Hermeneutics of Providence: Theology, Race, and Divine Action in History

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Willie James Jennings

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Theology
in the Divinity School of Duke University

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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the implications of the doctrine of providence for Christian life in the context of racialized modernity, offering a constructive theological response to two interrelated questions. First, how should Christians relate the doctrine of divine providence to the task of political judgment? That is, how should doctrinal accounts of the nature and shape of God's ongoing activity in history between creation and eschaton inform attempts to come to specific judgments about what God is doing in and through particular historical events? Second, how has whiteness insinuated itself into and distorted Christian attempts to discern the movement of God in history? In short, the dissertation engages divine providence not simply as a doctrine, but as a hermeneutic—a theological lens through which to actively interpret the world in relationship to God—and, more specifically, as a hermeneutic with a problematic history of identifying God's providential action with the interests and activities of white Christian peoples.

In dialogue with the writings of G.W.F. Hegel, Karl Barth, and James Cone, the dissertation examines the role played by the doctrine of providence in both theological justifications (Hegel) and critiques (Barth, Cone) of modern theories about European progress, the superiority of Western civilization, and white racial supremacy. I argue that Hegel articulates his problematic vision of providence through an operation of Christological displacement, wherein the figure of European man replaces Jesus Christ as the human subject in relationship to whom world history and global humanity find order, meaning, and purpose. I then turn to Barth and Cone, interpreting their writings on providence and divine action as critiques of the theological problem on display in Hegel.

Through analysis of this conversation within modern Protestant theology about providence, politics, and race, I outline a set of conditions for contemporary theological reflection on these matters. These include commitments to the centrality of the incarnation of Jesus Christ for conceptualizing providence, to the creatureliness of human beings, and to the active work of the Holy Spirit. I also argue that contemporary engagements with the doctrine must address two problems which neither Hegel, Barth, nor Cone sufficiently resolve: the persistent masculinity of Christian accounts of providence and a competitive construal of the Spirit-Son relationship.

The final chapter formulates a constructive hermeneutic of providence in light of these conditions. I develop an account of divine providence as the two-fold work of the Holy Spirit in (1) making Jesus Christ present to creation between ascension and eschaton and (2) enabling human creaturely participation in Christ's providential presence. Building on themes in womanist theology and contemporary pneumatology, I suggest that the work of the Spirit manifests in three characteristic activities in particular: the Spirit gives life to ordinary, overlooked, and oppressed material bodies; the Spirit joins, drawing those who would normally be strangers and enemies into intimate relationships; the Spirit anticipates the end of time in the midst of the present. By way of conclusion, I suggest how this hermeneutic of providence might help to shape particular judgments about where, how, and in whom the Spirit is making Christ present in the specific context of Durham, North Carolina in the second decade of the twenty-first century in light of the resurgence of thinly veiled white supremacist politics and the rapid gentrification of historic black communities facilitated by urban revitalization initiatives.

For Amy

In Memory of Allen Verhey (1945-2014)

Contents

Abbreviations

BTBP	*Black Theology and Black Power*
BTL	*Black Theology of Liberation*
CD I/1	*Church Dogmatics* I/1
CD II/2	*Church Dogmatics* II/2
CD III/3	*Church Dogmatics* III/3
CD IV/1	*Church Dogmatics* IV/1
GO	*God of the Oppressed*
LPWH	*Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*

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There are several groups to whom I owe debts of gratitude. My colleagues in the Divinity School and the Graduate Program in Religion have provided encouragement and friendship throughout this process. The organizing staff, strategy team, and leaders of Durham C.A.N. have consistently and persistently witnessed to the faltering, fragile, and hopeful endeavor that is democratic politics. Finally, I cannot imagine my life apart from Durham Church, from whose struggle to pursue committed intimacy and relational justice I have learned much about discerning the Spirit in a world governed by whiteness.

Finally, I wish to thank my friends and family, especially my wife and partner, Amy Jantzen, and our son Luke. Words are not able to express all that Amy and Luke have taught me and all that they mean to me. They have daily been a conduit for God's lavish, life-giving, death-defying love in this world. I dedicate this dissertation to Amy and offer it in memory of my late teacher, mentor, and friend, Allen Verhey, with whom I first developed the idea for a dissertation on providence in a corner booth at The Federal.

Introduction

On my first day as a doctoral student in the Th.D. program at Duke Divinity School, my friend told me that he intended to take his own life. A dark-skinned immigrant whom our pastor had invited into the rural church where I had served as an intern, my friend had found himself entangled within a white Christian community's web of well-intentioned paternalism from which he had been unable to extricate himself. During the summer of 2012—as he lived in an almost unfurnished second floor apartment without air conditioning or sufficient food—his relationships with his pastor and his church had rapidly deteriorated. The denominational authorities had finally moved to intervene in the situation, calling a meeting to seek reconciliation between the involved parties.

At this meeting, after listening to a recitation of all the ways in which my friend's white pastor felt aggrieved and injured by their relationship, my friend told me that he intended to end his life and that he had written a note for me to deliver to his family. Then he got up and walked out of the church. In response, my friend's pastor became hysterical. As the representatives of the congregation and denomination moved to comfort my friend's pastor, I followed my friend out into the unlit church parking lot. We wept and prayed together in that pitch-black parking lot with two other friends, while the church and its leaders cared for their own inside the well-lit building. In the weeks and months which followed, as I sought to make sense of what I had experienced that night, I came to the conclusion that those events represented a profound crisis for the vision of the church and the Christian faith that I had carried with me into my first orientation

session for the Th.D. program only hours before those events took place. That vision had been built upon a theology of that well-lit church, when what I needed now was a theology of that pitch-black church parking lot. Such a theology might help me to answer the question that haunted me as I began my doctoral studies: what was God doing on that night in August 2012?

This first question led quickly to others. What was God doing when extremist politicians pursuing a thinly veiled white supremacist agenda swept into power in the North Carolina General Assembly between 2010 and 2012? What was God doing as historic black communities in downtown Durham were being decimated by gentrification? What was God doing when Donald Trump was elected president of the United States? Over and over again, I found myself returning to basic questions about the nature and shape of God's ongoing relationship with the world between creation and eschaton—questions, in other words, about divine providence. The present study reflects my attempt to craft a theology of divine providence that might help to guide myself and others in discerning God's relationship to a world governed by the distorted racial logics of whiteness. My hope is that such discernment might lead to actions that are responsive to—and perhaps even participate in—what God is doing in the world today. As James Cone has suggested, "We must speak of God and his work, if we intend to join him."[1]

In the last several years, judgments made by influential Christian leaders about God's relationship to contemporary political events and movements have produced high

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[1] James Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 49 (hereafter cited as *BTBP*).

profile debates within North American Christianity. In December 2015, a controversy erupted in response to remarks about the Black Lives Matter movement made by faith leader and activist Michelle Higgins at InterVarsity Christian Fellowship's Urbana 15 student missions conference. In her keynote address, Higgins argued that, "Black Lives Matter is a movement on mission in the truth of God."[2] More recently, prominent evangelical voices like Franklin Graham, Michelle Bachmann, and Paula White have repeatedly expressed the opinion that divine providence and "the hand of God" were directly responsible for Donald Trump's victory in the 2016 presidential election.[3]

The present study offers a constructive theological response to two, interrelated questions that lie at the root of these debates. First, how should Christians relate the doctrine of divine providence to the ethical tasks of discernment and judgment? That is, how should they move from theological accounts of the nature and shape of God's ongoing action in history to specific judgments about the place of particular historical events and movements within that providential activity? Second, and more specifically, how has the racial subjectivity of whiteness insinuated itself into and distorted Christian attempts to discern the movement of God in history? The resurgence of overt, undisguised white supremacism and white nationalism in contemporary politics in the United State, which broad swaths of North American Christianity have been either

[2] Tobin Grant, "InterVarsity backs #BlackLivesMatter at Urbana 15," *Religion News Service*, December 29, 2015, http://religionnews.com/2015/12/29/intervarsity-backs-blacklivesmatters-at-urbana-15/.
[3] Lauren Markoe, "Did God choose Trump? What it means to believe in divine intervention," *Religion News Service*, January 17, 2017, http://religionnews.com/2017/01/17/did-god-choose-trump-what-belief-in-divine-intervention- really-means/.

indifferent to, at best, or supportive of, at worst, only confirms the timeliness and relevance of these questions for the fields of Christian theology and ethics.

At this point, a clarification on the use of a few key terms is in order. Throughout the present study, I will identify *whiteness* as the central problem which Christians in the United States in the twenty-first century must confront in their efforts to discern and respond to divine providence. From the outset, it is important to define what I mean by whiteness and to explain the relationship between this term and its close relative: *white supremacy*. Most basically, I define whiteness as what Pierre Bourdieu calls a habitus, or a "socialized subjectivity."[4] Whiteness is a set of flexible and shifting perceptions, dispositions, practices, structures, and processes that are historically, socially, politically and culturally produced through relationships to land and people defined by dislocation and domination.[5] Importantly, as has been recently demonstrated, these historical, social, political, and cultural practices and processes, which originally produced whiteness, had their roots in Christianity in general and Christian theology specifically.[6]

What this means is that whiteness—and race more generally—is neither natural or neutral. It is not the case that race is merely a descriptive category—a way to classify biological or physiological differences within humanity—that only later is corrupted into

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[4] Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc J.D. Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 126. See also Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, translated by Richard Nice (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 53: "The conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence produce *habitus*, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations."

[5] Robin DiAngelo, "White Fragility," *International Journal of Critical Pedagogy* 3, no. 3 (2011): 56-58.

[6] J. Kameron Carter, *Race: A Theological Account* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Willie J. Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

racism—the use of race as the basis for hierarchical and comparative evaluation. Rather, race and racism are "inevitable partners" that together follow "a crooked road, constructed by dominant peoples to justify their domination of others."[7] It is for this reason that I choose to identify whiteness—as opposed to white supremacy—as the primary problem to be confronted in this study. To use the term white supremacy is not in and of itself problematic, but it leaves open the possibility for misinterpretation, as if the problem is not racial thinking as such, but merely racial thinking used for domination through comparative evaluation. Racial thinking, however, was born out of the quest for domination through comparative evaluation. Therefore, this study sets out to interrogate the way in which the doctrine of divine providence has provided a powerful, ordering vision of God and creation, time and space, self and other, which has both contributed to the construction of the racial subjectivity of whiteness and comfortably resided within it.

The aims of the study are three-fold: (1) critical and historical, (2) constructive and theological, and (3) practical and ethical. The first, critical and historical aim of the study is to expose the *racial unconscious* of modern Christian theological reflection on the doctrine of providence.[8] It chooses an illustrative rather than an exhaustive approach, focusing on three major figures in the history of modern Christian theology: G.W.F. Hegel, Karl Barth, and James Cone. The study seeks to demonstrate that all three of these figures performed Christian theological reflection in order to engage and negotiate racial

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[7] Nell Irvin Painter, *The History of White People* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010).
[8] In invoking the racial unconscious, I draw upon Willie Jennings' development of Frederic Jameson's concept of the political unconscious in *The Christian Imagination*, 252, 342 n. 14. According to Jameson, the political unconscious is "the repressed and buried reality" which must be restored "to the surface of the text." See Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Sybmolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 20.

identity and racial politics. While Cone's concern to connect Christian theology to politics and race is clear enough, many might wonder what the theology of G.W.F. Hegel or Karl Barth has to do with these realities. Indeed, given the scholastic mode of theological inquiry which still largely dominates contemporary analyses of these figures, the answer might easily seem to be "nothing." Over and against this negative answer, the first basic aim of this study is to recover the "something" in regard to the connection between theology, politics, and race in modernity which abstract and scholastic analyses of Hegel and Barth have repressed and forgotten.

Most basically, my interpretations of these three figures seek to expose the fact that, in their writings on divine providence, they are very much engaged in negotiating the political and racial realities of their day. To this end, each of the three central chapters of this study demonstrate how Hegel, Barth, and Cone deploy the Christian doctrine of providence as a conceptual framework through which to come to specific judgments about the historical form and content of God's activity in a racialized world. Rather than treating Christian reflection on providence as a matter of abstract dogmatics that floats free of any concern for the world in which its author is located, this study examines such reflection as it actively functions as an interpretive lens for making sense of its author's world. In short, I examine providence not simply as a *doctrine*, but more specifically as a *hermeneutic*—thus the title of the present study.[9]

The second aim of the study is constructive and theological. I am not simply concerned to make a descriptive claim about the way that modern Christian theologians

[9] The phrase "hermeneutic of providence" comes from Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 92.

have used the doctrine of providence as a lens through which to interpret the political and racial dimensions of their contemporary worlds. I am also attempting to engage in normative theological reflection about what Christians ought to believe about the nature and shape of divine providence. Building upon the analysis of the hermeneutics of providence developed by Hegel, Barth, and Cone, I offer my own formulation of a hermeneutic of providence meant to guide Christian discernment of God's activity in the United States in the twenty-first century. At this level of my argument, I outline an understanding of divine providence as a two-fold work of the Holy Spirit: the Spirit makes Jesus Christ present to creation between Jesus' ascension and eschaton, and the Spirit enables finite and limited human creatures to participate in this presence during this time between the times. In sum, I offer a pneumatological account of providence in terms of Christological presence and anthropological participation.

The final aim of the study is ethical and practical. The study seeks to display how the account of providence articulated above might practically shape Christian judgments about where and how the Spirit is making Christ present and enabling human participation in that presence in contemporary political events. Drawing upon womanist theology and contemporary pneumatology, I argue that the material manifestations of divine providence in history can be discerned wherever Christ through the Spirit gives life to ordinary, overlooked, and oppressed material bodies, creates intimate and boundary-breaking communities marked by love for strangers and enemies, and anticipates the eschatological end of all things in the midst of present events.

These three interrelated threads of argumentation—the critical, the constructive, and the ethical—build cumulatively upon each other over the course of the study to produce a single, unified whole: a theology of providence that is (1) formulated in response to a critical diagnosis of the way that whiteness has distorted Christian thinking about providence and (2) deployed to shape Christian efforts to discern how God might be active in the world today.

In doing so, the study seeks to contribute to a number of areas of contemporary scholarly inquiry and debate about Christian theology, racial discourse, and modernity. First, it furthers attempts by Christian theologians to recover the doctrine of providence for contemporary Christian belief and practice. Beginning in the 1950s, a broad consensus emerged within the field of systematic theology that the doctrine of providence was in a state of crisis and that efforts to repair and retrieve it were necessary.[10] Over the past half century, there have been repeated efforts to diagnose the reasons leading to this "collapse" of the doctrine of providence and to offer new formulations of the doctrine in response.[11] The present study engages this mid-century diagnosis of a crisis or collapse of

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[10] Paradigmatic examples of this consensus are Langdon Gilkey, "The Concept of Providence in Contemporary Theology," *Journal of Religion* 43, no. 3 (1963): 171-192 and G. C. Berkouwer, *The Providence of God*, trans. Lewis B. Smedes (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1952).

[11] Langdon Gilkey, *Reaping the Whirlwind: A Christian Interpretation of History* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1976); Albert C. Outler, *Who Trusts in God: Musings on the Meaning of Providence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968); Peter R. Baelz, *Prayer and Providence: A Background Study* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1968); Michael J. Langford, *Providence* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1981); Benjamin Wirt Farley, *The Providence of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988); T. J. Gorringe, *God's Theatre: A Theology of Providence* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1991); Paul Helm, *The Providence of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994); E. Frank Tupper, *A Scandalous Providence: The Jesus Story of the Compassion of God* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1995); John Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998); Reinhold Bernhardt, *Was heißt "Handeln Gottes"?: Eine Rekonstruktion der Lehre von der Vorsehung* (Gütersloh: Chr. Kaiser/Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1999); Charles M. Wood, *The Question of Providence* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008); Francesca Aran Murphy and Philip G. Ziegler (ed.'s), *The*

the doctrine of providence and contributes to the efforts to effect a retrieval of the doctrine. However, in order to do so, it reframes the challenge posed by the doctrine of providence in a way that problematizes the consensus understanding of the doctrine's collapse. These issues are explored in greater detail in chapter one.

