It is undoubtedly an exaggeration to claim that Hegel invented the enterprise of philosophy of religion – given the obvious credentials of the Hume of *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (1779) and the Kant of *Religion within the Boundaries of Reason Alone* (1793). It is incontrovertible, however, that it is Hegel who first offers a full-scale modern articulation of “religion” in all of its dimensions, cognitive as well as affective, communal as well as individual, historical as well as normative. Without making it explicit, Hegel grasps the intimation given in the very term “religion,” which derives from the Latin *religare*, meaning “to bind” or “to bond.” As with the Roman Stoics, who had before them the multitudinous regional faiths, and who, arguably, therefore provide something like an ancient template, religion for Hegel is the binding or bonding of the human subject or group with the divine in and through one of its particular expressions in cult, practice, and form of life as well as thought and language. Hegel’s articulation is not only specifically modern in that it presupposes the Enlightenment critique of religion, it is also specifically post-Kantian, in that it presupposes Kant’s reflection on Christian theism in the first two Critiques, and especially Kant’s examination in *Religion* of what in biblical Christianity is rationally justifiable. To presuppose, however, is not necessarily to repeat. Although an early essay such as “The Positivity of the Christian Religion” reproduces a number of Kant’s criticisms of the regnant forms of Christianity and promotes his ethical substitute for confessional forms of Christianity, within a matter of years Hegel has taken some critical distance and proceeds along another axis (Hegel 1971a [1795]: 68–181). Shortly I will sketch what Hegel repeats, develops, and corrects of Kant. Before I do so, however, I should state that the enterprise of philosophy of religion differs from the enterprise of philosophical theology, whose focus is the demonstration of the existence and the nature of God, who is the ground of the universe. As is well known, Kant famously undermines philosophical theology, which dominated the German intellectual landscape in the first part of the eighteenth century, in the transcendental dialectic section of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. If Hegel’s early position seems to be that Kant has totally invalidated philosophical theology, later, however, he comes to the conclusion that he was mistaken. The enterprise of philosophical theology is conditionally legitimate. For this to be so, it is necessary to reconceive the nature of proof which, of course, is the object of Hegel’s various articulations of dialectical logic. Still, whatever room Hegel is able to
provide for a very much refurbished philosophical theology – illustrated especially in his two logics (1812, 1821) and his treatment of the proofs of God’s existence – it must make way for the new enterprise of philosophy of religion, even to the point of becoming an element of it.

