

The Logic of Theology Since Hegel

James A. Doull

It was idle, said Hegel, to look for true religion where there were not true secular institutions.¹ There had come into being a reconciliation of subjective freedom and institutional order which gave experience in the world of the same incarnate Trinitarian reason as was the belief of the Church. By true religion Hegel meant the Trinitarian and Christological doctrines as determined by the ancient councils which he thought to express rightly the original revelation found in the Gospels.² If the language of the ancient formulations was not that of philosophy, nothing of the content required revision or remaking. Image and 'Vorstellung' might, but, if guided by philosophical insight, need not mislead. These forms were capable of truth and need not be accommodated to the demands either of scientific reason or of existential experience.³

The reconciliation of individual freedom with the objective and universal reason of institutions had hardly occurred in Hegel's time when it was succeeded by a new revolution which is still with us.⁴ The principle of this revolution is an individuality complete in its separation from the universal or ideal, which appears to it as mythical. The former unification of individual and universal is interpreted as the work of a mythical imagination which is no longer credible to a scientific age. An abstract scientific reason is taken as rooted in the existential individual, as having for its end to liberate individuals in their particular interests. The new revolution

1. *Enzyklopädie*, 552, note: "Die wahrhafte Religion . . . geht nur aus der Sittlichkeit hervor und ist die denkende, d.h. der freien allgemeinheit ihres konkreten Wesens bewusstwerdende Sittlichkeit. . . . ausserhalb des sittlichen Geistes ist es daher vergebens, wahrhafte Religion und Religiosität zu suchen."

2. *Philosophie der Religion*: Die absolute Religion, C, 3 (Lasson).

3. *Enzy.*, 573, note; and elsewhere.

4. The institutions of Hegel's *Philosophie des Rechts* were actual and not an imaginary ideal (on which "The Concept of Enlightenment" by the author in *Festschrift* for Professor Peter Michelsen, Heidelberg, forthcoming), but to Marx and other radical Hegelians from the new existential standpoint they were pure mystification. It was then, and has remained, incomprehensible to the new revolution that Enlightenment had ever in truth been overcome. K. Marx, *Kritik des Hegelschen Staatsrecht*, sections 261-3, and generally; *Ökonomisch-philosophische Manuskripte*, part 3 (Marx, *Werke*, Lieber u. Furth, Darmstadt, 1962, vol. 1, p. 637 ff.)

differs from those of the previous century in its certainty that it is beyond all former divisions of thought and sensibility, that it has converted the ideal concreteness of Christian belief into the liberation of humanity in the real interests of individuals.⁵ This certainty is however only the potentiality of the existential individual to overcome its externality and division, to return to a knowledge of the Christian concreteness as not mythical but true for a belief and thinking itself undivided.⁶

The new revolution separates human from divine, is atheistic in relation to Christianity, unless so far as the assumed independence of the human is retracted and known as provisional. While the assumption stands, Incarnation, Trinity, the unconfused unity of human and divine natures in Christ must be thought untrue.⁷ The revelation of the Triune God historically in a human individual was from the first an offense to the revolution.⁸ The one creative God of the Old Testament annuls the assumption of an independent human existence, is therefore for this standpoint a mythical concept.⁹ The relation of Old to New Testament cannot be brought to light.¹⁰ Patristic theology can be spoken of as Hellenized

5. For the formation of the new revolutionary concept esp. Marx's criticism of Feuerbach, Bruno Bauer and Stirner in *Deutsche Ideologie*. The same concept in its various shapes emerges contemporaneously, e.g. in Compté and Mill, pervades political and economic life, art and culture of Europe from that time.

6. That the revolution does not have its end in itself becomes only generally recognizable at the end of its course, though an accurate study of the formation of the revolutionary concept out of antecedent institutions and thought shows this to be the case.

7. Since for the new revolutionary culture the existence of the individual is presupposed, to speak of incarnation is meaningless, as likewise that the individual should have to be saved from himself by relation to a Trinity and unity of God and man in which his presupposed independence would be annulled. The true accommodation of Christian theology to the revolutionary culture is not a revision or remaking of doctrine but its complete negation. What else is the radical separation of human from divine? W. Pannenberg, *Speaking about God in the Face of Atheistic Criticism, Basic Questions in Theology*, Vol. III, pp. 93-115, virtually allows that this is so: no decision about the existence of God is possible while the revolutionary concept of history stands.

8. E.g. Feuerbach, *Wesen des Christentums*, Sämtliche Werke, Bolin u. Jodl, Vol. VI, 401 ff. That only an immediate and abstract relation of man to God is conceivable is the assumption underlying Strauss's *Leben Jesu* and the criticism of doctrine in his *Christliche Glaubenslehre*.