Second, through its treatment of G.W.F. Hegel, the study participates in a wide-ranging, interdisciplinary effort to reevaluate the canonical figures of the modern West from a postcolonial or decolonial perspective, exposing the close relationship between racial and racist discourse and the purported egalitarianism and universalism with which the thought of these figures is often associated. As Barnor Hesse suggests, this trajectory of "*race/modernity* studies" seeks to uncover "the much neglected relation between *modern philosophy and the discourse of race*. It interrogates the indebtedness of eighteenth and nineteenth-century modern thought to ideas of liberty, rationality, and superiority shaped by the cultivation of *Europeanness*, while postulating an invented 'non-Europeanness' as its antithesis."[12] Contributions to this enterprise include critical interrogations of the thought of Immanuel Kant by Emmanuel Eze, J. Kameron Carter, Mark Larrimore, Robert Bernasconi, and Tsenay Serequeberhan, the thought of John Locke by Bhiku Parekh, Denise Ferreira da Silva, and James Tully, the thought of G.W.F. Hegel by Denise Ferreira da Silva, Michael Hoffheimer, Susan Buck-Morss, and Robert Bernasconi, and the thought of Karl Marx by Dipesh Chakrabarty and Cedric

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Providence of God: Deus Habet Consilium (London: T&T Clark, 2009); Terry J. Wright, *Providence Made Flesh: Divine Presence as a Framework for a Theology of Providence* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2009); Hans S. Reinders, *Disability, Providence, and Ethics: Bridging Gaps, Transforming Lives* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014).

[12] Barnor Hesse, "Racialized Modernity: An Analytics of White Mythology," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 30, no. 4 (2007): 643-663. Emphasis in original.

Robinson—to name only a few of the most prominent figures of the modern Western philosophical tradition.[13]

Finally, the present study can be located in relationship to two emerging fields of contemporary theological inquiry. First, it stands within the field of political theology. Political theology, broadly construed, refers to at least two distinct enterprises.[14] On the one hand, it names the attempt to evaluate the role that theological concepts and doctrines have played in the formation of secular modernity and its characteristic institutions and concepts—democracy, the market economy, etc. In this first form, political theology need not be a confessional endeavor, as it simply seeks to expose the Christian theological grammar which has shaped the modern world. The writings of Giorgio Agamben provide a paradigmatic example of this first form of political theology.[15] On the other hand,

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[13] Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, "The Color of Reason: The Idea of 'Race' in Kant's Anthropology," in *Postcolonial African Philosophy*, ed. Eze (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1997), 103-140; Carter, *Race: A Theological Account*; Mark Larrimore, "Sublime Waste: Kant on the Destiny of the 'Races,'" *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 29 (1999): 99-125; Robert Bernasconi, "Who Invented the Concept of Race? Kant's Role in the Enlightenment Construction of Race," in *Race*, ed. Bernasconi (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 2001), 11-36; Robert Bernasconi, "Kant as an Unfamiliar Source of Racism," in *Philosophers on Race*, ed. Ward and Lott (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 2002), 145-166; Tsenay Serequeberhan, "The Critique of Eurocentrism and the Practice of African Philosophy," in *Postcolonial African Philosophy*, ed. Eze (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1997), 141-161; Bhikhu Parekh, "Liberalism and Colonialism: A Critique of Locke and Mill," in *The Decolonization of Imagination: Culture, Knowledge, and Power*, ed. Pieterse and Parekh (London: Zed Books, 1995), 81-98; Denise Ferreira da Silva, *Toward a Global Idea of Race* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007); James Tully, "Rediscovering America: The Two Treatises and Aboriginal Rights," in *An Approach to Political Philosophy: Locke in Contexts* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993); Michael H. Hoffheimer, "Hegel, Race, Genocide," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 39 (2001): 35-62; Susan Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009); Robert Bernasconi, "Hegel at the Court of the Ashanti," in *Hegel after Derrida*, ed. Barnett (London: Routledge, 1998), 41-63; Robert Bernasconi, "'The Ruling Categories of the World': The Trinity in Hegel's Philosophy of History and the Rise and Fall of Peoples," in *A Companion to Hegel*, ed. Houlgate and Baur (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2011), 315-331. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (London: Zed Press, 1983).

[14] A helpful elaboration of these two senses of political theology can be found in Luke Bretherton, *Political Theology: A Field Guide* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, forthcoming).

[15] See, for example, Giorgio Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory: For a Theological Genealogy of Economy and Government*, trans. Chiesa with Mandarini (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011).

political theology can refer to constructive and confessional theological reflection on Christian political activity within the context of modernity, marked as it is by processes of secularization, globalization, and racialization. In this second form, political theology functions as a subdiscipline of Christian theology: just as theological anthropology attempts to reflect on the human being in light of God's revelation of Godself in Jesus Christ, so also political theology attempts to reflect on politics in light of God's revelation of Godself in Jesus Christ. In this latter form, political theology has developed through the work of thinkers such as Luke Bretherton, Jean Bethke Elshtain, Stanley Hauerwas, Vincent Lloyd, and Ted Smith.[16] The present study contributes to the field of political theology in both of its forms, exposing the Christian theological infrastructure of one of modernity's most influential philosophers, G.W.F. Hegel, and engaging in constructive reflection about faithful Christian political activity in dialogue with Karl Barth and James Cone.

The second emerging field of theological enquiry to which this study contributes explores the way in which Christian theology has provided the conceptual infrastructure through which racial discourse has come to be articulated in modernity and the way in which racial discourse in modernity has problematically shaped Christian theological imaginations in return. This second field brings constructive or systematic theology into dialogue with postcolonial studies, critical race/whiteness studies, and race/modernity

[16] See Luke Bretherton, *Resurrecting Democracy: Faith, Citizenship, and the Politics of a Common Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Sovereignty: God, State, and Self* (New York: Basic Books, 2008); Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981); Vincent Lloyd, *Black Natural Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Ted Smith, *The New Measures: A Theological History of Democratic Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

studies, seeking to expose the intimate and productive relationship that religious and racial discourse have had in modernity—a relationship that has too often been overlooked by members of these fields of inquiry. As Nelson Maldonado-Torres notes, "If one looked at the literature on religion and race as modern concepts or areas of study, however, one would find that scholars theorizing religion and those theorizing race are not typically in serious conversation with each other."[17] What has been true of religion and race is even more true of Christian theology and race. The present study follows in the wake of recent efforts by theologians like J. Kameron Carter, Willie Jennings, and M. Shawn Copeland to fill this lacuna by exploring the relationship between theological discourse and racial discourse in modernity.[18]

This study situates itself by triangulating between these two emerging fields of theological inquiry. Where the first—political theology—emphasizes the relationship between theology and politics, while sometimes venturing into discussions of race, and the second emphasizes the relationship between theology and race, while sometimes venturing into discussions of politics, the present study seeks to hold together theology, politics, and race as co-constitutive facets of a single frame of intellectual inquiry.

The study operates with a particular scope and clearly defined limits. It does not attempt an exhaustive reconstruction of the history of the doctrine of providence in modern Christian political thought and racial discourse. Rather, it focuses on three paradigmatic figures, each of whom understood their thought as directly engaging the

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[17] Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "Race, Religion, and Ethics in the Modern/Colonial World," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 42, no. 4 (2014): 691-711.
[18] Carter, *Race: A Theological Account*; Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*; M. Shawn Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010).

figures who came before them. Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* presents the doctrine of providence at the peak of its powers in shaping a vision of European modernity. While other figures engage the doctrine of providence in their political philosophies—Immanuel Kant being only the most obvious example—none can rival Hegel in terms of the scope and confidence of his use of the doctrine.[19] In the hands of Hegel, the doctrine of providence becomes the basis for a philosophical theory that orders all of time and space around the incarnation of the divine in modern European humanity and its civilization. The decision to focus on Hegel is also warranted by Hegel's tremendous influence on those who came after him. In the words of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "All the great philosophical ideas of the past century—the philosophies of Marx and Nietzsche, phenomenology, German existentialism, and psychoanalysis—had their beginnings in Hegel."[20] In composing his doctrine of providence in *Church Dogmatics* III/3, Karl Barth explicitly engages Hegel as a key interlocutor over and against whom Barth articulates his theology. Similarly, in his early writings James Cone is engaged in a running dialogue with Barth's theology. Thus, the selection of these authors allows the study to engage with three of the most influential theological figures of the last two centuries while also plotting a coherent narrative arc that authentically places their writings in dialogue with one another.

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[19] See, in particular, Immanuel Kant, "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Intent," in *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays: On Politics, History, and Morals*, trans. Humphrey (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Co., 1983); Immanuel Kant, "To Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch," in *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays: On Politics, History, and Morals*, trans. Humphrey (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Co., 1983).

[20] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Sense and Non-Sense*, trans. Dreyfus and Dreyfus (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 63. Cited in Charles Taylor, *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 538.

Methodologically, the study represents, what H. Richard Niebuhr calls a "pilgrim's venture": an attempt at historical inquiry made by one who is "interested more in prospect than in retrospect but who, seeing the continuity of present with past, know[s] that without retrospect no real prospect is possible."[21] In order to address contemporary questions about how to discern God's relationship to racial politics in the United States, I examine historical case studies in which theologians wrestled with similar questions in relationship to their own contexts. Rejecting an approach to interpreting theological texts which sees them as abstract dogmatic contributions to a timeless intellectual conversation, each of the central chapters roots its analysis of theological texts in the specific historical and socio-political contexts of their composition. Thus, the study situates Hegel's lectures inside of the Napoleonic conquest of Europe and Europe's conquest of the globe in the first half of the nineteenth century, Barth's *Church Dogmatics* III/3 in the context of the East-West conflict in 1948 and 1949, and Cone's early writings in the contexts of the urban rebellions in Detroit and Newark in the summer of 1967 and the rise of the Black Power movement. This methodological approach is more fully expounded in chapter one.

The study is structured around three central chapters, each of which explicate a highly influential theological hermeneutic of providence developed for the purpose of guiding discernment of and response to the activity of God in the modern, racialized world. All three of these hermeneutical visions focus their readings of divine providence in the world specifically on the activities of modern, racialized humanity. These three

[21] H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1988), 1.

chapters are framed by an introductory chapter which establishes the specific nature of the problem which the study seeks to address and a final chapter that draws together the common threads from each of the central chapters in order to formulate a constructive hermeneutic of providence.

The first chapter specifies the problem to which this study responds, framing it in relationship to other accounts of the problematic nature of the doctrine of providence for contemporary Christian belief and practice. It offers a critical evaluation of a conversation within systematic theology about the collapse of the doctrine of providence in the twentieth century, one which has framed subsequent attempts within the discipline to retrieve or revive the doctrine. I argue that the dominant framing of the collapse of the doctrine is a misdiagnosis, which insufficiently captures the depth and scope of the problem that providence presents for contemporary Christian theology. I offer an alternative diagnosis of that problem, one which both poses a far more serious challenge to Christian speech about providence and at the same time opens up new possibilities for meaningfully addressing that challenge.

Building on this framing of the problem, each of the central chapters explicates a hermeneutic of providence—an interpretation of the doctrine of providence which functions as a lens through which to interpret God's relationship to contemporary events in racialized modernity. G.W.F. Hegel, Karl Barth, and James Cone all offer accounts of divine providence that function as conceptual frameworks within which to address practical questions about divine action in world history.

The second chapter examines Hegel's dramatic reconfiguration of the doctrine of providence which he deploys to interpret the relationship of divine Spirit to the culmination of European modernity and the global imperial conquests of European civilization in the first half of the nineteenth century. The third chapter investigates Barth's articulation of the triune God's preservation, accompaniment, and government of creation in 1948 and 1949, demonstrating that Barth's dogmatic theology formed the basis for his critical interrogation of the East-West conflict which was rapidly intensifying during those years. The fourth chapter engages the early writings of Cone in order to show how Cone developed a unique understanding of the nature and shape of divine action through which he was able to identify the urban rebellions and struggles for black liberation in the 1960s and 1970s as the work of Christ. In each case, a different conception of the doctrine of divine providence shapes its author's theological interpretation of contemporary events, particularly as these events connect to fundamental questions about modernity, Western civilization, and racial humanity.

The fifth and final chapter synthesizes the findings of the three central chapters, drawing out the key issues, core themes, and shared problems that emerge from reading the accounts of Hegel, Barth, and Cone as contributions to an ongoing conversation in modern Christian theology about divine action, politics, and racial identity. In response to this synthetic analysis, the chapter then proceeds to formulate a constructive hermeneutic of providence that builds upon the best insights of that conversation while addressing those problems which Hegel, Barth, and Cone together leave unresolved.

By way of conclusion, the study offers some reflections on how this constructive hermeneutic of providence might help to shape practical judgments about where, how, and in whom God is active today, demonstrating how the account of divine providence developed over the course of this study might guide discernment of God's relationship to the racial politics of Durham, NC in the second decade of the twenty-first century.

Most basically, this study offers interpretations of the work of three seminal figures in the history of modern Christian theology that are original and innovative with respect to both method and content. More than this, however, it offers these interpretations in a way that meaningfully addresses a persistently problematic and under-examined locus of Christian doctrine, while also contributing to ongoing scholarly analyses of the role played by Christian theology in the formation and maintenance of the racialized modern world. Finally, I hope that this study also offers a way of thinking about God's action in history that might help ordinary Christians to see that Jesus Christ is at work in contemporary justice struggles and that the Holy Spirit is calling them to join Him.

Chapter 1

The Problem of Providence: Whiteness and Divine Action in History

In the July 1963 issue of *The Journal of Religion*, the American theologian Langdon Gilkey sounded the alarm: the doctrine of providence was in trouble. In his essay entitled "The Concept of Providence in Contemporary Theology," Gilkey exposed a serious deficit in theological reflection on the doctrine of providence in the dominant theological conversations of his day, arguing that providence was the only one of the major classical loci of Christian doctrine that had not enjoyed a considerable renaissance in the twentieth century.[1] Indeed, according to Gilkey the only significant feature of theological reflection on providence in the twentieth century was its rapid disappearance:

> Today this concept of Providence is notable mainly in its absence from theological discussion. This absence is in turn the more striking because, first, the two past traditions that have greatly influenced contemporary theology—the Reformation and Liberalism—both had carefully elaborated and very significant conceptions of Providence; and, second, because the question most frequently asked in contemporary theological discussion—What is the meaning, if any, of history?—might seem to call for an equally strong view of God's providential rule over historical events.[2]

The rapid erosion of one of the central classical doctrines of Christian theology—as well as the theological community's relative lack of interest in responding to this loss—led Gilkey to an important question: "Why has Providence in our generation been left a

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[1] Gilkey, "The Concept of Providence," 171-192. Gilkey contrasted the doctrine of providence with the doctrines of creation, sin, revelation, incarnation, justification, and eschatology. Of all of these classical theological doctrines, Gilkey suggested, providence "is the single one which has not been reinterpreted and revitalized by contemporary theology." Gilkey did, however, acknowledge that Karl Barth had undertaken precisely this task in his doctrine of providence in *Church Dogmatics* III/3. However, Barth was the exception that proved the rule for Gilkey.
[2] Ibid., 171.

rootless, disembodied ghost, flitting from footnote to footnote, but rarely finding secure lodgment in sustained theological discourse?"[3]

More than half a century later, Gilkey's question remains relevant. Despite the best efforts of Gilkey and others to account for the neglect of providence and to engage in a recovery of the doctrine, there remains a broad consensus among contemporary theologians: "The situation has not changed markedly since Gilkey wrote."[4] The doctrine does occasionally draw the attention of contemporary theologians—often doing so precisely because of its beleaguered condition.[5] However, it remains a largely neglected topic in contemporary Christian theology, especially when compared with the recent resurgence of interest in other central Christian doctrines such as the Trinity, Christology, theological anthropology, or eschatology. In sum, the problems afflicting the doctrine of providence have proven to be intractable enough to resist the sustained efforts of those who have sought to resolve them for more than half a century. It is not a surprise,

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[3] Ibid., 171. G. C. Berkouwer's *The Providence of God* represents a notable exception to this lack of interest in the eclipse of the doctrine of providence. While it did not do as much to raise the question of the doctrine of providence in mainstream academic theology, Berkouwer's book preceded Gilkey's article by more than a decade and raised a number of similar questions and concerns.