**Post-Kantian philosophy of religion**

Hegel’s philosophy of religion not only accepts many of Kant’s criticisms of Christianity, it also develops and corrects Kant’s revisionist proposal about what constitutes a justifiable form of Christian faith. Hegel believes that Kant was fundamentally correct in denying validity to revelation conceived as mere fact, in insisting that religion not contradict modern rationality in general or flout the principle of autonomy in particular, in scouring Christianity of superstition, the supernatural, and doctrine, and in shifting the burden from what Christ effects on our behalf to our assimilation of the meaning of his message, which has to do with making actual the kingdom of God on earth. Even when Hegel comes into his own as a philosopher, with the writing of *Faith and Knowledge* (1802 [Hegel 1977a]) and the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807 [Hegel 1977b]), he will not forswear these fundamental Kantian allegiances. Although in the 1790s, along with the Romantics, Hegel flirted with the view that Greek religion was superior to Christianity, he came to agree with Kant that Christianity was the highest form of religion, and that its specifically Protestant form was the acme of its real historical realization. By the time of the *Phenomenology* (1807), however, Hegel had developed Kant’s particular judgments in ways that Kant might not have recognized. The *Phenomenology* plots Christianity as the fullest realization of religion, of which the religions of the East as well as Greek religion represent adumbrations of lesser and greater adequacy. In chapters 6 and 7 of the *Phenomenology* Hegel provides a sophisticated teleological scheme of the development of religion, the basic shape of which is maintained throughout his career. In the 1807 text Hegel also deepens the contrast made by Kant between Christianity and Judaism. Considered as the binary opposite of what Christianity essentially is, Judaism is cast as a purely legalistic form of religion which insists on the absolute transcendence of God and requires absolute obedience of the religious subject. In his essay “The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate,” Hegel characterizes Judaism as the most “abject” of all religions (1799) (Hegel 1971a: 182–301). Although late in his career, and especially in *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* (1827 [Hegel 1984]), Hegel will moderate this view somewhat, a negative characterization of Judaism in Hegel’s texts is typical. Within his more or less cultural Christian perspective, the influence that Judaism has had on Christianity is of more import than the status of Judaism itself. Unfortunately, from Hegel’s point of view, few of the historical forms of Christianity have remained untouched by Judaism, and thus many forms of Christianity are bedeviled by “unhappy consciousness” (*Unglückliche Bewusstsein*) (Hegel 1977b: 125–39), with the divine being regarded as everything, the world and humanity as nothing. This Hegelian characterization of Christianity as “alienation” (*Entfremdung*) was subsequently exploited by Ludwig Feuerbach and Karl Marx in their adaptation and overcoming of what they regarded as Hegel’s idealism.
At the same time, throughout his corpus, but especially in his posthumously published *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* (Hegel 1995a) and *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (Hegel 1995b), Hegel puts an exclamation point on the Protestant form of Christianity by emphasizing its contrast with Catholicism. Whereas the latter is incoherently a power broker pointing its subjects in an otherworldly direction while demanding absolute obedience of its subjects on matters of faith, doctrine, practices, and forms of life, Protestantism, by contrast, respects the autonomy of individuals and provides religious grounds for a secular form of existence in which economical life, marriage, and the flourishing of the state are key. Hegel is persuaded that his construct of Protestantism is faithful to that of the historical Luther. In order to do so, however, he does have to gloss over such characteristic doctrines of Luther as “scripture alone” (*sola scriptura*) and “grace alone” (*sola gratia*). For him scripture is a “wax nose” (Hegel 1984: 122–23) bearing just about any interpretation, and the language of grace offends the post-Enlightenment axiom of autonomy which Hegel supports. Nor does Hegel sanction the view that Protestantism recapitulates the Christianity of the apostolic period. Apostolic Christianity is beset by serious problems, which include obsessive focus on the figure of Christ and an essentially sectarian view of the church. In contrast with Luther, Hegel’s view of the Reformation is that it is a genuinely new moment in Christianity and, indeed, in history. For Hegel, the Reformation is nothing short of a revolution, one that founds the Enlightenment and thus grounds the modern secular world.

If Hegel repeats and develops Kant’s insights on religion and Christianity, he also corrects him in a number of important ways. There are four particular deficits in Kant’s thought that Hegel recurs to throughout his writings: (1) Kant has an underdeveloped historical sense, which prevents him from seeing how and why Christianity can be justified as the supreme instance of religion; (2) relatedly, Kant vastly underestimates the communal nature of religion in general and of Christianity in particular. It was Hegel’s acute sense of the need for community which first led him to oppose Greek religion, which was communitarian all the way through, to Kant’s highly individualistic moral version of Christianity. The communitarian emphasis is the basis of Hegel’s important contrast between “Ethical Life” (*Sittlichkeit*) and “morality” (*Moralität*), which is a mainstay of his work and finds especially important expressions in the third volume of the *Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences* (Hegel 1971b: 259–91) and *Philosophy of Right* (Hegel 1952); (3) Kant’s dismissal of doctrines Hegel finds to be an Enlightenment over-reaction, and Hegel finds Kant’s marginalization of the doctrine of the Trinity to be especially facile; (4) although Kant rightly dismissed a view of Christ who effects salvation on behalf of humanity, he overstepped the mark when he made Christ a mere moral teacher and failed to attend to the metaphysical implications of the incarnation and cross.