9. "Vermittelst der Schöpfung der Welt aus Nichts giebt sich der Mensch die Gewissheit, dass die Welt nichts ist und vermag gegen den Menschen," Feuerbach, *Wesen Chr.*, p. 358. For Bultmann and existential theology creation is an historical, not a cosmological, concept.

10. G. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*. E.t., Vol II, part three, p. 336 ff. and Postscript.

Christianity, as a transitory and superseded theology, the work of a people not yet freed from myth and speculation. But in so speaking one assumes that there is an existential Christianity, that the revolution is a form of Christianity and not its negation.¹¹

In the Church there remains a knowledge of the end sought by the revolution, that through which its liberation would be actual and not implicit only. But the end was known at first only in flight from the revolution, in reaction to it.¹² As thus externally mediated the principal Christian doctrines were the object of an immediate knowledge, an incomprehensible mystery, to Anglo-Catholicism and like reactions in France and Germany.¹³ A divine reason continuing through the successors to the Apostles should exclude the profane reason of the last and earlier revolutions.¹⁴ But the revolution was domiciled all the same in the Church as the science which should know scripture, dogma and ecclesiastical history.¹⁵ Ecclesiastical authority might be infallible and unchanging in principle, but, as applied to a humanity which assumes the external and contingent thought of the revolution, must appear as historical and endlessly mutable.¹⁶

Revolution and the reaction from it to tradition and divine authority were forms of the same: the one the separation of human from divine, the other their immediate unity. The interest of subsequent theology, as of philosophy and the revolutionary culture generally, has been to recover the lost mediation. The revolution had to discover the universal and divine, without which its principle was an unresolved conflict between abstract reason and existential subjectivity.¹⁷ Theology must lose all objectivity

11. That Patristic theology is only that of a past age results already from F.C. Baur's division of the history of dogma, on the implications of which see esp. *Lehrbuch der Christlichen Dogmengeschichte*, Darmstadt, 1968, pp. 356-7.

12. E.g. J. H. Newman on the revolution and his reaction from it, *Apologia pro Vita Sua*, Oxford, 1967, pp. 218-9. The same reaction in the Tractarians generally, in Lamennais, etc.

13. E.g. Newman on the ancillary place of reason in religion, E.R. Fairweather, *The Oxford Movement*, pp. 21-31.

14. Fairweather, 54-59, 330-33.

15. In the Catholicizing reaction the reason of the revolution was only formally subordinated to authority. In its exercise it remained therefore part of the revolution.

16. Papal infallibility appeared essential to the Roman Catholic Church because, according to the reason of the revolution, questions of faith and morals are endlessly indeterminate. Authority which had become thus arbitrary and without intrinsic reason must in due course collapse, follow and not direct the revolution.

17. The resolution is assumed to be present. The movement and interest of the revolution is somehow to make actual this assumption which belongs to it from its concept and first constitution.

and true content if the logic of the theologian remained separated from the divine λόγος of the revelation.¹⁸ In this history the Church, once admitting the secular reason of the revolution, has appeared repeatedly to be drawn wholly into it.¹⁹ The revolution has been constrained repeatedly to turn to an ideal world, only to assert anew the priority of its existential principle.²⁰ In both cases what has been sought and by stages found is a universal able to sustain the separation of human from divine, an individuality not original but in its difference and particularity falling within a comprehensive divine purpose, in short a restored relation of the revolutionary individual to the Christian religion.

Theologians assumed the new independent humanity of the revolution. It was everywhere agreed that speculative theology, if it were possible, was insufficient and that a beginning must be made with the historical individual.²¹ A more critical study of the life of Jesus than that of Strauss might find a relation to the theology of the Church empirically founded.²² From the side of theology, the Chalcedonian formula appeared in need of revision if it would have place for human individuality as now at last understood.²³ A criticism of 'kenotic' doctrines which separated the humanity from the divinity of Christ might discover a unity of

18. The Church in its retreat from the revolution assumes there is a knowledge of its doctrines in faith. The reason of the revolution, while it is assumed to be separate, denudes faith of its content and reduces it to what it is logically, an immediate knowledge without discourse, where Christian faith is of the unity of the two. Nor can the Church adhere to religious language as independent of logic. In that case it has no answer to Feuerbach, since the certainty of the revolution that Christian doctrine is myth has its root in the independence of thought from language and imagination, a certainty that these are only a projection which rational freedom can retract.

19. The present argument shows that this secularization has assumed three logically distinct stages.

20. Again in three principal stages.

21. On the formation of this conviction in Germany the contemporary account of J.E. Erdmann, *Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie*, Anhang, I.B., is instructive.

