinitizing of one single human individual, thus enabling that one individual to realize in himself at once both what God truly is and what man truly is, and in so doing to reveal to man as such what it is to be truly the "image" of God.<sup>23</sup> As incarnate God Jesus Christ is the revelation of God to man, but he is also the revelation to man of what it is to be authentically human. The trinitarian "Son" is the purely "spiritual" image of the Father; the Son incarnate in Jesus Christ is the individual sensible image of God; each human being is destined through Christ to be at once the finite and the infinite image of God.<sup>24</sup>

If, then, Hegel can see in the Incarnation the kind of "rational necessity" we have described, he can, by the same token, see the same sort of necessity in the "reconciling" death of Christ on the cross, precisely because it too is a "moment" in the temporal unfolding of the "divine Idea." In the *Phenomenology* Hegel had spoken of the necessary "death of God," of the man who is God, from two points of view. (1) Christ had to die, in order that the abstract concept of a God "out there," who either stood aloof from the affairs of men, like the impersonal God of the "Deists," or was so transcendent as to be incomprehensible to man, like the God of the "theologians" of his day, might cede to the truly self-revealing God of the Christian religion. (2) Christ had to die, in order that the unique union of the divine and the human in one perceptible individual might make room for the universal vocation of man to live in the Spirit, through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the Christian community and, consequently, in its individual members, who could thus realize their human vocation to be authentic "images" of the infinite God.

It might seem strange that Hegel has, perhaps, more to say on this last theme of reconciliation in his *Lectures on Aesthetics* than any-

23. See *EpW*, No. 383.

24. *VPG*, p. 403; see *VPR* II, p. 141.

where else. If, however, we remember that to "reconcile" is to harmonize the discordant, it may not seem so strange. There is something peculiarly aesthetic in the concept of "reconciliation" as Hegel develops it. There is unquestionably something strikingly *discordant* about clinging to one's finitude to the extent of refusing to *accord* with the infinite which alone can give meaning to the finite. In the Incarnation God took upon himself finitude, thus showing man that the unity of the infinite and the finite is not an ideal of harmony impossible to achieve.<sup>25</sup> The process, which Hegel calls "the process of *negativity*," corresponds with the life, suffering, and death of God, which makes possible man's reconciliation with God. Now man must go through the same process, "in order to make the reconciliation actual in himself."<sup>26</sup> By becoming an individual man God shows man what human dignity really is. "This means that the human spirit *in itself*, according to its essential concept, is true spirit and, therefore, that each individual subject as man has the infinite vocation and dignity of being a purpose of God, united with God."<sup>27</sup> To speak of man's "infinite vocation" is to speak of his orientation to being reconciled with himself *by* being reconciled with God. What this ultimately means is the process of moving from the merely natural to the truly spiritual, the voyage described at length in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.<sup>28</sup> Reconciliation, however, does not mean that man ceases to be man, a contingent being, immersed in his own finitude. Just as God does not cease to be infinite in taking on finitude, so man does not cease to be finite in being elevated to infinity.<sup>29</sup>

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25. *VA II*, p. 134.

26. *Ibid.*, pp. 146-147.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 148.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 160.

29. *VA III*, p. 13.