**Synoptic and expansive expressions of Christian symbols**

From at least the time of the *Phenomenology*, Hegel had arrived at a consistent position on religion in general, Christianity in particular, and the relation between other religions and Christianity. Nonetheless, the *Phenomenology* provides a very compressed coverage of these issues, even as it insists that while other religions have value in
conjugating the union of the divine and nature and the divine and human, they all fall short of Christianity while anticipating it. With regard to the famous chapter 7, on “Revealed Religion” (die offenbare Religion), in the Phenomenology, a number of important points should be made: (1) against the backdrop of the definition of religion as a bonding of the human to the divine, Hegel judges that “In Christ” one finds the unsurpassable coincidence of the divine and the human and thus the maximum of divine presence (Hegel 1977b: 458–62); (2) at the same time, however, this presence is not simply given; the cross portrays the “death of God” (Hegel 1977b: 455), that is, the overcoming of the transcendent divine beyond the world and its emptying into the world of nature and, especially, humanity (Hegel 1977b: 467–68). The presence of the divine is everywhere and nowhere, and is certainly not restricted to certain places and times, ecclesial rites, practices, and forms of life; (3) the meaning of Christ is more important than the historical figure, and it is the Christian community (Gemeinde) which has the sole prerogative of assigning meaning (Hegel 1977b: 473); (4) Christianity has a symbolic and narrative dimension that has cognitive force. These symbols, which serially constitute the Christian narrative, include creation, fall, incarnation–cross, history as the assimilation of Christ, and the end of history, which is the climactic moment of transcendence becoming immanent in the historical-social and secular world (Hegel 1977b: 465–78); (5) Hegel not only reinstates the symbol of the Trinity (Hegel 1977b: 459–60), which Kant has exiled from the discourse of philosophy of religion, but considers it to be a meta-symbol that interprets the other symbols and gives coherence to the narrative that Hegel acknowledges to make a truth-claim (Hegel 1977b: 465–78); and finally (6) this truth-claim is not redeemed by Christianity itself, but is redeemed in philosophical reflection whose medium is that of concept (Begriff) rather than symbol or representation (Vorstellung) (Hegel: 1977b: 479–93).

Hegel articulates all these points much more expansively in his Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion. Here I will speak to the first three points articulated above as a group, and treat in somewhat more detail point (4). Points (5) and (6) are sufficiently important to merit subsections of their own. The varied lecture series of 1821, 1824, 1827, 1831 continue to privilege Christianity by calling it “revelatory religion” (die offenbare Religion), which, despite its title, does not suggest some supernaturalistic irruption from on high, but a value judgment that the coincidence of the divine and the human, which is anticipated to various degrees in other religions, becomes fully real (wirklich) only in Christianity. Although by twenty-first-century standards Hegel does not rise to the level of a comparative religion expert, he shows a decent amount of knowledge of Persian and East Asian religions. In his expansive discussion of Christianity Hegel unpacks the enigmatic connection between incarnation and the cross. Hegel thinks it crucial that it is a real historical human being who realizes the unity of divinity and humanity (Hegel 1985: 215, 311–12). But since the purpose of this coincidence is the elevation (Erhebung) of the human into the divine (Hegel 1985: 324–25), it is important both that this coincidence not neglect the finitude of human being of which death is an indelible aspect and that Christ not stand in the way of the universalization of the divine-dimension ingredient in humanity. Death, which leads to disappearance and absence, is thus as important as real divine presence, since it allows subsequent Christian communities to extract from Christ the general
meaning of the divine potential of humanity. Hegel is persuaded that the modern world is really the eschatological fulfillment of the kingdom of God or the kingdom of the Spirit. The kingdom of God is a thoroughgoing democratization of the sacred such that the profane spheres of existence such as the family, civic life, and the life of the state can now be brought under the canopy of the sacred.