22. So eminently F.C. Baur, for whom the difference of Pauline and Johannine reports from the Synoptics is not yet a mere diversity, but has the form of a contrariety, pointing to an underlying unity as expressed in Church doctrine. An opposition of Hellenic to Hebraic begins with Baur, but not yet their separation as with Harnack and then existential theology.

23. Excerpts in English from the *Dogmatik* of Gottfried Thomasius on the person of Christ in *God and Incarnation in Mid-Nineteenth Century German Theology*, ed. and tr. by C. Welch, New York, 1965; brief accounts in the histories of nineteenth century theology of Welch and Stephan-Schmidt.

natures, but as a process.²⁴ Ancient Hellenic assumptions about the immutability of God had need of revision.²⁵ A separation of the Trinitarian God from human experience was otherwise inevitable.²⁶

In the theology of the first decades of the revolution there is a mediation between conservative reaction and the revolution. The mediation is, however, only as a process which is lost in the result. As against the pantheism of Strauss there is a return of the human to God, a perception of the Trinity as the term of this process.²⁷ Except in word and traditional language there is not a knowledge of the Trinity as principle and origin of the presupposed historical beginning.

Christianity in this first mediation is not drawn fully into the revolution.²⁸ The dead traditionalism of the flight from the revolution to authority without subjective freedom receives in this form a superficial animation.²⁹ The limits of this position may be seen most easily from the side of the revolution. By the same logic the early Nietzsche found his existential freedom dissolved in the aestheticism of Schopenhauer and Wagner, which reached after a concreteness transcending the human.³⁰

This first mediation was not for nothing, but the preparation and basis of the Victorian culture of the late nineteenth century and its European equivalents.³¹ A conclusion of the process from the historical individual to the universal is presupposed, and thus stabilized one can devote oneself to the human and finite within

24. On Dorner's Christology, excerpts from *System der Christlichen Glaubenslehre* in Welch, *God and Incarnation*.

25. As notably by Dorner: brief accounts in the histories of Barth, Welch, Stephan-Schmidt.

26. On this implication, e.g., Baur, *Dogmengeschichte*, p. 381, n. 3; and the theological positions of Biedermann and Rothe, on which the histories mentioned; excerpts on the Christology of Biedermann in Welch.

27. Dorner illustrates better than any the limits of theology at this stage.

28. One may think of the ecclesiastical socialism of F.D. Maurice or the more strongly secularized *Ethik* of R. Rothe.

29. "Both Puseyite religion about God and Carlyle's religion of man amounted to the same thing: 'religion against God . . . the heresy of our age . . . leading to the last most terrific form of infidelity,'" Welch, *Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century*, Vol. I, p. 246, quoting F. D. Maurice.

30. E.g. Nietzsche, *Menschliches Allzumenschliches*, Vorrede.

31. The nature of this preparation can be seen in many ways. Politically the liberalism of the mid-century, where, as in the revolutions of 1848, individuals would appropriate political power, gives way to a more realistic submission to the state.

the limits of a revived Kantian philosophy.³² The typical theologian of the time is Ritschl, who with his followers reduces Christianity to a progressive moralism.³³ Old and New Testament are brought within the limits of this culture.³⁴ Harnack explains patristic theology as an Hellenic corruption.³⁵

In this progressive scientific culture Christianity and the revolution appear to be assimilated to each other. But the forgotten mediation of human and divine on which this reconciliation was based makes itself felt. From the side of the revolution Nietzsche can proclaim the nihilism of an abstract culture which cannot find room for the living individual.³⁶ The logic of this criticism is most lucidly given from the side of the universal by F.H. Bradley, who finds the world of this moralistic religion in all its forms an unreal and contradictory appearance.³⁷ The reality discovered in the dissipation of this nihilistic culture is the Christian concept of the unity of human and divine, now out of a second mediation in which is transcended not merely the process to this idea, but also the logical form of the separation of the human.³⁸ There comes into view at the end of this stage an intuition of the unity of the living individual and the universality of thought, which is the basis of more recent theology and philosophy, of the third and last form of the revolutionary culture.

The existential individual at this third stage has attained the universality in which he is again capable of hearing the objective divine Word, of knowing it as the origin of the presupposed humanity of the revolution. Barth can truly say that from this

32. The philosophy of the mid-century, in which Lötze was the characteristic figure, groped after a unified subjectivity, which is afterwards assumed in the subsequent return to Kant; useful accounts of this history in Überweg, Vol. iv, 1923, sect. 16-25, and especially Erdmann, *op.cit.*

33. Ritschl, *Die Christliche Lehre von der Rechtfertigung und der Versöhnung*. Useful accounts of the position in the histories of Stephan-Schmidt and Barth.