[4] Charles M. Wood, "Providence," in *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, ed. Kathryn Tanner, John Webster, and Iain Torrance (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 93. For other representative expressions of the consensus view of a continuing crisis of the doctrine of providence, see Bernhardt, *Was heißt "Handeln Gottes"?*, 19-25; Julian N. Hart, "Creation and Providence," in *Christian Theology: An Introduction to Its Traditions and Tasks*, ed. Peter C. Hodgson and Robert H. King (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1994), 141; Peter C. Hodgson, "Providence," in *A New Handbook of Christian Theology*, ed. Donald W. Musser and Joseph L. Price (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1992), 394-6; Sung-Sup Kim, Deus providebit: *Calvin, Schleiermacher, and Barth on the Providence of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2014), 210-224; Wolf Krötke, review of *Was heisst 'Handeln Gottes'?*, by Reinhold Bernhardt, *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 125: 1190–3; Reinders, *Providence, Disability, and Ethics*, 25; E. Frank Tupper, "The Providence of God in Christological Perspective," *Review & Expositor* 82 (1985): 579-595.

[5] In 2008, for example, the University of Aberdeen hosted a major conference on providence—tellingly advertised as an opportunity to "break new ground" on the topic—that was headlined by many of the leading theological voices in contemporary theology and led to the publication of *The Providence of God: Deus Habet Consilium* edited by Francesca Murphy and Philip Ziegler. The following year, Charles Wood's expanded reflections on providence appeared in *The Question of Providence*. Also in 2009, David Fergusson delivered Princeton Theological Seminary's Warfield lectures on the doctrine.

therefore, that many theologians have put providence to one side—preferring to ignore the doctrine rather than risk becoming entangled in the complex theological web that it has come to represent.

In this chapter I will offer my own assessment of the nature and shape of the theological problem that the doctrine of providence represents for contemporary Christian theology and lay out a framework and method for constructively addressing that problem in the remainder of the present study. In section 1.1, I offer a critique of the dominant way that the twentieth century "crisis" of the doctrine of providence has been narrated within the field of Christian theology by Gilkey and others. I challenge the basic assumption that the real challenge to a Christian account of providence is the mass suffering of European humanity in the first half of the twentieth century. According to this narration of the doctrine's collapse, providence fell into a crisis in the twentieth century precisely because it could not render such suffering intelligible. Over and against this narrative, I argue that there is a more historically and conceptually basic problem for a Christian account of providence: the doctrine's ability to render intelligible the massive suffering inflicted upon non-European peoples by Christian Europe throughout the modern period. In short, I ask why Christian theologians in Europe and the United States only declared a state of crisis for the doctrine of providence when the suffering, dislocation, and domination that had marked the experiences of non-European peoples for hundreds of years finally manifested in Europe itself in the twentieth century.

Having articulated the problem to which the study will respond, the second and third parts of the present chapter map out the framework and methodology which will

guide that response in the following chapters. In section 1.2, I argue for a *hermeneutical*—as opposed to a strictly *doctrinal*—framework for Christian theological reflection on divine providence, suggesting that Christian theologies of providence must grapple with providence's peculiar status as a theological doctrine that is integrally practical, in the sense that it is a doctrine directly concerned with the possibility of action in the world.[6] I will therefore outline a theological approach to the doctrine of providence that attends to the ethical tasks of discernment, judgment, and action as integral aspects of the doctrine itself. Finally, section 1.3 outlines the methodological approach which guides my subsequent analysis of the figures of Hegel, Barth, and Cone. I will argue that a particular mode of historical inquiry can be employed to uncover a diverse set of theological tools, concepts, and models for thinking constructively about the relationship between providence, politics, and race in the modern world.

1.1 The Wound of Providence

In *Places of Redemption*, Mary McClintock Fulkerson argues that, "Theologies that matter arise out of dilemmas. … As Charles Winquist is reported to have said, creative thinking originates at the scene of a wound. Wounds generate new thinking. Disjunctions birth invention. … Like a wound, theological thinking is generated by a sometimes inchoate sense that something must be addressed."[7] Similarly, Peter Ochs has argued that the work of theological reflection and scriptural interpretation ought to be conceived as a *reparative* enterprise which generates new beliefs and habits when

[6] Oliver O'Donovan outlines this understanding of the practical in *Self, World, and Time: Ethics a Theology 1* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2013), 33.
[7] Mary McClintock Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption: Theology for a Worldly Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 13-14.

dominant ones are disrupted by suffering.[8] Both of these accounts helpfully frame the conversation about the collapse and/or crisis of the doctrine of providence that has unfolded within the field of Christian theology since the middle of the twentieth century. This conversation has attempted to diagnose and address a wound—some kind of suffering which has rendered the dominant accounts of divine providence problematic or in need of repair. But what is this wound?

According to the dominant narration, which was articulated by prominent European and North American theologians like G.C. Berkouwer and Langdon Gilkey, the wound lies in the profound suffering of European humanity in the first half of the twentieth century and their concomitant loss of confidence in their place in the world. In what follows, I will argue that there are profound limitations to this understanding of the crisis of the doctrine of providence, such that it in fact constitutes a misdiagnosis of the wound which must be addressed. I will argue that Berkouwer and Gilkey approach the crisis of the doctrine of providence from within the framework of whiteness, interpreting it from their vantage point as centered, first world citizen-subjects.[9] The wound of providence, from this perspective, is the suffering and dislocation of white Christian peoples in the first half of the twentieth century. Thus, it was only when white, Christian civilization and its faith in itself began to come under duress over the course of the

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[8] For a helpful analysis of Ochs's theory of reparative reasoning, see Nicholas Adams, "Reparative Reasoning," *Modern Theology* 24.3 (2008): 447-457.

[9] My interpretation of Gilkey and Berkouwer parallels Chela Sandoval's criticisms of Frederic Jameson in *Methodology of the Oppressed* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 15-37. Sandoval incisively explores the phenomenon of "the disoriented first world citizen-subject" who emerges over the course of the twentieth century from the recognition that he is "no longer capable of making sense of or giving meaning to the practices that life in 'advanced' industrialized societies required its members to observe" (Sandoval, 8-9).

twentieth century that a problem emerged for Berkouwer and Gilkey. However, I will suggest that what appeared as a fundamental crisis for Christian belief in providence to those dwelling on the topside of modernity was in fact a reality that those dwelling on the underside of modernity had already experienced for hundreds of years.[10]

Where Gilkey and Berkouwer see the wound emerging when divine providence could no longer hold together a vision of the world crafted by whiteness, I will argue that the wound to which theological reflection on providence must address itself is in fact precisely the fact that Christian belief in divine providence seamlessly held together a vision of the world crafted by whiteness in the first place. Most basically, therefore, the wound to which Christian theology must respond is the suffering of non-European humanity, suffering that for hundreds of years *did not* seem to pose a significant obstacle to Christian belief in providence and was, furthermore, justified and rendered intelligible precisely through appeals to divine providence. That is the problem to which the present study addresses itself. The crisis of the doctrine of providence for contemporary Christian theology is not that providence *ceased to function as a meaningful theological category* in the face of the suffering of European peoples in the first half of the twentieth century, it is that providence *functioned so well as a meaningful theological category* through which to render intelligible the suffering of non-European peoples for centuries prior.

1.1.1 Diagnosing the Wound: The Dominant Account

When G. C. Berkouwer and Langdon Gilkey proclaimed the crisis of the doctrine of providence in the 1950s and 1960s, they were not simply suggesting that a particular

[10] Enrique Dussel, *The Underside of Modernity: Apel, Ricouer, Rorty, Taylor, and the Philosophy of Liberation*, trans. Mendieta (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1996).

configuration of theological ideas no longer made sense. They were, more fundamentally, concerned about the fact that an entire way of seeing and being in the world which this particular configuration of theological ideas had supported was in crisis. It is not only the doctrine of providence, but also a particular ordering of humanity and society which was under duress. It was, as Berkouwer asserted, a fundamental "problem of man" itself.

Gerrit Cornelis Berkouwer was a significant figure in twentieth century Dutch Reformed theology, as well as an important Protestant contributor to ecumenical dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church after the Second World War. He held the chair in dogmatics at the Free University of Amsterdam from 1945-1974, a chair whose previous occupants included Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck. His ecumenical work earned him a personal invitation to attend the Second Vatican Council as an observer. A prolific author, he wrote five books on Roman Catholicism and the eighteen volume series *Studies in Dogmatics*.[11] The second volume to appear in the English edition of this series was *The Providence of God*, which contains Berkouwer's frank description of what he identifies as a "crisis of the providence doctrine in our century."[12]

Writing from his post-war vantage point in 1950, Berkouwer surveys the landscape of a European humanity whose experience in the first half of the twentieth century radically calls into question the church's confession of the providence of God. In a century which will forever be marked as a time "of the concentration camps and the pogroms, of war and hatred, of attack on the worth of humanity itself," Berkouwer suggests that the providence of God "has today become a profound problem—*the*

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[11] Eduardo Echeverria, *Berkouwer and Catholicism: Disputed Questions* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 1.
[12] Berkouwer, *The Providence of God*, 7.

problem for persons who have never even considered it before." Yet while this problem has manifested as a problem with God and God's providence, its roots lie first and foremost in "the problem of man."[13]

A half-century of self-inflicted mass slaughter has produced a European humanity whose fundamental outlook on existence is defined by a sense of "radical displacement and estrangement." Berkouwer labels this pervasive attitude "dread": "Dread may be considered the result of man's being more or less ruthlessly snatched out of an old and trusted order and forced into a strange, hostile world. … The trusted order out of which man is plucked is the order of Providence."[14] As he sees it, modern humanity stands at a crossroads where it is forced to choose between "the comfort of the old confession of God's providence," which now seems to ring hollow, and "the *dread* that rises from the events of our century," which presents itself in nihilism and atheism as the "one realistic world and life view" and the "only logical and permissible conclusion."[15]

The swift collapse of providence in the face of this radical alienation of "man" from "his trusted order" is all the more surprising to Berkouwer in light of providence's previous reign as "one of the most self-evident articles of the Church's confession." Long after other Christian doctrines like the virgin birth, the resurrection, and the ascension were subjected to strident criticism, providence continued to elicit almost "universal assent" from nineteenth century humanity.[16] Berkouwer explains providence's rapid fall from grace as the result of a gradual watering down of the doctrine within eighteenth and

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[13] Ibid., 8, 11, 12. Emphasis in the original.
[14] Ibid., 12.
[15] Ibid., 12. Emphasis in original.
[16] Ibid., 17, 10, 11.

nineteenth century Christian theology which corroded the doctrine from the inside out, leading to its catastrophic demise at the hands of the twentieth century's horrors. The collapse of the doctrine of providence led ineluctably to the death of a certain way of being in the world for European humanity: "God is estranged from man; and man becomes a stranger in His world."[17] Berkouwer never pauses to reflect on the fact that for many millions of non-Europeans, the dread, suffering, estrangement, and alienation then being experienced in Europe had been a daily reality for hundreds of years.

Langdon Gilkey's "The Concept of Providence in Contemporary Theology" appeared just over a decade after the publication of Berkouwer's discussion of the twentieth century crisis of providence in *The Providence of God*. In this concise essay, Gilkey offered an account of the status of the doctrine in contemporary theology that echoed many of the core sentiments of Berkouwer.

Like Berkouwer, Gilkey argues that the disappearance of the doctrine of providence in the twentieth century is indicative of more than just an intellectual problem within the academic guild of Christian theology. Paralleling Berkouwer's assertion that the problem with providence if more fundamentally a "problem of man," Gilkey suggests that the root cause of providence's demise lies "in the general character of our cultural situation." [18] While past centuries have seen obstacles to belief in the doctrine of providence, the twentieth century proved unique in posing seemingly insurmountable challenges to the doctrine which appeared to leave no possibility of a reconfiguration or adaptation of providence to the new cultural circumstance.

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[17] Ibid., 17.
[18] Gilkey, "The Concept of Providence," 173.

Gilkey shares Berkouwer's assessment that the final deathblow to providence was struck by the catastrophic devastation that European humanity had inflicted upon itself in the first half of the twentieth century. He traces the doctrine's demise to the "violent irruption of evil" in the twentieth century, which left the "field of life … filled with the very real screams of mangled bodies and littered with very dead corpses."[19]

Berkouwer and Gilkey agree that the collapse of the doctrine of providence means more than just a loss of a particular set of intellectual truth claims about God's relationship to the world. For Gilkey, the collapse of the doctrine meant that "our" cultural situation was now defined by the fact that "*no* purpose, direction, or meaning of any sort could be seen in the general passage of historical events."[20] Similarly, according to Berkouwer, "man" has been "alienated from his trusted order."[21] For both thinkers, the suffering of European humanity in the twentieth century constitutes a wound which Christian reflection on the doctrine of providence has been unable to address. In what follows, I will suggest that the wound to which theologies of providence ought to respond is in fact much deeper.

1.1.2 An Alternative Diagnosis

On January 10, 1838, John C. Calhoun, a former vice president, current U.S. senator from South Carolina, and perpetually vociferous defender of slavery, took to the floor of the United States Senate to offer an apology for the South's peculiar institution. In his remarks, Calhoun concocted a defense of slavery that mixed paternalism and white

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[19] Ibid., 175.
[20] Ibid., 173.
[21] Berkouwer, *The Providence of God*, 12

supremacist racial theory with an appeal to God's mysterious providential ordering of human political and economic relations:

> He saw (said Mr. C[alhoun]) in the question before us the fate of the South. … A mysterious Providence had brought together two races, from different portions of the globe, and placed them together in nearly equal numbers in the Southern portion of this Union. They were inseparably united beyond the possibility of separation. Experience had shown that the existing relation between them secured the peace and happiness of both. Each had improved; the inferior greatly; so much so, that it had attained a degree of civilization never before attained by the black race in any age or country. Under no other relation could they co-exist together. To destroy it was to involve a whole region in slaughter, carnage, and desolation; and, come what will, we must defend and preserve it. … Many in the South once believed that it was a moral and political evil; that folly and delusion are gone; we see it now in its true light, and regard it as the most safe and stable basis for free institutions in the world.[22]

Not content with simply defending the continued existence of the Southern slavocracy on the grounds of political pragmatism—as a regrettable but necessary evil—Calhoun met the moral critiques of his abolitionist opponents head on. Attempting to outflank his enemies and seize the moral high ground, Calhoun argued that when viewed from the perspective of God's beneficent, providential organization of human society, slavery was revealed to be an unqualified good for all involved, promoting the improvement and development of masters, slaves, and society at large. In taking this

[22] John C. Calhoun, "Further Remarks in Debate on His Fifth Resolution," in *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, ed. Clyde N. Wilson (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1981), XIV: 84. See also Calhoun's expression of similar sentiments in a letter to a theological defender of slavery, Rev. Alexander McCaine, dated August 3, 1842 written to compliment McCaine on his *Slavery defended from Scripture, against the attacks of the Abolitionists*: "A mysterious Providence has thought proper to bring together in that portion of the Union, two races in nearly equal numbers, from different continents, and of the most opposite color and character of any two on the Globe. They have lived together under the present relation, for more than two centuries, in peace and prosperity, with the greatest improvement of the inferior race, physically, intellectually, and morally, and without deterioration of the superior. They cannot be separated; nor can they live under any other. … Safety, patriotism, and duty, commands [*sic*] us, then, to maintain it at all hazard; and in obeying their mandate, you have shown that we have the high and holy sanction of Scripture" (*The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, XVI: 348).

position, Calhoun echoed the view that his fellow South Carolinian James Henry Hammond had expressed in the U.S. House of Representatives just two years earlier, when Hammond described slavery as "the greatest of all the great blessings which a kind Providence has bestowed upon our glorious region."[23]

Calhoun's grotesque mobilization of the concept of providence to defend the Southern system of race-based slavery points to a critical problem which is missed by Berkouwer and Gilkey in their descriptions of the twentieth century collapse of the doctrine of providence: the way that whiteness has persistently infiltrated, distorted, and subverted modern Christian discernment of the activity of divine providence in the world. Unlike Berkouwer and Gilkey's diagnosis, which identifies the crisis in terms of the *inability* of the doctrine of providence to make sense of the suffering of European humanity, this alternative perspective locates the problem precisely in the remarkable *ability* of the doctrine of providence, when articulated from inside of the logics of whiteness, to justify the tremendous suffering of non-European humanity at the hands of white, Christian peoples.