I turn now to Hegel’s treatment of Christian symbols, which together shape the hugely important Christian narrative which Hegel thinks discloses the truth of reality. Given its much greater expansiveness, Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion allows one to see Hegel’s quite distinct take on Christian symbols or representations (Vortellungen). A good example is provided by Hegel’s treatment of the symbol of creation. Hegel shows that he has no truck with views of creation which insist on an omnipotent creator who gratuitously brings the world into being. For Hegel, gratuity implies contingency, which makes the world a mere accident, and thus without inherent value, and the relation between the divine and the world purely extrinsic (Hegel 1985: 248–50). From Hegel’s perspective, Descartes and other modern philosophers are following the bad practice endemic to Western religious and philosophical thought of thinking creation to be under the mode of efficient causality. In contraposition, for Hegel the world is intrinsically rather than extrinsically connected to the divine, and truly expressive of it. Were Hegel to have stopped here, he might easily be placed in the Romantic camp, or even construed as a follower of Spinoza, whose Ethics constituted the most powerfully argued philosophical alternative to standard forms of theism in modern philosophy. In the end, however, what divides Hegel from both is that the world expresses the divine as much by antithesis as by imitation. Throughout the various lecture series on Christianity, not only is Hegel prepared to name the world as “evil,” as he had done in the Phenomenology (Hegel 1977b: 467–70), he is also prepared to name as his precursor, Jacob Boehme (1575–1624), a German speculative mystic. Although not found in the mainstream of modern philosophy, Hegel thinks highly enough of him in his account of modern philosophy in the third volume of Lectures on the History of Philosophy (Hegel 1995b: 188–216) to devote more pages to him than to Descartes and Leibniz. In calling “creation” evil Hegel is making a metaphysical rather than a moral point (Hegel 1985: 205–6, 295–98), specifically, that “creation” is the other of the divine, and as such is a resisting medium, albeit one that will gradually be overcome by and enlightened by Spirit. More, divinity and/or Spirit can only realize itself in and through the trial of opposition. For Hegel, the divine or Spirit is not a given, it becomes itself or realizes itself through opposition.

Another Christian symbol, which is both affirmed and revised, is the symbol of the fall. Although Kant, in his account of radical evil in Religion (Kant 1998: 45–73), paved the way for Hegel’s revisioning of the biblical symbol of the fall, this was the Christian symbol perhaps most excoriated in and by the Enlightenment. Perhaps Hegel’s almost complacent endorsement of the fall occurs in Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion (Hegel 1985: 87–89, 296–99) and also in the Encyclopaedia (Hegel 1975: 36–45). This is not to say, however, that Hegel reverts to a pre-Enlightenment position in which autonomy and/or pride is the cause of fall, which thereby would justly merit divine punishment. In fact, Hegel reads Genesis 3 in a way very different from religious thinkers such as Augustine and Luther. Rather than the Garden of Eden being
a place of perfection, it is a place of ignorance. And rather than the transgression against a statutory obedience being as accidental as it is illegitimate, it is totally valid, since it is necessary if humanity is to become all that it can be (Hegel 1985: 205–6). No or refusal is an ingredient in history which will end on the overwhelming positive of a society of human beings elevated (Erhebung) to divine status. Thus Hegel is able to integrate the notion of fall into a program that is even more daringly progressivist than that found in the most optimistic of Enlightenment authors. Perhaps it should be said that, in both Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion and the Encyclopaedia, Hegel is prepared to associate with the heretical exegeses of Gnosticism pointed to by the early church fathers: divine prohibition is indicative of jealousy; the serpent told the truth when it pointed out that the transgression would make Adam and Eve divine.

**Trinitarian figuration**

Given the marginalization of the symbol of the Trinity in modern German efforts to reconstruct Christian faith in the light both of Enlightenment objections and contemporary needs, it is conspicuous that both the Phenomenology and the Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion find a place for it. In fact both texts do much more. Confining myself to the Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion, we can say that Hegel provides a rendition of what in classical theology would be called an account of the Trinity in se and the missions of the Trinity, with a view to showing their intrinsic unity. More specifically, he speaks of three realms or kingdoms, that is, the realm of the Father constituted by the dynamic processes of the triune God anterior to creation and salvation history; the realm of the Son, which consists of creation as summed up in the incarnation and passion and death of Christ; and third, the kingdom of Spirit, which consists of the assimilation by the Christian community over time of the meaning of Christ, which meaning is now fully recognized and enacted in the modern world as true humanism. Still, despite his countenancing of a symbol of the Trinity, he does not feel under any obligation to reproduce the results of the theological tradition. This is shown in part by the kinds of religious thinkers recalled. Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion mentions Philo of Alexandria, the great Gnostic heretic Valentinus, and the Neoplatonist Proclus (Hegel 1985: 85–88). Hegel’s preferences are systemic. In volume two of his Lectures on the History of Philosophy (Hegel 1995a: 387–94, 396–99, 432–50), Hegel praises all three above thinkers for articulating a dynamic triadic form of thought. As Hegel attempts to reconstruct Christianity in the wake of the Enlightenment, he obviously is not only unmoved by the normative Trinitarian articulations of Nicaea (325) and Constantinople (381), but has nothing to say about the trinitarianism of Augustine, Gregory of Nazianzen, Aquinas, or, for that matter, Luther or Calvin.

In Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion Hegel makes it perfectly clear that he feels free to depart decisively from classical trinitarianism on its three most important fronts: (1) the understanding of the Trinity in itself or the immanent Trinity; (2) the understanding of the nature and function of the economy of salvation; and (3) their relation. With regard to (1) Hegel argues against a hypostatic or personalist interpretation of the Trinity. Strictly speaking, the immanent Trinity or the kingdom of
the Father is a dynamic process of three moments, only the third of which is a candidate for personhood (Personlichkeit) (Hegel 1985: 287). In emphasizing the third moment – relatively speaking, the moment of the Spirit – over that of the first – relatively speaking, the Father as origin – Hegel reverses the standard theological figurations of Western and Eastern Christian Trinitarian theology. With respect to (2) Hegel’s reflection on the kingdom of the Son also shows that Hegel does not feel the weight of the theological tradition. As hinted at already, Hegel feels quite negatively about any suggestion that creation, incarnation, and the cross are contingent events. But Hegel goes much further than those philosophers and theologians in the Western tradition who object to the unilateral assertion of God’s “good pleasure” and are made uncomfortable by a strong distinction of a modal kind between what God has actually done and what is possible for God. Hegel insists that creation and redemption are, in effect, logically and ontologically necessary for God, since it is in and through the economy that the divine develops and actualizes itself. In Hegel the term “love” often serves as a functional equivalent of the term which from the Phenomenology on (Hegel 1977b: 10–11) is his mainstay, that is, Spirit (Geist).

Throughout the Christian philosophical and theological traditions, while attention is drawn to the fittingness of God’s acts of creation and redemption, the emphasis falls heavily on gratuity. Influenced by Spinoza, Hegel feels called on to identify gratuity with contingency. And, from his perspective, the last thing with which the divine has to do is contingency. Major differences come to the surface also in Hegel’s pneumatological reflection. In the nineteenth century Hegel’s confessional critics noted – sometimes with applause but often with alarm – that Hegel did not follow either the classical or Reformation traditions in speaking of the Spirit as a divine power distinct from the world and humanity and truly inspiring it. Hegel cannot bring himself to support this degree of separation, or indeed any separation. Thus, in Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion Hegel effectively identifies the person of the Holy Spirit with the universal spiritual community (Gemeinde) (Hegel 1985: 333–34), the result of the appropriation of the meaning of Christ. Perhaps it is the note that Hegel strikes here that gives most courage to Ludwig Feuerbach, who, in The Essence of Christianity (1844), thinks that the secret of Hegel’s theology is anthropology.

This brings us to point (3), that is, the relation between the immanent Trinity and the economy of creation and salvation. One crucial point has been suggested already, that although the orders of creation, redemption, and sanctification depend on the immanent Trinitarian realm as the Father, there is in operation at the very least a form of reciprocal dependence: without creation and redemption (Son) and sanctification (Spirit), the realm of the immanent Trinity (Father) would not be actual or really real. At a minimum then, each is both the ground and consequent of the other. This alone represents a major shift away from the classical philosophical and theological traditions which held that dependence was asymmetrical: the world depends on God; God does not depend on the world. The medieval philosopher-theologian Thomas Aquinas gives expression to this basic conviction in his famous Summa Theologiae (First Part q. 13. Art. 7) when he says that while the world bears a real relation (dependence) to God, God does not bear a real relation (dependence) to the world. The point for him is almost a matter of philosophical and theological grammar. In his trinitarianism, as in his logic and
metaphysics, Hegel is enough of a revolutionary to break the grammatical rule. Read aright, however, Hegel is more revolutionary still. He can be read not only as favoring symmetrical dependence over the classical tradition’s asymmetrical relation between God and the world, but also as reversing the asymmetry in favor of the world: the divine would not be actual unless it had economy as its field of operation, a work that not only matters to the divine but without which the divine would constitutionally remain unrealized. For the divine is only fully real and fully self-conscious in and through the experiences and consciousness of human beings in a goal-directed history.