34. Biblical and patristic studies at this second stage lose the light of a unifying reason, superficial though it was, which informed the works of Baur, Neander, Rothe in the earlier stage. There is instead the mixture of an abstract analytic reason with arbitrary opinion and hypothesis. A brief survey in Stephan-Schmidt, p. 233.

35. Harnack's *Dogmengeschichte* carries into the history of dogma the complacent moralistic theology of Ritschl.

36. Nietzsche, *Der Wille zur Macht*, part 1: Der europäische Nihilismus.

37. F. H. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*.

38. Bradley, on the absolute.

standpoint Feuerbach is answered.³⁹ But in the Barthian theology, as philosophically in a new capacity for a concrete Platonic idealism, there is the difficulty that the human individual, if he can find in himself relation to an ideal, divine world, is also divided from that universality, is the *Dasein* or finite human individual incapable of such knowledge.⁴⁰ Feuerbach has still ground to stand on, though the revolutionary anthropology has now properly only the status of a Platonic hypothesis, a provisional presupposition.

In the theological positions which take shape in opposition to a Barthian transcendence, the difference between Christianity and revolutionary culture is obliterated. The relation of the Church to the world is not now in the form of an abstract morality but through the whole existential humanity of the revolution. Feuerbach and Marx may appear to have their full recognition. But the argument has rather brought to light that the revolutionary principle does not have its end in itself. The supposition of an independent humanity only stands so long as the existential individual is separated from the universal moral will of technology. The theologian asks whether the human relation to a universal divine purpose is through a Heideggerian 'Dasein'⁴¹, through a liberal or anarchic Marxism — in a technology animated and controlled by individuals released from all authority⁴², or in some other way. At the extreme the revolutionary principle is fully exposed as an hypothesis which cannot stand by itself. The revolution appears as the contradiction of a universal self-identical purpose which is realized in an ever changing flux of particular ends.⁴³

As the nature of the revolutionary principle comes to be fully exposed in this final stage, the long separation of Old and New Testament studies from the theology of the Church begins to vanish. It is still argued, and as at the beginning of the revolution, that the truth of the Trinitarian and Christological doctrines must be looked for historically, in the events of the crucifixion and the

39. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, E.t., Vol. 1, sect. 13; and elsewhere.

40. Criticisms of Barth's Trinitarianism and Christology in W. Pannenberg, *Grundzüge der Christologie*, p. 166 ff, 312, and elsewhere; in J. Moltmann, *Trinität und Reich Gottes*, E.t. 139 ff.

41. Especially R. Bultmann.

42. J. Moltmann, *op. cit.*, part. VI: The Kingdom of Freedom; W. Pannenberg, *Basic Questions in Theology*, Vol. III, 6 and 7; and many contemporary theologians.

43. The extreme is where the abstract moral will of technology and the anarchic liberation from it are perceived not different but forms of the same revolutionary principle.

original certainty about the resurrection.⁴⁴ But when the interpretation of these events is taken from Jewish eschatology, and the difference between Judaism and Christianity abolished, the nature of the revolution comes more nearly into view. What Strauss, Feuerbach, Marx, principally opposed and found incredible was that the human should not be taken as independent but as a moment in the divine purpose.⁴⁵ In the Judaized Christianity of the latest theology this independent humanity is both radically given up and then reasserted with all the fanaticism of the revolution.⁴⁶ What distinguished Jesus from the Zealots of his time is disregarded, namely that for him the human relation to God was not in these external ends but through them as a difference and particularity also for him known as derivative.⁴⁷

With the end of the revolution is restored the possibility of an ordered secular freedom, not the attrition and ruin of all institutions which the revolutionary principle must bring about in the course of its development. There is restored at the same time the possibility of discerning in the teaching, life, death and resurrection of Christ the revelation in one man of the same Triune God, of the same relation of human and divine, as was afterwards formulated universally in the orthodox doctrine of the Church. As mediated by its negation and loss in the revolution this knowledge is no longer so dependent as for Hegel on the institutions of a particular people, their flourishing and decay. Though destructive of doctrine and negative in its immediate results, the biblical theology of the revolutionary period provided a way of going beyond itself acceptable to a free secular culture.

Dalhousie University,
Halifax, N.S.

44. As by Pannenberg, *Grundzüge*, Erster Teil: Die Erkenntnis der Gottheit Jesu.

45. See n. 5.

46. Cf. Pannenberg and Moltmann in the works cited.

47. Such is, for example, the sense of the criticism of Jewish law by Jesus. To equate Christian freedom with the illusion of a revolutionary freedom without authority, as do Moltmann, Pannenberg and many other theologians, is in truth to remain with law in the most abstract and oppressive form of a mindless bureaucratic control.