For at least the last half-millennium, the distorting effects of whiteness have plagued Christian attempts to exercise political discernment and judgment in concert with interpretations of God's providential action in history. Indeed, in terms of the breadth and the depth of this problem, it is no exaggeration to say that this problem has been one of the perennially recurring features of European Christianity over the last five hundred years, cutting across historical, geographical, and confessional boundaries with alarming

[23] James Henry Hammond, *Remarks of Mr. Hammond of South Carolina on the Question of Receiving Petitions for the Abolition of Slavery in the District of Columbia* (Washington: Duff Green, 1836), 11.

ease. Whether one considers Spanish and Portuguese Catholics in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, British Anglicans in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Presbyterians and Methodists in the United States in the nineteenth century, German Lutherans in the 1930s, or South African Dutch Reformed Christians in the twentieth, the empirical results are surprisingly consistent given the vast distances in time, space, and theological tradition that separate these different situations: the mass suffering, enslavement, and death of non-white peoples at the hands of white, Christian peoples who explicitly and self-consciously invoked divine providence as the lens through which to render their actions theologically intelligible and claim them as righteous. Like Abel's blood crying out from the ground in Genesis 4, this suffering is a wound to which theological reflection on divine providence must respond.

1.1.3 Excursus: On the Insufficiency of The Traditional Remedies

Christian theology has produced a body of conventional wisdom about the relationship between the doctrine of providence and the tasks of political discernment and judgment that contains a number of traditional remedies for addressing problematic conceptions of God's activity in history. It is of course possible that the particular wound identified in this study might be resolved by one of these remedies quite easily, alleviating the need for further inquiry. To demonstrate that this is not the case, I will briefly examine two of the most historically significant theological remedies for problematic doctrines of providence in light of historical debates in the United States about providence and African slavery. By displaying the shortcomings of the traditional remedies, the necessity of a closer examination of these issues will become clear.

1.1.3.1 Providence and Creation: Preserving the Order of Things

In Book 16 of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, John Calvin explores the intersection between the doctrine of providence and political judgment in a section dedicated to arguing that "God's providence especially relates to men."[24] In the midst of his steadfast defense of the conviction that God determines all that happens in world-occurrence, Calvin draws some troubling conclusions about the ramifications of his understanding of providence for human responses to economic disparities between rich and poor in human societies. Riffing on Proverbs 29, Calvin asserts, "Even though the rich are mingled with the poor in the world, while to each his condition is divinely assigned, God, who lights all men, is not at all blind. And so [Solomon] urges the poor to patience; because those who are not content with their own lot try to shake off the burden laid upon them by God."[25] Though it leads to a highly objectionable conclusion, the logic of Calvin's position is fairly straightforward. God's all-encompassing providence establishes, maintains, and governs everything that happens in world history, including the affairs of humanity. Thus, it is by the direct decision and action of God that some human beings are poor, while others are rich. To try to extricate oneself from the condition of poverty would be, therefore, to engage in rebellion against the will of God.

Whether or not Calvin's position on this issue is consistent with his treatment of providence as a whole—and I think that it might be possible to make a case for a "minority report" within Calvin's thought on providence that runs in direct contradiction

[24] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill and trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 204.
[25] Ibid., 205.

to what he says here—with this particular conclusion Calvin displays one of the archetypal errors of Christian political judgment exercised in relationship to a reading of divine providence.[26] On this erroneous understanding of the ramifications of the doctrine of providence for human political judgment, the doctrine functions as little more than a divine stamp of approval for the status quo. It is an inherently conservative reading of the political consequences of providence whose maxim is "that which is, is good"—or perhaps better yet, "God willed it, I accept it, that settles it." In situations in which the political status quo is unjust, this distortion of political judgment leads Christians to fight to maintain a sacralized order of things, rather than to seek justice.

Given the popularity of this problematic construal of the relationship of providence and political judgment in the history of Christianity, theologians have thought it wise to develop a remedy. Over and against this conservative use of the doctrine of providence, efforts have been made to articulate a doctrine of providence that, as one author puts it, "can underwrite and animate a critical politics of social and political change."[27] With an alternative construal of the doctrine of providence, Christian political judgment can be mobilized in support of political transformations:

> The origins of the existing order of things become less important than acknowledgment that all such orders are themselves subject to the dynamic exercise of divine sovereignty in the present. The path of divine governance and the unfolding of the divine will may cut across or even against things as they stand. Christians thus know no final obligation to uphold and maintain any given

[26] The core theological problem in interpreting Calvin's thought on providence is how Calvin locates the doctrine of providence in relationship to God's power and God's love. Calvin at his best strives to articulate his doctrine of providence as a property of the latter or, more precisely, in such a way that God's power cannot be any different than God's love. However, his attempts remain less than satisfactory. For a similar account of Calvin's doctrine of providence, see Reinders, *Disability, Providence, and Ethics*, 125-156.
[27] Philip Ziegler, "The Uses of Providence in Public Theology," in *The Providence of God: Deus Habet Consilium*, ed. Murphy and Ziegler (London, T&T Clark, 2009), 308.

> worldly order; rather, on this account, their proper obligation is to keep abreast of the present *ruling* of the God who is ever free according to his good purposes "to will a world in which human efforts alter human social orders."[28]

This theological strategy admirably attempts to free Christian political judgment from complicity in uncritically maintaining the present order of things in order to mobilize the doctrine of providence as a resource for political resistance and change.

While there is much to recommend this critique and reconstruction of the relationship between the doctrine of providence and political judgment, it does not offer a satisfactory explanation of providence's problematic conceptual role in justifying African slavery. While defenders of slavery certainly invoked ideas of providential order to justify slavery and discourage slaves from seeking freedom, it is equally true that "a critical politics of social and political change" inspired by the doctrine of providence was precisely what many Christians understood themselves to be about in their "human efforts" to "alter human social orders" by creating, maintain, and expanding a new global economy based upon human slavery.[29]

William Henry Holcombe's pamphlet *The Alternative*, published in 1860, provides a perfect example of the theological interpretation of slavery that envisioned it

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[28] Ibid., 308. The quotation is from Kathryn Tanner, *The Politics of God: Christian Theologies and Social Justice* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1992), 101. Emphasis in original.

[29] For example, the slave trader John Saffin, who engaged in one of the earliest debates about slavery in North America with Judge Samuel Sewall of Massachusetts, asserted in *A Brief, Candid Answer to a Late Printed Sheet, Entitled,* The Selling of Joseph, "God hath set different Orders and Degrees of Men in the World, both in Church and Common weal. Now if [Sewall's] Position of parity should be true, it would then follow that the ordinary Course of Divine Providence of God in the World should be wrong, and unjust." For Saffin's full letter see Mason I. Lowance, Jr. (ed.), *A House Divided: The Antebellum Slavery Debates in America, 1776-1865* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 14. Similarly, though with a sharper ethical prescription, the English Puritan theologian Richard Baxter instructed slaves to "reverence that providence of God which calleth you to a servant's life, and murmur not at your labor, or your low condition; but know your mercies, and be thankful for them" (David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966), 204).

in relationship to the transformative and dynamic movement of God's providence in the world. Holcombe was the son of Virginia slave owners who emancipated their slaves and moved him to Indiana when he was still young. However, his parents' emancipatory actions did not shape Holcombe's mature views on the topic of slavery and, after becoming a doctor and gaining national repute for his cholera treatments, he moved south to Mississippi in 1852 and took up the pro-slavery cause with a vengeance.[30]

In *The Alternative*, Holcombe conceives of the relationship between divine providence and the institution of slavery not in terms of the static preservation of a divinely established order, but in terms of the mission of white Christian humanity to respond to the *dynamic* and *active* movement of God in the world:

> The South is now fully convinced of the benefits and blessings it is conferring upon the Negro race. It is beginning to catch a glimpse of the true nature and extent of its mission in relation to this vast and growing institution. The government of the South is to protect it; the Church of the South is to Christianize it; the people of the South are to love it, and improve it and perfect it. God has lightened our task and secured its extension by making our interests happily coincide with our duty. We anticipate no terminus to the institution of slavery. It is the means whereby the white man is to subdue the tropics all around the globe. … African slavery is no retrograde movement, no discord in the harmony of nature, no violation of elemental justice, no infraction of immutable laws, human or divine—but *an integral link in the grand progressive evolution of human society as an indissoluble whole*.[31]

Surprisingly, Holcombe's understanding of the relationship between divine providence and human political judgment on display in *The Alternative* matches quite closely the

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[30] David Brion Davis, *Antebellum American Culture: An Interpretive Anthology* (Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath and Co., 1979), 463.

[31] William Henry Holcombe, "The Alternative," in *Antebellum American Culture*, ed. Davis (Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath and Co., 1979), 465-66. Emphasis added. Holcombe was not alone in holding this view. As David Brion Davis argues throughout *Slavery and Human Progress* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), despite the eventual consolidation of discourses of progress by the antislavery movement, progressive visions can be found at the heart of movements of imperial expansion and mass enslavement throughout history.

supposedly radical view that humanity's "proper obligation" in relationship to divine providence "is to keep abreast of the present *ruling* of the God who is ever free according to his good purposes 'to will a world in which human efforts alter human social orders.'"[32] Ironically, the theological remedy for one of the archetypal distortions of Christian political judgment in relationship to divine providence is here a part of the problem. The politics of slavocracy in the United States could, in fact, quite comfortably take the form of a critical politics of social change—this was not the problem. The problem was that they were a critical politics of social change produced from inside the logics of whiteness.

1.1.3.2 Providence and Eschatology: Divinizing Human Political Activity

If one of the paradigmatic distortions of Christian political judgment in relationship to divine providence leads to the uncritical preservation of the created order, then the second classical source of warped political judgment exercised in relationship to divine providence lies at the other end of the doctrinal spectrum in eschatology. This second perennial misinterpretation of the political ramifications of the doctrine of providence hampers faithful political judgment by too closely aligning human political activity with the unfolding of the messianic age.

From this second problematic perspective, faith in providence enables Christians to decipher the manifestations of God's salvific action in history in particular people, movements, or events, in such a way that political history merges with salvation history as human political projects are caught up in the divine work of redeeming the cosmos.

[32] Ziegler, "The Uses of Providence," 308.

This misuse of the doctrine of providence dramatically and inappropriately raises the expectations associated with human political endeavors, inviting triumphalism and extremism.

From Eusebius of Caesarea in the fourth century to the work of the theological representatives of the *Deutsche Christen* in the twentieth, examples of this problematic collapsing of the doctrine of providence into eschatology abound in the history of Christian theology.[33] In response to this error, contemporary political theologians, often taking their cues from the writings of St. Augustine, have formulated alternative constructions of the relationship between providence and eschatology in order to encourage a more modest use of Christian political judgment. Rather than folding providence into eschatology, these theologians insist on the distance between the two:

> Christian faith acknowledges in God's providence the preservation and preparation of the wide periphery of political life through what might be styled *non-eschatological activity*, that is divine activity which preserves but does not itself save, which prepares but does not consummate the divine purposes for creaturely life. To this there corresponds a disposition towards political life whose expectations and endeavors are similarly subeschatological. … What befits human endeavor in the field of divine providence is pursuit of modicums of peace and justice such as can be humanly achieved—not less, but not more.[34]

When confronted by historical examples of Christians whose understanding of providence too quickly licensed their belief in the special divine authorization of a

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[33] Indeed, it was not a coincidence that the theologian Erik Peterson wrote his famous essay "Monotheism as a Political Problem" from Germany in 1935. In the essay, Peterson deploys Augustine's understanding of the relationship and distance between providence and eschatology to criticize Eusebius's interpretation of the Christianization of the Roman Empire under Constantine as the dawning of the messianic age and therefore also to call into question the same theological operations as they were being used in his time to conceptualize the relationship between Christianity and National Socialism. See Erik Peterson, "Monotheism as a Political Problem," in *Theological Tractates*, ed. Michael J. Hollerich (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 68-105.

[34] Ziegler, "The Uses of Providence," 320. Emphasis in original.

political movement or leader, one quickly appreciates the benefits of this formulation of the doctrine of providence for Christian political judgment. It even seems possible that this understanding of the political ramifications of divine providence might address the distortions of Christian political judgment which rendered theologically intelligible the mass murder, enslavement, and suffering of non-European humanity in modernity. However, a closer examination of the theological debates about slavery in the United States in the 1850s suggests that a theological solution to this problem will not be this easily found. Disturbingly, those voicing the position closest to this modest conception of the political ramifications of the doctrine of providence in these debates were the defenders of slavery.

In *Providence and the Invention of the United States, 1607-1876*, Nicholas Guyatt offers an extensive and careful analysis of the various ways in which Christians in the United States construed the doctrine of providence and its relationship to national politics. While Guyatt insightfully explores the complexity and malleability of the doctrine of providence in a variety of episodes in the history of the United States, his exposition of the theological debates of the 1840s and 1850s about the meaning and place of slavery in relationship to divine providence are particularly relevant to the present discussion. Guyatt argues that while there were Christians who steadfastly warned against the nationalism and imperialism that results from divinizing human political agendas through joining them to an interpretation of God's providential action in history, they were the defenders of slavery.

As the debates about slavery rose to a fever pitch in the years prior to the Civil War, the defenders of slavery increasingly embraced a moderate realism in regards to the doctrine of providence, while simultaneously accusing Northern abolitionists of messianic triumphalism in aligning emancipation with the redemptive movement of God in the world. A particularly clear example of the thinking that increasingly came to dominate the pro-slavery position on providence comes from the writings of Benjamin Palmer, who became a champion of Southern secessionism after preaching a famous sermon on this topic.[35] Palmer's deepest engagement with the relationship of the doctrine of providence to human slavery appeared in his *Vindication of Secession* published in 1861 in which he fiercely criticized the pro-slavery, but anti-secession position of the Presbyterian minister Robert J. Breckinridge—whose belief in a providential destiny for the United States prevented him from endorsing an action that could lead to its dissolution. Guyatt's discussion of Palmer's *Vindication* is worth quoting at length:

> Palmer angrily set about Breckinridge's arguments in his *Vindication*, beginning with the suggestion that the South had declared a mission to take slavery anywhere beyond its current boundaries. … At the core of his attack was a deep skepticism about what had animated Breckinridge in the first place: a mission for the United States that was so enormous and important that it would consign questions like slavery to a secondary place in political and religious debate. This line of thinking reminded Palmer of the fate of the Roman Empire, and Breckinridge himself was 'to all intents an imperialist.' This led Palmer to the unlikely conclusion that, 'had there not been an African on this continent,' the North and the South would have been forced to diverge because they had radically different views of the workings and scale of God's plan for America. The North's providential presumptuousness led the United States towards empire, whereas the South had the good sense to abandon the national vessel before it was dashed on the rocks of imperial decline. Southerners rejected the fantasy of an aggrandized America with global pretensions and would 'put out the long-boat,

[35] Nicholas Guyatt, *Providence and the Invention of the United States, 1607-1876* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 249-250.

> and separate in time to save and perpetuate those republican principles which are dear to our hearts.'[36]

In the *Vindication*, Palmer plays the part of Augustine to the United States' Roman Empire, vociferously criticizing those who would take up the role of a latter-day Eusebius and lend the progressivism of Northern visions of emancipation divine sanction. Drunk on eschatological messianism, Northerners had forsaken the pursuit of "modicums of peace and justice" for the prospect of a progressive reforging of an entire world order in an attempt to inaugurate their interpretation of the eschatological destiny of the human race in the present through their own efforts. While this does not invalidate the important Augustinian insights about the relationship between providence and eschatology in matters of human political action, Palmer's adoption of a very similar theological perspective on providence in the defense of the institution of slavery demonstrates that the distortion of Christian political judgment exercised in light of divine providence could prove remarkably resistant to—and even able to coopt—what today is popularly considered to be an important theological corrective *for* distorted political judgment.

This analysis suggests that the wound identified in the present chapter cannot be resolved by turning to two of the most prominent remedies that the Christian tradition has articulated for treating problematic doctrines of providence. The theological problem is not that the doctrine of providence was conceived so as to foreclose on the possibility of a critical politics of social change, but that the critical politics of social change to which interpretations of providence gave birth were calibrated around a vision of white

[36] Ibid., 251-52.

Christian humanity that led to radical misrecognition and abuse of creation and fellow creatures. Likewise, the theological problem is not that the doctrine of providence was too closely aligned with eschatology and gave birth to a triumphalist, messianic politics, but that even calls for a modest providentialism that did not invest penultimate human political life with sacral authority or significance could be deployed in the service of unthinkable violence against fellow creatures. Instead, the theological problem is that European Christian peoples have located themselves at the center of the doctrine of providence, and fused their reading of God's active rule in history to their own exercise of active rule in history. Like a planet altering the trajectory of a passing meteor, the placement of white Christian humanity at the center of the doctrine of providence has exerted a gravitational pull on Christian political judgment, warping its trajectory as it draws it into its orbit. The challenge facing the present study is to properly diagnose the nature of the distorting influence that whiteness has exerted upon Christian attempts to discern the work of providence in history and to offer a constructive alternative that might resist such distortion.