From representation to thought

Hegel is not being in the least disingenuous when, in the post-Kantian field of thought, he recommends Christianity not only as compatible with the modern secular world, but as nothing short of its foundation. He abjures the tactic of watering down Christianity, and is convinced that the way forward is through a more fully rendered form of Christianity that will not give short shrift to any major Christian doctrine, even such an apparently useless one as the Trinity. But, as we have seen, Hegel does not offer a conventional interpretation of the Trinity or, for that matter, of any other Christian doctrine. This is the price that he thinks needs to be paid in order for Christianity to be validated in the modern world. In chapters 6 and 7 of the *Phenomenology* and throughout *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* Hegel presents religions as having much to recommend themselves to post-Enlightenment human being. This is even more the case with regard to Christianity. All religions – not excluding Christianity – are handicapped when it comes to validating themselves. This is so not only because religions are made up of practices and forms of life as well as beliefs that are expressed in symbols and narratives, but because claims to truth are made in and through these symbols and narratives that they themselves cannot redeem. Claims to truth can be redeemed and/or justified only at the level of conceptual formulation. Religion, then, is a penultimate rather than ultimate discourse, and this law still applies to Christianity, which Hegel regards as the highest instance of religion. This is shown, on the one hand, in the relationship between Christianity and philosophy in the *Phenomenology* (Hegel 1977b: 479–93), and on the other, in the relationship between representation and thought in the later *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* (Hegel 1984: 239–56) and volume three of the *Encyclopaedia* (Hegel 1971b: 271–315). In the case of the former, in its symbols and narrative Christianity discloses the truth of reality as such. Nonetheless, it more nearly apprehends than comprehends the truth. Comprehension is the business of philosophy, and its medium is the concept. Relative to the concept, symbol and narrative are accommodations to both the order of time and sense. Given the epistemic register of the *Phenomenology*, it comes as no surprise that Hegel marks the contrast between religion and philosophy as that between a genuine but limited form of knowing and absolute knowing (*absolute Wissen*).

With regard to the relation between representation and thought, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* follows the *Phenomenology* exactly. The representations of
Christianity, however much they apprehend the truth, do not rise to an eternal point of view, which is precisely the transcending of point of view. Again, this is achievable only in a conceptual framework. For Hegel the ultimacy of philosophy is not self-interested or disciplinary assertion; if thinking is allowed free rein, Hegel is persuaded that the ultimacy shows itself. What needs to be done, therefore, is to allow thinking to take over and not adhere to particular formations of thought. In his application of sublating (Aufhebung) which, following the etymological meaning that Hegel provides in the first volume of the Encyclopaedia, means preservation as well as annihilating (Hegel 1975: 142), Hegel insists that Christianity has nothing to fear in being reduced to having a penultimate rather than ultimate status when it comes to truth. Indeed, by ceding to philosophy, it finds the means to have its practices and forms of life justified, as well as its symbols and narrative. This provides Christianity with an invulnerability that it has never had throughout its own history. From Hegel’s point of view, the price is amazingly low: Christianity will have to cede top place in the hierarchy of discourses to philosophy, which will interpret and preserve those Christian practices and forms of life to fit them to the modern secular world, and which will brush up Christian symbols and narratives to remove anything pictorial and anything that smacks of time and gratuity. Where Hegel makes this most clear is in the concluding paragraphs of the Encyclopaedia. The move from religion to philosophy is the move to logic where all relations between concepts are understood to be eternal and necessary. A particularly interesting way in which the movement from religion to philosophy is marked is in and through the relation between what might be called religious syllogism and philosophical syllogism proper. Recall the account in Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion of the three spheres of Father, Son, and Spirit, each of which is further differentiated. In these crucially important paragraphs of the third volume of the Encyclopaedia, these spheres are mapped into three syllogisms which together constitute a master religious syllogism which culminates in the realization of Spirit in history (Hegel 1971b: 297–302). In the philosophical syllogisms and master syllogism, which remaps the religious syllogism now without the handicaps of the sensory, the temporal, and the merely contingent, Hegel thinks that he can lay forth the self-mediating Concept, which is the functional equivalent of God but in whom philosophers participate as essentially equal partners (Hegel 1971b: 302–15). For rising to this level of thinking is to rise to the level of eternity and to be ontologically identical with it.