1.2 A Practical Providence: Doctrine, Ethics, and Politics

Having identified the wound to which Christian theological reflection on divine providence must respond, I now turn to outlining a framework and method within which such a response can be made. I begin by arguing that theologies of providence must be articulated in light of the doctrine's necessary connection to the tasks of practical discernment and judgment of God's activity in history. Providence, I contend, ought to be understood not only as an abstract *doctrine*—a configuration of ideas to which human

beings offer intellectual assent—but as a practical *hermeneutic*: a lens through which human beings interpret the world in relationship to God.

1.2.1 Providence and Ethics: Discernment, Judgment, and Action

Anyone who spends enough time in the world of American Christianity will eventually come to be familiar with a much beloved sermon illustration about a man who drowned in a flood. As the story goes, a terrible storm swept through the man's town and caused a massive flood. As the floodwaters rose, rescuers made a series of efforts to evacuate this man from his home—first offering him a spot in the last car to leave town, then sending a boat to him, and finally lowering a basket from a helicopter. Yet each time, the man refused to be rescued, repeating his belief that, if he was truly in danger, God would save him. Not surprisingly, the man drowned soon thereafter. Upon reaching heaven, the man—perhaps letting his understandable consternation at his own demise get the better of him—challenged God to give an account of God's failure to deliver him from the floodwaters. Slightly taken aback, God responded that God had made a number of attempts to save the man—sending him a car, a boat, and even a helicopter!

While this apocryphal tale is usually invoked as a tired illustration of the different ways God acts in history, it actually contains a suggestive lesson about the important connection between providence and ethics. In the story, the man had to reason about what God was doing in the flood and come to practical judgments about the correct course of *action* to be taken in response: whether or not to get in the car, the boat, and the helicopter. The story thus offers a surprisingly astute picture of the practical nature of the doctrine of providence. To say that providence is a *practical* doctrine is to say more than

that its subject matter is connected to concrete historical events in the lives of those who reflect upon it. Providence is a *practical* doctrine in the sense that Aristotle uses the term in relationship to *phronēsis* or *practical* reason: reflection upon it does not simply issue in a theoretical conclusion, but in action.[37] In other words, Christian thought about providence, in addition to attempting to accurately formulate "assertions of truth, '*x* is the case,'" must also wrestle with questions about coming to accurate "assertions of right, '*y* should be done.'"[38] Furthermore, as Oliver O'Donovan suggests, when that which should be done has ramifications for whether one lives well or not, *practical* thought is simultaneously *ethical* thought.[39] Therefore, to say that providence is a practical doctrine more often than not also means that it raises questions of ethics—not simply about action, but about *right* action.

All of this is a perhaps overly complex way of naming the fact that theological reflection on providence ought in some way to reflect the fact that for most human beings the doctrine of divine providence does not primarily appear as a theoretical proposition to affirm or deny, but as a practical question that confronts them as they walk down the street or read the newspaper. By far, the large majority of the theological work done on the doctrine of providence takes place around kitchen tables and bedsides, on front

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[37] For Aristotle's discussion of the link between practical reason and action, see his *Nichomachean Ethics*, trans. Irwin (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1999), VI.5.3. He suggests that well-functioning practical rationality grows out of the virtue of *phronēsis*, which "is a state grasping the truth, involving reason, *concerned with action* about things that are good or bad for a human being" (emphasis added). See also Alasdair MacIntyre's discussion of Aristotle's practical syllogism, the proper conclusion of which ought to be the immediate performance of an action as opposed to a theoretical postulate requiring application in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 135-140.

[38] O'Donovan, *Self, World, and Time*, 22.

[39] Ibid., 33. While the term "practical" denotes a consideration of "the world of reality" and "the moment of possibility," the term "ethical" adds an additional component to consider: "the acting self."

porches and street curbs, and in grocery stores, doctor's offices, funeral homes, and sanctuaries—as people try to discern what God is doing in their histories and the histories of their communities. But furthermore, this work of discernment necessarily issues in acts of judgment, as those who attempt to discern what God is doing in their histories and the histories of their communities must then respond to and live in light of that which they discern.

The doctrine of providence therefore confronts human beings with questions of *location* and *agency*: How am I to locate myself within God's providential activity? And how should I understand the correspondence (or lack thereof) between my own actions and that activity? Or, more simply put: What is going on? And what ought to be done? Though he does not make the link to the doctrine of providence explicit, this same connection provides the basis for H. Richard Niebuhr's account of the moral life in *The Responsible Self*.[40] Though Niebuhr approaches the relationship between providence and ethics in the opposite order by beginning with an analysis of human moral agency, his whole account points towards the doctrine of providence as the necessary frame for human moral action. Expanding upon his assertion in *The Responsible Self* that the ethical question "What shall I do?" can only be answered by raising the more fundamental question "What is going on?,"[41] Niebuhr suggests that human moral agents most appropriately answer this second question in light of the theological maxim that

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[40] H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self: An Essay in Christian Moral Philosophy* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1963), 45. Why Niebuhr never mentions providence in *The Responsible Self* remains a mystery—perhaps it is because he felt that it would lend too much "theological" specificity to a work intentionally labeled "Christian moral philosophy" and dedicated to exploring "the human moral life in general" and not "simply the Christian life."
[41] Ibid., 63.

"God is acting in all actions upon you."[42] In Christian theological terms, this means that the doctrine of providence—which provides the means for theologically discerning "what is going on"—functions as the ground of Christian moral agency.[43]

When viewed from this perspective, the doctrine of providence becomes one of the key points at which doctrine and ethics converge. To think theologically about providence—God's relationship to the history of creation—is already to find oneself ethically implicated as a particular creature within that history to which God relates. When it comes to the doctrine of providence, questions of doctrine *are* questions about ethics—the two must be taken together. Applying Stanley Hauerwas' account of the relationship between doctrine and ethics to this particular issue, one could say that the content of the doctrine of providence is not a "'metaphysics' which one might get straight before one can turn to questions of ethics." Instead, the coherence of theological discourse on providence rests upon "the indissociable unity of the theological and ethical aspects" of the doctrine.[44] Given this understanding of the doctrine, a complete account of the providence will not only include a description of the theoretical structure of God's relationship to history, but must also attend to questions of human judgment and action *in relationship to* divine providence.

While providence raises issues of practical import requiring discernment, judgment, and responsive action in a number of different areas of human life, there are at

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[42] Ibid., 126.
[43] Charles Wood makes this argument in *The Question of Providence*, 12: "The question of the doctrine of providence might be formulated in this way: *How are we to understand theologically what goes on?*" Emphasis in original.
[44] Stanley Hauerwas, "On Doctrine and Ethics," in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine*, ed. Gunton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 32, 36.

least two particular cases that seem especially relevant. The first case is that of suffering and illness. When the harsh realities of tragedy or illness impose their disorienting presence on human lives, they confront human beings with hard questions about providence ("Where is God in this?") that necessitate judgment and action ("What ought to be done?"). With the surprise diagnosis of cancer comes the immediate necessity of making decisions about the course of treatment to be undertaken. The same holds true for end of life care. The deep questions presented by the slow death of a loved one do not hang in the air as matters for personal reflection, but run head long into the need for decisions about how long to prolong that loved one's life through medical technology.

In these cases, "What is God doing in this illness?" is not only a question about how to conceive of a loving God's relationship to suffering and evil—though it is that as well—but a practical question that must be answered in order to be able to make decisions about whether or not to engage in a severe regime of chemotherapy or to remove a loved one from life support systems. In relationship to suffering or illness, providence operates more often than not as a *practical* doctrine—but not simply in the sense of being concerned with "real world" events. Rather providence is practical in the sense of being intimately connected to judgment and action—and thus ethics.[45] This

[45] For related treatments of providence in relationship to suffering, illness, and disability that also emphasize the practical dimensions of the doctrine, see John Swinton, "Patience and Lament: Living Faithfully in the Presence of Suffering," in *The Providence of God:* Deus Habet Consilium, ed. Murphy and Zeigler (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 275-289; Reinders, *Disability, Providence, and Ethics*, 4, 17-21; and Hans Reinders, "Why This? Why Me? A Theological Reflection on Ethics and Providence," in *The Providence of God:* Deus Habet Consilium, ed. Murphy and Zeigler (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 290-306. Swinton and Reinders both offer compelling cases that the Christian doctrine of providence does not provide theoretical answers for why evil or suffering exists, but rather shapes how Christians practically respond to what happens in their lives. They conceive of these responses primarily in terms of coming to grips with the phenomena of suffering and illness, but it seems that their insight would also apply to other types of responses, such as making decisions about treatment.

practical dimension of the doctrine of providence does not only demonstrate itself in the experience of individuals, but also manifests itself paradigmatically in the lives of political communities.

1.2.2 Providence and Politics

While the doctrine of providence certainly shapes the way that individuals interpret and respond to events in their personal lives like illness or tragedy, the most explicit and visible applications of providence to questions of judgment and action have historically occurred within the realm of politics. Indeed one contemporary author goes so far as to suggest that, "The doctrine of providence carries little serious intellectual weight apart from the work it does in interpreting political events."[46] While one need not accept this rather extravagantly hyperbolic assertion, the existence of a deep and variegated set of connections between providence and politics is undeniable.

As a lens through which to read political history, providence has been invoked with both the utmost sincerity and cold, manipulative cynicism. It has all too often generated diametrically opposed interpretations of God's relationship to the same event. Nevertheless, despite the diversity in the form and content of providence's many manifestations, it remains true that over and over again, from ancient times to the present, human communities have insisted on coordinating their political judgments about what ought to be done with their interpretations of some version of the doctrine. As Charles Mathewes suggests, "Everyone who thinks about life in time—that is, everyone—has some functional equivalent to the doctrine of providence—some way of giving the shape

[46] Stephen H. Webb, "From Prudentius to President Bush: Providence, Empire, and Paranoia," in *The Providence of God:* Deus Habet Consilium, ed. Murphy and Ziegler (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 233.

of history or time meaning and purpose. And anyone who thinks about time and history, in our world, thinks about politics."[47] Mathewes is of course aware that modern history is replete with figures who have asserted exactly the opposite of this claim, suggesting that the entire enterprise of linking the work of politics to a wider reading of history ought to be scrapped—that humanity ought to throw off the shackles of superstition and learn to make its way in the world without the crutch of theological or philosophical myths about the fundamental shape and direction of history. Ironically, of course, these progressive visions for the development of a purely immanent, rational, or secular politics constructed without the aid of a providential reading of history are themselves often deeply reliant upon some alternative myth about the direction of history—many of which may even be direct secular descendants of the doctrine of providence itself.[48] Whether or not Mathewes is right that *everyone* has some functional equivalent to the doctrine of providence, at the very least it seems clear that to do without one is significantly more difficult than most of the people who have claimed to do so have realized.

The exercise of political discernment and judgment in relationship to providence is notable not only for its ubiquity, but also for its publicity. Because debate and deliberation about the political ramifications of the doctrine of providence take place quite literally in public and concern the actions and interactions of large groups of people,

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[47] Charles Mathewes, "Providence and Political Discernment," in *The Providence of God:* Deus Habet Consilium, ed. Murphy and Ziegler (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 257.

[48] For a good summary of the debate about the secularization of the doctrine of providence in modernity, which interestingly denies the secularization thesis, see Christopher Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven: Progress and Its Critics* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1991), Perhaps the most extensive discussion of the modern secularization of the doctrine of providence can be found in Amos Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination: From the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 202-289.

the failures and abuses of this particular class of judgments about providence have taken place on a large scale and been especially well documented. So much injustice has been perpetrated and so much blood has been shed by those claiming to be agents of divine providence, that the political abuse of the doctrine of providence has come to be seen as posing questions not just about the proper application of the doctrine to the political realm, but about the legitimacy of the doctrine as a whole.[49]

As Karl Barth wrote, that the word providence could "become a favorite one on the lips of Adolf Hitler" certainly raises serious questions about the doctrine's future prospects in Christian theology.[50] These questions become even graver when one adds the voices of Robespierre, Napoleon, European colonialists, and defenders of slavery in the southern United States—all of whom explicitly invoked the doctrine of providence as a way to locate their political causes within the movement of God in history.[51] It is

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[49] For example, Reinhold Bernhardt suggests that the doctrine's track record of complicity in the divinization of nationalist ideologies—embodied paradigmatically in Hitler's invocation of the doctrine as a trope for Germany's divine election and mission—raises the question as to whether a rehabilitation of the doctrine would be desirable even if it was possible. See Bernhardt, *Was heißt "Handeln Gottes"?*, 20-21.
[50] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. and trans. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, 14 vols. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956–75), III/3, 33. Subsequently, *Church Dogmatics* will be cited as *CD* volume/part, page.
[51] David Nicholls offers an excellent analysis of the linkage between Robespierre's radical political agenda and his faith in the special providence of God in *God and Government in an 'Age of Reason'* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 76-89. Nicholls cites a remark of Robespierre, delivered during a debate at the Jacobins in March of 1792, that captures his position particularly clearly: "To invoke the name of Providence and to express an idea of the eternal being who intimately affects the destiny of nations, who seems to me personally to watch over in a very special way the French revolution, is not an idea too outrageous, but a heartfelt belief indispensable to me" (80). Napoleon promoted the notion of a providential blessing that enabled his rise and now preserved his regime. As Joseph de Maistre wrote, "Bonaparte puts it out that he is the envoy of God. Nothing is truer. He comes directly from heaven, like a thunderbolt. … He is a great and terrible instrument in the hands of providence" (cited in Steven Englund, *Napoleon: A Political Life* (New York: Scribner, 2004), 364). For representative examples of the place of the doctrine of providence in the way European figures conceptualized their colonial activities, see Willie Jennings's discussion of Gomes Eanes de Azurara and José de Acosta Porres in *The Christian Imagination*, 17-18, 90-100. The remarks of James Henry Hammond before the United States House of Representatives on February 1, 1836 provide a particularly chilling example of an appeal to providence made in defense of slavery in the United States: "The camel loves the desert; the reindeer seeks the everlasting snows; the wild fowl gather to the waters; and the eagle wings his flight above the mountains. It is equally the order of Providence that slavery

therefore perfectly understandable why some might conclude that, at least as far as its connection to political discernment and judgment goes, the doctrine is more trouble than it is worth. At the very least, the burden of proof must lie with those who wish to continue to utilize the doctrine of providence as a resource for political judgment.

In taking up this challenge, theologians must resist the temptation to address providence's ugly political history by rushing to prematurely absolve the Christian doctrine of providence by shifting the blame. This temptation manifests in explanations that root the problem in "bad faith," suggesting that political leaders like Hitler cynically invoked providence as a religious ideology to strengthen the appeal of their movement, but lacked genuine Christian conviction. These overly tidy conclusions suggest that the real culprit is not the doctrine of providence itself, but rather the evil human being who distorts the doctrine for his or her own ends.

There are at least three problems with this strategy for vindicating providence. First, it relies on the speculative reconstruction of malevolent and dishonest inner motives which are in open conflict with the explicitly affirmed beliefs of these figures. Second, even if one could prove that a number of the more notorious political invocations of the doctrine of providence issued from this kind of bad faith, for every example of insincere

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should exist among a planting people beneath a southern sun. There the laborer must become a fixture of the soil. His task is not from day to day, nor from month to month, but from season to season, and from year to year. He must be there to clear, to break, to plant, to till, to gather, to fallow, and to clear again; and he must be kept there by a never ceasing, unavoidable, and irresistible force. … Slavery is said to be an evil; that it improvishes the people, and destroys their morals. If it be an evil, it is one to us alone, and we are contented with it—why should others interfere? But it is no evil. On the contrary, I believe it to be the greatest of all the great blessings which a kind Providence has bestowed upon our glorious region. For without it, our fertile soil and our fructifying climate would have been given to us in vain. As it is, the history of the short period during which we have enjoyed it has rendered our Southern country proverbial for its wealth, its genius, its manners" (Hammond, *Remarks of Mr. Hammond*, 11.).

motives, one can point to examples of deeply devoted, theologically trained Christian figures who put the doctrine to use in the service of horrific colonial and imperial agendas. One thinks of figures like José Acosta who—as Willie Jennings has convincingly demonstrated—produced a providential interpretation of Spanish colonialism that grew out of ardent faith and rigorous theological education.[52] Third, even those appeals to providence that issued from bad faith were embraced by masses of devoted Christians as compatible with Christian belief and practice.[53]

Eschewing these easy escape routes, the present study attempts to engage seriously with the theological operations which enable providence to function as an interpretive framework that renders intelligible the suffering of non-European peoples at the hands of white, Christian peoples. To do so, it will engage divine providence as a *practical* doctrine, functioning as a hermeneutical lens to guides human discernment, judgment, and action.