What is beyond philosophy of religion, then, is philosophy in the full and proper sense. Throughout the nineteenth century, with regard to both his view of philosophy and his philosophy of religion Hegel had his devotees. But he also had more than his fair share of detractors. Empiricists and naturalists, Kantians and postmoderns objected to the exorbitant claims which Hegel makes on behalf of speculative philosophy, which comprehends and explains everything. In general, Christians have not been comforted either. According to Kierkegaard, Hegel’s speculative thought compromises the ineluctable finitude of the self and thus takes faith out of the equation. Other Christian thinkers have pointed to the sidelining of immortality, for it becomes unnecessary to speak of it once we can participate in the eternal in the here and now. And many theologians were and are unpersuaded that the Christianity which Hegel submits to conceptualization is recognizably
Christianity. They are appalled rather than amused by Hegel’s interpretation of Christian symbols, the Christian narrative, and the Trinity.

Hegel has sometimes been called the “Protestant Aquinas.” There are good reasons behind the analogy. As Aquinas sums up in a comprehensive, incisive, and decisive way the tradition of Catholic philosophy and theology, so Hegel could be understood to sum up in similar fashion the Protestant tradition, given the scope of his coverage, the brilliance of his performance, and the difficulty of gaining an argumentative foothold against it. Of course, with respect to this view there would be more demurrers than acceptors. In Hegel’s own day Schleiermacher in his Gläubenslehre (1822) articulated a dogmatics that he felt summarized Protestant thought in a much more faithful and adequate way. Again in the Protestant tradition, Karl Barth certainly refused to give Hegel the mantle, not only because he disagrees with him about the nature of faith, its relation to philosophy, and on just about every Christian symbol, but also that Hegel is not comprehensive in his treatment of Christian belief and not especially profound. But even a liberal Protestant theologian such as Paul Tillich was unwilling to give Hegel the prize. Although he did not think that anything remotely approaching a final system of Protestant theology was feasible, he also thought that critics of Hegel such as Kierkegaard and Schelling were too important to ignore.

To the issue of consensus or lack thereof, we can add another. This has to do with the status of tradition. For Aquinas, the tradition was both a given and an argument. Where possible, however, he abided by judgments of the theological tradition. From his perspective, the creeds and conciliar judgments were sacrosanct. By contrast, Hegel stipulates that his philosophy of religion represents a beginning while at the same time summing up the history of Christian reflection. But he no more felt that his thought has to conform to creed than to the Bible, or that certain rulings of the church are normative in any way. Moreover, no Christian thinker has canonical status, not Augustine, not Aquinas, not even Luther, whom he raises up as a standard, but also ignores when convenient. Moreover, this is as it should be. The torch has passed to the philosopher, who alone in these Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment days can present a form of Christianity that will be acceptable to the new secular world order.

See also Immanuel Kant (Chapter 1), Ludwig Feuerbach (Chapter 5), Rudolf Bultmann (Chapter 12), Paul Tillich (Chapter 13), Karl Barth (Chapter 14), Enlightenment (Chapter 23), Liberal theology (Chapter 28), Phenomenology (Chapter 31), Doctrine of God (Chapter 35), The Trinity (Chapter 43), Christian theology of religions (Chapter 57), Christian philosophical theology (Chapter 64).

Bibliography


Further reading

Jaeschke, W. (1990) Reason in Religion: The Formation of Hegel’s Philosophy of Religion, Berkeley: University of California Press. (This has established itself as the standard text on Hegel’s Philosophy of Religion and is especially good on the Kantian background of Hegel’s religious thought.)