1.3 Providence, History, and Theological Method

In this study, I propose to address the constructive theological and ethical questions outlined above by investigating three historical episodes in which Christian thinkers engaged in theological reflection on the doctrine of providence in order to make sense of the racial politics of their contemporary worlds. The three central chapters of the study will each explicate a *hermeneutic of providence*—a doctrinal exposition of the nature and shape of divine providence articulated as an interpretive lens to guide

[52] Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 65-118.
[53] For a similar call to take invocations of providence in political discourse seriously, see Guyatt, *Providence and the Invention of the United States*, 8.

Christian discernment of the activity of God in the world. Each of these hermeneutics of providence relate their analysis of divine action in the world specifically to the activities of modern, racialized humanity. First, G.W.F. Hegel queries the relationship of divine Spirit to European humanity's rapid consolidation of global domination in the first half of the nineteenth century. Second, Karl Barth composes his doctrine of providence in *Church Dogmatics* III/3 in response to the emerging new world order of Western capitalism following the Second World War. Finally, James Cone develops a theological account of divine action to argue that Jesus Christ is at work in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s through the rise of Black Power and urban rebellions in Newark, Detroit, and beyond.

As previously stated, therefore, this study takes inspiration from H. Richard Niebuhr's description of historical-theological inquiry as a "pilgrim's venture": an attempt at historical inquiry made by one who is "interested more in prospect than in retrospect but who, seeing the continuity of present with past, know[s] that without retrospect no real prospect is possible."[54] By engaging in three such historical explorations, I will generate a set of theological perspectives on the relationship between providence, politics, and race, the analysis of which will provide the impetus for the constructive theological conclusions that will be developed in the final chapter of the study. In what follows I will first seek to further substantiate why this methodological

[54] Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America*, 1. The turn to history has more recently been championed by Smith in *The New Measures*, 10: "If the Christian life means responding in fitting ways to God's action upon us … then the primary question of Christian moral philosophy is 'What is happening?' Theological history begins with that question, and with the conviction that we cannot understand what is happening unless we understand the history of how it came to happen."

turn to history is appropriate and advantageous for the theological analysis of providence, before arguing that the doctrine of providence itself plays an important role in shaping the type of historical inquiry appropriate for this investigation.

1.3.1 *Why* history?

My approach to the present task is not unlike that of a builder who, when hired to construct a house on land that has proven perennially inhospitable to such building projects, investigates the history of attempts to build similar types of houses on similar types of land. If done well, such an investigation will turn up a number of different strategies, tools, approaches, and models derived from a diverse group of builders and architects from different historical and geographical locations. The builder can then look for patterns that emerge across diverse times and spaces, learn from the unique aspects of each case study, and selectively retrieve the best insights gained from these past efforts. She will survey the history of good, bad, and mixed results in order to shape her approach to the build. She will learn of techniques and tools of which she may have been previously unaware, but which will prove critically important for the successful completion of her task. In sum, her study of relevant past building projects will generate the conceptual and technical insights that will enable her to successfully carry out her constructive work.

In a similar way, this study will place historical inquiry in the service of its constructive theological agenda. By investigating and reflecting upon the history of diverse attempts to engage the doctrine of providence in the context of racialized modernity, I hope to discover the tools, concepts, and insights that will make possible my

own constructive analysis of the doctrine. Thus, historical inquiry serves as an important resource for constructive theological reflection because it provides a repository of suggestive examples, potential models, and otherwise forgotten possibilities—all of which can contribute to the imaginative formulation of a contemporary treatment of the topic.[55]

In addition to the role that history plays in uncovering resources for contemporary theological reflection, there are two other reasons why a turn to history is particularly appropriate for a study on the doctrine of providence. First, the basic subject matter of the doctrine of providence naturally suggests the necessity of some attention to the category of history and the importance of connecting reflection on providence to the people, places, and things which shaped that reflection in the first place. The doctrine of providence is concerned with what happens to creation and creatures *in time*. From the start, the doctrine of providence contains an innate connection to history.

At their best, Christian theologies of providence have recognized this fact. Augustine's reflections on providence in *The City of God* emerged as a response to the sack of Rome by Alaric the Visigoth in 410.[56] Dante analyzed divine providence in *De*

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[55] As Ted Smith and David Daniels suggest, turning to history enables the work of "unforgetting" otherwise suppressed alternatives in order to think critically and constructively about the present. The retrieval of historical resources fuels the task of contemporary revision and reconstruction. See David D. Daniels III and Ted A. Smith, "History, Practice, and Theological Education," in *For Life Abundant: Practical Theology, Theological Education, and Christian Ministry*, ed. Dorothy C. Bass and Craig Dykstra (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008), 236. Deploying historical exploration in this way is particularly appropriate for reflection on the doctrine of providence. Given the well-documented scarcity of reflection on providence in contemporary theology, the past contains better resources and conversation partners for thinking and talking about the doctrine of providence than the present. Historical study allows theological analysis to tap into a readily available source of raw theological data. For a doctrine like providence that has recently fallen upon such hard times, this makes the turn to history quite simply a necessity.

[56] Augustine, *The Retractions*, trans. Sister M. Inez Bogan (Baltimore, MD: The Catholic University of America Press, 1968), 209: "Meanwhile, Rome was destroyed as a result of an invasion of the Goths under

Monarchia in light of the advent of Henry VII's armies to Italy in 1312.[57] Calvin's doctrine of providence attempted to make sense of sixteenth century historical existence: natural disasters, varying yields from agricultural production, and material poverty in Geneva all lie just beneath the surface of his doctrine in *The Institutes* I.16.[58] Nor has this simply been a pre-modern phenomenon. One need look no further than the seismic unsettling of the doctrine of providence that followed from the Lisbon earthquake of 1755, the intellectual aftershocks of which—most famously visible in Voltaire's critique of the doctrine in *Candide*—have reverberated through more than two centuries of European thought.[59] As these examples demonstrate, history provides an anchor that ties individual instances of theological reflection on the doctrine of providence to the particular people, places, and things that shaped them and made them intelligible in the first place.

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the leadership of King Alaric, and of the violence of this great disaster. The worshipers of many false gods, whom we call by the customary name pagans, attempting to attribute its destruction to the Christian religion, began to blaspheme the true God more sharply and bitterly than usual. And so, 'burning with zeal for the house of God,' I decided to write the books, *On the City of God*, in opposition to their blasphemies and errors. This work kept me busy for some years because many other things, which should not be deferred, interfered and their solution had first claim on me. But finally, this extensive work, *On the City of God*, was completed in twenty-two books."

[57] See Shaw's discussion in the introduction to Dante, *Monarchy*, ed. Prue Shaw (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), x, xxiv, xxxiii.

[58] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 197-210. During his explication of the doctrine of providence, Calvin addresses the relationship between God's providence and the varying amounts of breast milk produced by nursing mothers (200), individuals killed by shipwreck and falling trees (199), crops destroyed by drought and hail (203), and the existence of economic disparity in human societies (205). On this last issue, Calvin suggests that, "Even though the rich are mingled with the poor in the world," the condition of each is "divinely assigned." Therefore he instructs the poor to be "content with their own lot" and not attempt to "shake off the burden laid upon them by God."

[59] For extensive expositions of the significance of the Lisbon earthquake for modern European thought and culture, see Susan Neiman, *Evil in Modern Thought: An Alternative History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002) and the essays compiled in Theodore E. D. Braun and John B Radner (ed.'s), *The Lisbon Earthquake of 1755: Representations and Reactions*, volume 2005:02 of *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2005).

Without this historical anchoring, it can seem like the doctrine of providence is most fundamentally a collection of timeless theological ideals which different theologians have variously assembled and configured. Yet the difference between Augustine, Calvin, and Barth's accounts of the doctrine of providence cannot simply be reduced to differing configurations of eternally unchanging truths. The most obvious difference—and one that ought to matter for theological reflection—is that Barth wrote his doctrine of providence in the late 1940s in Germany, while Augustine wrote *The City of God* in North Africa at the beginning of the fifth century and Calvin wrote Book 16 and 17 of *The Institutes* in Geneva in the sixteenth century. By paying attention to this, one can put one's doctrines on the ground, reading them against the background of particular historical persons, places, and things and locating them in the midst of the messy machinations of real human lives. As Langdon Gilkey says, "It cannot be questioned that as an authentic human is *historical*, deeply related intentionally and unintentionally to social changes in which he or she is immersed, so an authentic religion and a valid theology must be historical."[60] As a doctrine addressing the history of creation, providence provides the site at which theological reflection ought to most obviously connect to the actual lived histories of the human beings who do the reflecting.

1.3.2 *Which* history?

In recent times, when theologians have turned to history as a resource for theological thinking, they have more often than not turned to a particular mode of historical investigation. The type of historical work has largely taken the form of

[60] Gilkey, *Reaping the Whirlwind*, 34. Emphasis in original.

historical meta-narratives and have come to be associated with names like Alasdair MacIntyre, Charles Taylor, John Milbank, and Brad Gregory.[61] The canonical works of this genre of historical inquiry roughly share a certain profile. First, they cover massive historical periods and geographical areas, stitching them together into linear accounts of historical development. Second, they seek to discover causal explanations of how contemporary human life and thought came to be the way it is today as a result of past developments. Furthermore, while not locating this historical causality solely within the history of ideas, they tend to subordinate social or cultural developments to intellectual ones in their descriptions of these causal relationships.[62] The present study deploys a very different mode of historical investigation than the one embodied in the meta-narrative genre.

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[61] See MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*; Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989); Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); John Milbank *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1990); Brad Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 2012).

[62] The causal priority given to ideas is perhaps most visible in MacIntyre's *Whose Justice, Which Rationality?*, which traces the development of conceptions of justice and practical rationality through a series of talking heads (Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas, Hutcheson, and Hume) in order to offer an explanation of and solution to what he sees as the crisis of liberal individualism. Charles Taylor's work offers a far more complex example. In *Sources of the Self*, he strongly asserts that a full historical explanation of any concrete development in history must attend to both ideas and practices as driving forces of historical development: "Change can come about in both directions, as it were: through mutations and developments in ideas … and also through drift, change, constrictions, or flourishings of practices, bringing about the alteration, flourishing, or decline of ideas" (205). Taylor justifies his preoccupation with the development of ideas with the clarification that he does not take his work to be offering historical explanations at all. Rather he sees himself as attempting to answer an interpretive question about the power and attraction of certain ideas regardless of how they came to be. However, he admits that he is walking a fine line: "This discussion … has to serve as a warning to me not to lose from sight the context of practices in which this identity developed, and the powerful forces shaping them. Pressures so massive on the history of civilization as those I have been describing have to be kept in mind even when they are not—rightly not—the focus of attention" (207). The fact that Taylor has produced such a massive output of work dedicated to understanding modern identity without any substantial reflection about the importance of colonial and imperial practices for the creation of that identity suggests that perhaps he has not taken his own warning seriously enough.

First, where meta-narratives attempt to integrate diverse geographical locations and expansive historical periods into a single historical plot line, the present study attempts to judiciously paint three distinct historical portraits. Second, where meta-narratives seek causal historical explanations in which a straight line can be drawn from the past to the present, the present study contents itself with outlining a series of historical possibilities, which do not necessarily share a common trajectory to the present. In other words, I seek to paint a series of portraits, drawing out the connections between particular constructions of the doctrine of providence and attempts to discern God's relationship to particular historical episodes.[63]

In summary, whereas historical meta-narratives too often present themselves as universal causal narratives which leverage explanations of why things went the way they did in order to explain the way things are today, the historical thrust of the present study pushes towards a mode of thick historical description, making a series of sketches of past episodes in which Christians have struggled to negotiate the complicated relationship of providence, politics, and race. This work of thick description seeks to discover continuities, discontinuities, surprises, and ironies that might be sources of wisdom aiding contemporary efforts to engage the same issues. The reasons for preferring this latter

[63] For similar attempts to chart the relationship between two types of discourse without slipping into the mode of causal explanation, see David Nicholls's study of the relationship between religious discourse about God's government of the universe and political discourse about human government in *God and Government in an 'Age of Reason'* and David Brion Davis's study of the connection between debates about slavery and discourses of progress in *Slavery and Human Progress*. Nicholls's study attempts to map the interactions "between religious and political discourse—a mutual borrowing of concepts and images" without speaking of "a *causal* relationship between religious and political discourse" (ix, emphasis in original). Similarly, Davis notes that his study is "less concerned with 'underlying causes' than with the ways in which slavery and emancipation were perceived, understood, explained, symbolized, and related to larger frames of reference" (xix).

mode of historical inquiry as an ally for theological reflection are of two types: empirical and theological.

The empirical reasons relate to the accuracy of the meta-narratival mode of history. A chief problem with the meta-narrative genre is that the very features that give it its appeal also threaten to undermine it in a number of ways. The author of such a narrative is constantly tempted to oversimplify complex historical phenomena, falsely equate concepts and ideas that may bear the same name but actually emerge from very different historical conditions and intellectual traditions, and draw simplistic conclusions about the overall trajectory of this history (usually in terms of either decline or progress).[64] Thus, while these narratives wield great explanatory power in their memorability and simplicity, they usually do so at the cost of attention to nuance and detail—to the warp and woof of the individual threads of which they are composed. Once someone tugs on one of these loose ends, the story that held such great power over the imagination of the reader all too often unravels.

A particularly egregious example of this is Mark Lilla's *The Stillborn God*, which articulates a simple and persuasive story about the birth of modern political theory out of the violent death throes of medieval Christendom's religious fanaticism. Lilla's basic claim is that modern political philosophy emerged as an attempt to articulate a modest, peaceful politics that offered humanity a way to free itself from the hold of medieval political theology. The problem with all political theology, according to Lilla, is that it

[64] On the contemporary prevalence of narratives of progress and decline in recent theological histories, see Smith, *The New Measures*, 11. Smith is critical of such narratives for their failure both to "account for complexities and discontinuities" within historical phenomena and to "recognize the indirect, ironic relationships between human projects and the saving work of God."

dangerously amplifies the conflict that is already an inherent property of politics through appeals to divine revelation.[65] Lilla holds up Thomas Hobbes as the great revolutionary who led modern humanity's escape from this deplorable tradition of theologico-political thought.

As Lilla tells it, in the aftermath of the destruction wrought by political theology "something happened—or rather, many things happened, and their combined force would eventually bring the reign of political theology to an end in Europe. Not just Christian political theology, but the basic assumptions upon which all political theology had rested. … A Great Separation took place, severing Western political philosophy decisively from cosmology and theology."[66] The first—and most important—thing that happened in the construction of the Great Separation, according to Lilla, was the publication in 1651 of Hobbes's *Leviathan*, which contained "the most devastating attack on Christian political theology ever undertaken and was the means by which later modern thinkers were able to escape from it."[67] Indeed, Lilla boldly asserts that, "The aim of Leviathan is to attack and destroy the entire tradition of Christian political theology."[68]

While this is certainly a powerful explanatory story, it rings hollow when held up to a critical light. Indeed, Hobbes's Great Separation was neither great—in the sense of an unprecedented revolutionary creation *ex nihilo*—nor a separation. While Hobbes

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[65] Mark Lilla, *The Stillborn God: Religion, Politics, and the Modern West* (New York: Vintage Books, 2008), 52: "All politics involves conflict, but what set Christian politics apart was the theological self-consciousness and intensity of the conflicts it generated—conflicts rooted in the deepest ambiguities of Christian revelation."
[66] Ibid., 58.
[67] Ibid., 75.
[68] Ibid., 75.

certainly made some unique, perhaps even revolutionary, contributions to Western political thought, advocating for a separation between ecclesiastical and secular authorities was not one of them. One can think of a number of examples that demonstrate that the idea of separating ecclesiastical and secular authorities did not originate in 1651, from Dante's *De Monarchia* (c. 1312), to Marsilius of Padua's *Defensor Pacis* (1324), to Luther's *On Secular Authority* (1523).[69] Furthermore, if anything, Hobbes did not advocate the separation of theology and politics, but rather their joining—prompting Rousseau's comment that Hobbes brought about a reunion of "the two heads of the eagle."[70] Most problematically, Lilla's work totally fails to address the fact that fully half of *Leviathan* is taken up with biblical exegesis and theological reflection—nor, for that matter, does his reading of Hobbes make any sense of the full title of the work: *Leviathan, or the Matter, Forme, and Power of a Commonwealth, Ecclesiastical and Civil*. Therefore, while *The Stillborn God* tells a very persuasive tale that serves as a kind of creation myth for a particular vision of liberal politics, it proves totally unconvincing when one examines its component parts in any great detail.

In addition to this practical concern about the accuracy of the meta-narratival approach to history, there are also good theological reasons for eschewing this form of intellectual inquiry, which are integrally connected to a Christian doctrine of providence. The meta-narrative genre too easily produces works that succumb to the temptation to

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[69] See Dante, *Monarchy*, 63-94; Marsilius of Padua, *The Defender of Peace*, ed. and trans. Annabel Brett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); and Martin Luther, *On Secular Authority*, in *Luther and Calvin on Secular Authority*, ed. Harro Höpfl (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).
[70] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, in *The Social Contract and Other Later Political Writings*, ed. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 146.

produce an all-encompassing history of an idea, a field, or a civilization articulated from a quasi-divine perspective, which claims to uncover a "key" or "guiding thread" to history. Given that the doctrine of providence has functioned at least since Augustine to check human pretensions to be able to read history from a quasi-divine perspective, the meta-narrative approach to a historical exploration of the doctrine of providence would be a performative contradiction. Instead, the doctrine of providence calls for a chastened mode of historical inquiry that takes seriously the particularities, complexities, and contradictions of a history interpreted by finite human creatures. In this study I attempt to use thick historical description in precisely this mode.

For all these reasons, thick historical description serves as an ideal means to generate a set of diverse theological perspectives on the relationship between the doctrine of providence and the task of human political judgment that can inform a constructive account of that relationship in contemporary Christian life. Locating important historical treatments of the doctrine of providence in their socio-political contexts brings the inherent connection between providence and political judgment into focus, illuminating the practical nexus where interpretations of divine providential action meet judgments about appropriate human political action in the context of racialized modernity. This descriptive work leads toward a normative goal: by examining three historical figures, I hope to unearth the resources necessary for a constructive hermeneutic of providence to guide Christian discernment of God's activity in the world in the twenty-first century.

1.4 Conclusion

This chapter outlined an assessment of the theological problem that the doctrine of providence represents for Christian theology, diagnosing a wound to which theological reflection on this topic must seek to meaningfully respond. I argued that the way that theologians over the past half-century have narrated the "crisis" or "collapse" of the doctrine of providence fails to adequately grapple with the true depth of the problem. Where several influential accounts identify the root of the problem in the doctrine of providence's inability to make sense of the suffering of European humanity in the first half of the twentieth century, I suggested that the problem must instead by related to the doctrine of providence's ability to function inside the framework of whiteness in order to make far too much sense of the suffering of non-European peoples under European domination in modernity.

The chapter then proceeded to develop a framework and method that might structure a meaningful response to this theological wound. I suggested that theological reflection on providence should operate within a hermeneutical, as opposed to a strictly doctrinal, framework. That is, a theology of providence ought to take seriously the practicality of the doctrine, the way in which it functions as an interpretive lens through which to guide discernment of God's present action in history. Finally, I outlined a method for the present task, suggesting the fittingness of historical analysis as a mode of theological inquiry that might constructively contribute to contemporary reflection on the relationship between providence, politics, and whiteness in the twenty-first century.

In the next three chapters, I will examine how three prominent figures in the history of modern Protestant theology theologically negotiated the relationship between

providence, politics, and race in the modern world. In doing so, I seek to discover resources for resisting the distortion of Christian belief and practice that occurs when the doctrine of providence becomes entangled within the logics of whiteness.

Chapter 2

G.W.F. Hegel:
Divine Providence in Time, Space, and Race

Just before first light on the morning of October 14, 1806, Napoleonic troops under the command of Jean Lannes and Pierre Augereau launched an attack against the Prussian forces of Prince Friedrich Ludwig von Hohenlohe in the first action of the Battle of Jena and Auerstedt. With the main body of the Prussian army attempting to withdraw to the north and east so as not to be cut off from Leipzig and Berlin—unaware that another of Napoleon's commanders, Louis-Nicolas Davout, had already blocked their path of retreat—Hohenlohe's forces pulled back from the town of Jena in order to set up a position on the more easily defensible plateau that overlooked the town, from which they might screen the Prussian army's retreat from the advancing *Grande Armée*.[1] At daybreak, Lannes and Augereau's troops, who had spent the night moving through Jena and massing just below the crest of the plateau, began their advance through a thick fog to assault Hohenlohe's forces.

As the two armies fired their first volleys, French victory seemed anything but assured. Napoleon was under the impression that he was encountering the main body of the Prussian army on the plateau outside of Jena, when in actuality the core of the Prussian force was moving northeast toward Auerstedt to confront Davout's much smaller French force, which the Prussians outnumbered two to one. Furthermore, while

[1] Peter Paret, *The Cognitive Challenge of War: Prussia 1806* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 20-22.

the total number of French and Prussian troops was roughly equivalent, twenty thousand of Napoleon's soldiers under the command of Jean-Baptiste Bernadotte inexplicably failed to join in the battle, despite being within earshot of the fighting. It seemed plausible that Hohenlohe's forces might be able to mount a rearguard defense against Napoleon's main force, allowing the Prussians to overwhelm Davout's forces and escape northeast towards Leipzig and Berlin where they could then dig in and await the help of their Russian allies.[2]

However, if the results of the battle were less than certain as the day began, by nightfall Napoleon's forces had achieved a crushing victory, comprehensively routing the entire Prussian army in a single day of fighting. After a pitched battle at Jena, Hohenlohe's defensive screening action failed, as his troops were driven from the field by the main body of Napoleon's army. Meanwhile, to the northeast at Auerstedt, Davout's troops managed to turn back the main Prussian force in its attempt to escape towards Berlin—despite being outnumbered two to one. Mass confusion ensued for the Prussians, as the troops retreating from Jena collided with the troops retreating from Auerstedt. The Prussian army had no choice but to abandon all strategic objectives and flee to the north. Within ten days, the French took Berlin unopposed. Within a month, over half of the Prussian army had been destroyed, scattered, or taken prisoner.[3]

Fought as it was on the plateau outside their town, the citizenry of Jena had front row seats from which to witness Napoleon's resounding demolition of the once dominant

[2] Ibid., 21, 25.
[3] Ibid., 27.

Prussian military—and indeed the entire system of warfare that it embodied.[4] Napoleon himself rode through the center of the town on the day before the battle on his way to scout the Prussian position. Among the inhabitants of Jena who witnessed the French Emperor's movements in the town that day was a cash-strapped and, at the time, relatively unknown university professor: Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel.

Despite only glimpsing Bonaparte from a distance, the Emperor made a profound impression upon the young philosopher. In a letter written later that very day, Hegel described his encounter with Napoleon to the theologian Immanuel Niethammer:

> I saw the Emperor—this world-soul—riding out of the city on reconnaissance. It is indeed a wonderful sensation to see such an individual, who, concentrated here at a single point, astride a horse, reaches out over the world and masters it. … Such advances as occurred from Thursday to Monday are only possible for this extraordinary man, whom it is impossible not to admire.[5]

Napoleon so impressed Hegel that the latter could not contain his unabashed admiration for the former, despite the fact that the troops commanded by this "extraordinary man" were at that very moment in the process of ransacking Hegel's city and university, jeopardizing the publication of Hegel's first book, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*—the last few pages of which Hegel had to shove in his pockets as the French troops entered the city—not to mention the struggling professor of philosophy's fledgling career.[6]

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[4] Ibid., 5. "Two systems of warfare clashed, and a conventional, time-tested way of raising troops, of training and fighting, was not only defeated but demolished."

[5] G. W. F. Hegel to Immanuel Niethammer, October 13, 1806, in *Hegel: The Letters*, trans. Butler and Seiler (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984), 114.

[6] Gary Dorrien, *Kantian Reason and Hegelian Spirit: The Idealistic Logic of Modern Theology* (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 198. The damage sustained by the university at the hands of the French caused enrollment to plunge to 130 students, forcing the destitute Hegel to beg his friends for employment opportunities and eventually accept a position as a newspaper editor in Bamberg.

Hegel's glowing assessment of Napoleon—which was clearly not rooted in his own self-interest or well-being—reflects the emerging contours of his philosophy of history, envisioning Napoleon as a unique individual bearing world-historical significance. Hegel would refine and develop his philosophical approach to world history over the course of his life, eventually expounding it in its mature form in his lecture cycles on the philosophy of world history, which he delivered five times over the last decade of his life at the University of Berlin.

While Hegel's personal encounter with Napoleon took places some two decades prior to his years in Berlin, the French Emperor continued to receive favorable treatment in Hegel's lectures. If anything, the passage of time only improved Hegel's opinion of the world-historical significance of Napoleon.[7] In the *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, Hegel pointed to Napoleon as a concrete example of a world-historical individual who was the means of divine spirit's self-actualization in the world-historical process.

However, Hegel's attempt in his lectures to discern Napoleon's world-historical significance by locating him within a comprehensive theory of the relationship between divinity, history, politics, and humanity represents only one particular example of what for Hegel was a much more ambitious endeavor. As Hegel boldly declared to his students in the opening lines of his very first introduction to the lecture cycles in 1822, "The subject of these lectures is the *philosophical history of the world*. Our concern is to work

[7] Joachim Ritter, *Hegel and the French Revolution: Essays on the* Philosophy of Right, trans. Winfield (London: The MIT Press, 1982), 46; Cyril O'Regan, "The Religious and Theological Relevance of the French Revolution," in *Hegel on the Modern World*, ed. Collins (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1995), 34.

our way through universal world history as such."[8] In the lectures, Hegel sets out to analyze the shape, direction, and purpose, not simply of recent European history, but of the history of the *kosmos* as such. Of particular importance for the present study, is the fact that Hegel does so from the perspective of divine providence—attempting to map the intrahistorical relationship between God and the world that constitutes the world-historical process. Hegel develops an account of world history as the movement of divine spirit toward self-consciousness in the world through the providential progression of historical epochs, the rise and fall of states, the heroic exploits of world-historical individuals and the atoning deaths of those who lose their lives upon the slaughter bench of history. As one commentator suggests, Hegel views history as "the autobiography of God."[9]

Hegel explicitly acknowledges the central conceptual role played by the doctrine of divine providence in his lectures, expounding at length the foundational connection between the Christian theological conviction that "the world is ruled by providence" and the philosophical first principle guiding his lectures: "The conception that reason governs the world, and that therefore world history is a rational process."[10] Yet, Hegel does not simply repristinate traditional Christian thinking about providence to serve as the framework of his philosophical approach to world history. Rather, he attempts a revolutionary transformation of the doctrine of providence in light of what he sees as the

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[8] G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: Volume 1: Manuscripts of the Introduction and the Lectures of 1822-3*, trans. Brown and Hodgson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 67 (hereafter cited as *LPWH*). Emphasis in the original. Any subsequent citations of the lectures that are not drawn from this edition will be marked as such.
[9] Sidney Hook, *From Hegel to Marx* (New York: Humanities Press, 1950), 36.
[10] *LPWH*, 79.

unprecedented epistemological powers made available to humanity within the advanced conditions of European modernity. Theologically speaking, then, *The Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* represent Hegel's attempt to construct a comprehensive reading of world history in light of his particular construal of the doctrine of divine providence.

In the hands of Hegel, the doctrine of providence becomes a powerful conceptual lens that—he believes—enables him to read the movement of the divine in history with unprecedented clarity. Indeed, his chief criticism of the doctrine of divine providence as it has traditionally been articulated within Christianity is its insistence on epistemological humility. He firmly rejects the idea—central to much Christian reflection on divine providence—that God's providential activity in history is mysterious and hidden from human eyes. Hegel decisively parts ways with figures like Augustine of Hippo and John Calvin, who identify the hiddenness of divine providence as a key aspect of the doctrine. In *The City of God*, Augustine asserts the mysterious nature of divine providence in response to questions about why the wicked often prosper while the righteous suffer in this temporal life: "Deep is the providence of the creator and ruler of the world, *and his judgments are inscrutable, and his ways past finding out* (Rom. 11:33)." Calvin similarly emphasizes the incapacity of humanity to attain knowledge of God's providential rule in his account of divine providence in Book I of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, speaking of "God's secret plan," asserting that "the sluggishness of our mind lies far beneath the height of God's providence," and maintaining that "his wonderful method of governing the universe is rightly called an abyss, because while it is hidden from us, we

ought reverently to adore it."[11] Hegel articulates his understanding of providence in direct opposition to this stream of Christian reflection on the doctrine.

However, Hegel does not consequently reject the Christian theological tradition as a whole in order to formulate his theory about the relationship of the divine to world history. To the contrary, he casts his alternative conception of divine providence as an internal critique of the doctrine *from within* the Christian tradition, suggesting that the emphasis on humility and mystery in prior Christian accounts of providence fails to account properly for the central truth of Christianity: that God has revealed Godself in history.

As Hegel construes it, the activity of divine self-revelation—which, on Hegel's terms, is simultaneously a process of divine self-constitution—is a teleological process, occurring progressively in and through history. Hegel argues that with the advent of a fully mature European modernity, the time has come when the trajectory of revelation has reached its zenith, allowing Hegel himself to map the movement of the divine in history: "Because the essential being of God is revealed through the Christian religion, the key to world history is also given to us."[12] Importantly, Hegel does not draw the chief warrant for his critique of traditional Christian understandings of divine providence from an extra-, anti-, or post-Christian source. Rather, he derives his critique from his understanding of the central truth of Christianity itself: the incarnation.

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[11] Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. Babcock (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2012), 30; Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 199, 208, 213. Emphasis in original.
[12] *LPWH*, 145.

For Hegel, the fundamental truth of the incarnation—that God reveals Godself to humanity—establishes both the possibility and necessity of a more confident and robust approach to interpreting divine providence, requiring modern European Christians like Hegel to set aside traditional admonitions about the hidden and mysterious nature of divine providence and embrace their ability to read perspicaciously the movement of God in history. Hegel frames the guiding philosophical first principle of the lectures—that world history is governed by reason—not as a *rejection* or *subversion* of the content of the Christian doctrine providence, but rather as an understanding of the content of the doctrine that *more faithfully* reflects the central truth of Christianity. In short, Hegel understands his philosophical interpretation of world history as fulfilling, rather than abolishing, the Christian doctrine of providence.

Armed with this modified doctrine of providence, Hegel endeavors in his lectures to map the movement of the divine in world history. He maps this movement along three related axes: the temporal, the spatial, and the anthropological. Most obviously, the divine process of spirit coming to self-consciousness in history unfolds temporally or historically—from past to present. However, it also unfolds spatially or geographically—from "east to west," as Hegel asserts.[13] Furthermore, on Hegel's account it is not simply certain geographical *spaces* that stand in closer relationship to the divine than others, but, more precisely, the *peoples* that inhabit those spaces.[14] Hegel interprets the movement of

[13] Ibid., 201.
[14] Thus, Hegel can describe the New World as either a land lying outside of world history entirely or the land of the future, depending on whether he locates it in relationship to the "disappearing" indigenous inhabitants of the Americas or the emergent Euro-American civilization springing up in the United States. I explore this discrepancy in Hegel's account at further length below.

divine providence in relationship to history (time), geography (space) and humanity (anthropology) in order to produce an account of the incarnation of the divine in the world.

In this chapter I will argue that Hegel deploys the doctrine of providence in *The Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* as a conceptual apparatus through which he theorizes world history as a teleological process of divine incarnation, articulated in terms of historical, geographical, and anthropological progress. These temporal, spatial, and anthropological lines of analysis converge in Hegel's thought around one figure, who emerges from the lectures as the divine subject of world history: European man.[15] Indeed, in his lectures Hegel sacralizes European Christian civilization, envisioning it as the *telos* of world history, the intrahistorical eschaton in which the divine life of spirit reaches final consummation. The inhabitants of this civilization become, for Hegel, the final bearers of divine presence in history—those in whose humanity the divine is most fully incarnate.

In what follows, I will attempt to substantiate this interpretation of Hegel's understanding of the relationship between divine providence, world history, and European humanity in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*. The structure of

[15] The use of the masculine pronoun "man" is intentional. The divine subject of history that resides at the apex of Hegel's philosophical account of world history is gendered as male. While Hegel does not address gender explicitly in the lectures, his grounding of world history in the publicity and universality of the state must be read in light of his relegation of women to the private and particular realm of the family in his *Elements of The Philosophy of Right*, trans. Nisbet (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991), 206-7: "Man therefore has his actual substantial life in the state, in learning, etc., and otherwise in work and struggle with the external world and with himself. … Woman, however, has her substantial vocation in the family. … When women are in charge of government the state is in danger, for their actions are based not on the demands of universality but on contingent inclination and opinion." For Hegel, world history is concerned with the state and is therefore, on his own understanding of gender roles in society, a thoroughly masculine phenomenon. For more on this point, see Genevieve Lloyd, *The Man of Reason: "Male" and "Female" in Western Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 80-85.

my argument is as follows. In section 2.1, I briefly position my reading of Hegel at the intersection of two conversations within contemporary Hegel scholarship—one about Hegel and theology, the other about Hegel's opinions of the inhabitants of Asia, Africa, and the New World—which have up until now proceeded relatively independently of one another. Section 2.2 contains my attempt to expose the theological grammar that undergirds Hegel's lectures, defending my previously articulated thesis that the doctrine of providence plays a foundational conceptual role in Hegel's approach to world history. After establishing the nature of the relationship between the doctrine of providence and the conceptual apparatus of Hegel's lectures, I turn in section 2.3 to examine the specific interpretation of history and global humanity that emerges from Hegel's attempt to relate divine providence to the particulars of history, geography, and anthropology. I display the way in which Hegel uses the doctrine of providence to imagine the location of various peoples within the divine economy of incarnation—from Africans and the indigenous inhabitants of the Americas, who are entirely cut off from participation in the divine, to Western Europeans, in whom spirit finds its final resting place.

Finally, in section 2.4 I conclude with a discussion of the theological ramifications of this analysis of Hegel's lectures for the attempt to think constructively about providence, politics, and race today. Ultimately, I want to suggest that three particular features of Hegel's understanding of divine providence stand out as particularly relevant for further theological interrogation: the revision of the relationships between creation, fall, and redemption in the Christian narrative, the collapsing of world history (*weltgeschichte*) into salvation history (*heilgeschichte*), and the erasure of the

significance of Jesus of Nazareth for the theology of divine providence. These three theological moves enable Hegel to construct a doctrine of providence predicated upon the rejection of creaturely finitude that produces an interpretation of world history as a teleological process of progressive incarnation calibrated around a vision of European man as the divine subject of history.

2.1 An Unfamiliar Crossroads: Hegel, Theology, and Global Humanity

In this chapter I explicate Hegel's lectures on the philosophy of world history with the dual intent of demonstrating the presence of a significant theological grammar at the heart of the lectures *and* substantively engaging the racist vision of global humanity expressed in those lectures in light of that grammar. This approach situates my argument at the intersection of two conversations within contemporary Hegel scholarship, one regarding Hegel's relationship to Christian theology and the other regarding the status and significance of Hegel's negative views of non-European humanity. By and large, these two conversations have proceeded relatively independently of one another, reflecting an unspoken consensus that, when it comes to Hegel, theology is theology, and race is race, and never the twain shall meet.[16] Because my argument engages both of these conversations, it seems appropriate briefly to locate my own approach in relationship to each of them.

2.1.1 Hegel and Theology

The last half-century has witnessed the emergence of a complex and multi-tiered conversation within the fields of philosophy and theology about Hegel's relationship to

[16] A notable exception to this status quo is Bernasconi, "The Ruling Categories of the World," 315-331.

Christian theology.[17] The conversation is characterized by at least four distinct types of questions about that relationship—though most works on this topic understandably attempt to answer more than one of these questions simultaneously. First, is a theological reading or interpretation of Hegel's thought defensible?[18] Second, if so, what is the specific theological substance or content of that thought?[19] Third, what is the relationship between this theological content and traditional Christian orthodoxy?[20] Fourth, how does

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[17] For a comprehensive review of the past half-century of scholarship, see Nicholas Adams, *Eclipse of Grace: Divine and Human Action in Hegel* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), xi-xx. Also helpful in this regard is the introduction to Cyril O'Regan's *The Heterodox Hegel* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994), 1-25. My own mapping of the field is indebted to these accounts.

[18] Representative arguments on behalf of the affirmative consensus include Karl Barth, *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century: Its Background & History* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1959), 384-421; Karl Löwith, "Hegel and the Christian Religion," in *Nature, History, and Existentialism, and Other Essays in the Philosophy of History*, ed. Levison (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1966), 162-203; Emil Fackenheim, *The Religious Dimension in Hegel's Thought* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1967), 116-222; Cyril O'Regan, *The Heterodox Hegel*, 2-4; Peter Hodgson, *Hegel and Christian Theology: A Reading of the* Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 3-74; Martin J. De Nys, *Hegel and Theology* (London: T&T Clark International, 2009), 15-36, 60-81. For a few contrasting examples of works that reject the theological reading of Hegel, see Robert C. Solomon's *In the Spirit of Hegel: A Study of G. W. F. Hegel's* Phenomenology of Spirit (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983); Alan White, *Absolute Knowledge: Hegel and the Problem of Metaphysics* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1983). See also Peter Hodgson's survey of the anti-theological perspective—with respect to Hegel's philosophy of history—in *Shapes of Freedom: Hegel's Philosophy of World History in Theological Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 10-11, 28-30.

[19] In addition to the previously cited works by Fackenheim, O'Regan, and Hodgson, see Ivan Ill'in, *Die Philosophie Hegels als kontemplative Gotteslehre* (Bern: A. Francke, 1946); Jörg Splett, *Die Trinitätslehre G.W.F. Hegels* (Freiburg: K. Alber, 1965); Albert Chappelle, *Hegel et la religion* (Paris: Éditions Universitaires, 1967); James Yerkes, *The Christology of Hegel* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1983); Emilio Brito, *La Christologie de Hegel: Verbum Crucis*, trans. B. Pottier (Paris: Beauchesne, 1983); Dale M. Schlitt, *Hegel's Trinitarian Claim: A Critical Reflection* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1984); Andrew Shanks, *Hegel's Political Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Glenn Alexander Magee, *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001); William Desmond, *Hegel's God: A Counterfeit Double?* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Co., 2003); Martin Wendte, *Gottmenschliche Einheit bei Hegel: eine logische und theologische Untersuchung* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2007); Cyril O'Regan, *The Anatomy of Misremembering: von Balthasar's Response to Philosophical Modernity: Volume 1: Hegel* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2014).

[20] While most treatments of the theological content of Hegel's thought touch on the question of orthodoxy, the two volumes by O'Regan and the volume by Desmond focus most explicitly on this theme. According to both thinkers, while Hegel seems to mimic familiar tropes from the Christian theological tradition, his apparent post-Enlightenment recovery or remembering of that tradition proves to be a profound subversion of it—thus, O'Regan's language of "misremembering."

that specific theological content—whether orthodox or heterodox—shape and inform Hegel's wider philosophical thought?[21]

While my exposition of Hegel's relationship to Christian theology will touch on all four of these areas of inquiry, I am especially concerned with the second and fourth questions outlined above and will therefore subordinate the first to the second, and the third to the fourth. In relationship to the first two questions, although I will certainly defend the viability of a theological reading of Hegel's lectures on world history, that defense will mostly take the form of an argument about the particular content of the theological dimension of those lectures—that content being the doctrine of divine providence. In this regard, I am closely following the methodological approach adopted by Cyril O'Regan in *The Heterodox Hegel*, which argues *from* rather than *for* the emerging consensus affirming the legitimacy of a theological reading of Hegel, focusing instead on identifying the specific content of Hegel's theology:

> Though the present work will argue for the theological reading of Hegel and marshal evidence in its support, such argument and presentation of evidence will be quite limited. The work speaks *from* the consensus it diagnoses … . Speaking from this consensus, it promotes the view that the really imperative task is to attempt a more precise identification of the theological species or variety (speculative) of Christianity appealed to by Hegel.[22]

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[21] This question animates several important investigations of Hegel's relationship to theology including Eric Voegelin, "On Hegel: A Study in Sorcery," in *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin: Published Essays 1966-1985*, ed. Sandoz (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 213-255; Andrew Shanks, *Hegel's Political Theology*; Rowan Williams, "Hegel and the Gods of Postmodernity" and "Logic and Spirit in Hegel," in *Wrestling with Angels: Conversations in Modern Theology*, ed. Mike Higton (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2007), 25-52; Nicholas Adams, *The Eclipse of Grace*; Peter Hodgson, *Shapes of Freedom: Hegel's Philosophy of History in Theological Perspective*; Andrew Shanks, *Hegel Versus 'Inter-Faith Dialogue': A General Theory of True Xenophilia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

[22] O'Regan, *The Heterodox Hegel*, 4.

O'Regan folds the answer to the first general question about Hegel and Christian theology into his treatment of the second, more specific, question, showing that a theological reading of Hegel is defensible precisely by offering one such reading that displays Hegel's commitment to particular construals of the doctrines of the Trinity, creation, incarnation and passion, spiritual community, and eschaton.

The present chapter functions similarly, while extending O'Regan's method in two ways. First, it focuses its theological reading of Hegel around the doctrine of providence, which receives only passing attention in *The Heterodox Hegel*. Second, it takes up the *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* as its main text, where O'Regan concentrates on the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion.* These two extensions of O'Regan's approach are related. The doctrine of providence does not feature centrally in Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, so it makes sense that O'Regan would not identify it as one of the central tropes of Hegel's theological thought. However, if one approaches the *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* with the same interests in expositing a theological "depth grammar" in Hegel's thought, the doctrine of providence quickly emerges as a key theological concept.[23]

In addressing the third and fourth questions about Hegel's relationship to Christian theology, I will fold my answer to the third question about the orthodoxy or heterodoxy of Hegel's theological positions into my answer to the fourth question about

[23] Methodologically, this expansion of the scope of an investigation of Hegel's theological thought beyond the bounds of the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* finds precedent in Nicholas Adams' *Eclipse of Grace*. As Adams suggests, this expansion is important, on Hegel's own terms, because "there is no easy division between 'philosophical' and 'theological' work in Hegel: it is all philosophical, and it is all concerned with God in various ways." See Adams, *Eclipse of Grace*, xviii.

the ramifications of Hegel's particular construction of Christian doctrine for his wider thought. As will become clear, there are several significant aspects of Hegel's doctrine of providence—its construction of the relationships between creation, fall, and redemption, between creation history and salvation history, and between the incarnation and providence—which can be identified as lying outside the bounds of traditional Christian theological understandings of the doctrine. However, the aim of this chapter is not to simply identify whether or not this is the case, but to ask why it matters for how Hegel constructs his philosophy of world history—and therefore how he understands history, politics, and global humanity. It is by addressing this fourth question that the present study seeks to make its most original contribution, moving beyond a simple description of Hegel's doctrine of providence to a critical assessment of the connection between Hegel's particular construction of that doctrine and his problematic views on race and historical progress.

2.1.2 Hegel and Global Humanity

Given the sheer volume of philosophical and theological scholarship that has been produced about Hegel, it is surprising that so little of it has attempted to substantively engage with the racist and Eurocentric views that he embraces in his philosophical texts. This is particularly true for the *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, in which Hegel expresses his views of non-European humanity in detail and at great length. While evidencing a voracious hunger for almost every other aspect of Hegel's thought, many philosophers and theologians seem to lose their intellectual appetites when the conversation turns to questions about Hegel's comparative global anthropology. While I

will not attempt here to address why this might be the case, I do think it wise to engage the most popular objections to substantively wrestling with the relationship between Hegel's differential assessment of the inhabitants of the New World, Africa, Asia, and Europe and the wider philosophical and theological grammar of his thought.[24]

Within Hegel scholarship, there are at least five common strategies deployed to avoid a substantive engagement with Hegel's views on global humanity: (1) the non-strategy of silence, (2) the straw man caricature of Hegel's critics, (3) the "child of his times" or "best available information" argument, (4) the prejudicial surface vs. philosophical depth argument, and (5) the argument that questions the legitimacy and reliability of the texts of Hegel's lectures. While some of these strategies are not totally without merit, none of them convincingly invalidates the approach that I will take to these issues in the remainder of the chapter.

The first strategy is simply to ignore the existence of the problematic passages from Hegel's lectures. Obviously, this does not make those passages disappear or offer a compelling reason why they ought not be addressed.

The second strategy popularly deployed to justify a refusal to engage Hegel's explicitly stated opinions about non-European humanity attempts to caricature what such an investigation would be like, constructing a straw man that it then theatrically dismisses in order to alleviate any need for further conversation. Duncan Forbes employs this strategy in his introduction to H. B. Nisbet's translation of Hegel's lectures, taking aim at

[24] Robert Bernasconi makes an attempt to offer such an explanation with regard to contemporary philosophy in "Will the Real Kant Please Stand Up: The Challenge of Enlightenment Racism to the Study of the History of Philosophy," *Radical Philosophy* 117 (2003): 13-22.

those who are "always ready to enjoy the deflating of large balloons" and feel competent to "lecture the crowd ... on the iniquities of a system which they have not begun to understand properly."[25] As Forbes sees it, critiques of Hegel's anthropological views are nothing more than the opportunistic leveraging of temporal privilege by those who seek to exalt themselves over and against the giants of the philosophical past: "It is also fashionable to display one's broadmindedness by criticizing Hegel for being arrogantly Europo-centric or Western-oriented."[26] Having unearthed the disingenuous motives of Hegel's critics, Forbes does not need to engage their arguments or seriously attempt to evaluate the problematic texts in question. He already knows what he will find. Unverifiable *ad hominem* argument preempts the academic task and critical readings of Hegel are not so much refuted as they are simply dismissed.

A third strategy employed to preempt the need for careful scrutiny of these issues is the "child of his times" argument.[27] The more careful variants of this argument suggest that the passages of Hegel's lectures in question simply reflect a defect in Hegel's sources, from which he obtained his information about global human cultures.[28] Hegel, the argument goes, was simply working with the best available information. Susan Buck-Morss originally adopts this perspective in the first edition of her famous essay on Hegel

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[25] Duncan Forbes, "Introduction," in *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: Introduction*, trans. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), vii.
[26] Ibid., xxii. As if to confirm that he himself is not constrained by the standards of a politically correct broadmindedness, Forbes asks, "Isn't Hegel's perspective broadly the right one? Or at least should one not wait until history has shown its hand a bit more clearly?"
[27] Bernasconi, "Will the Real Kant Please Stand Up?," 14.
[28] See, for example, Joseph McCarney, *Hegel on History* (London: Routledge, 2000), 142-43, in which McCarney laments "the paucity and poverty of Hegel's anthropological sources." See also Hodgson, *Shapes of Freedom*, 81 n. 23: "Hegel had access to detailed sources for the geography and history of Asia and Europe, but he relied on travel and missionary reports for Africa and the Americas, which gave a very prejudiced and limited picture."

and Haiti, before retracting this view in *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*. Initially, Buck-Morss suggests that, "It is sadly ironic that the more faithfully his lectures reflected Europe's conventional scholarly wisdom on African society, the less enlightened and more bigoted they became."[29] However, she revises this position in a footnote added during subsequent revisions: "My conclusion here does not bear scrutiny. Rather, Hegel distorted his sources in order to fit his philosophy of history." Buck-Morss' reversal evidences the impact of the important work done by Robert Bernasconi on this topic, which comprehensively demonstrates that the best information available to Hegel was significantly better than the information Hegel included in his lectures.[30] Bernasconi's research decisively undermines the "child of his times" strategy, showing that Hegel's "times" offered significant alternatives to his views, which he rejected and distorted as he developed his own position.

The fourth, and perhaps most popular, strategy used to account for Hegel's opinion of the peoples of the New World, Africa, and Asia rests on a surface/depth distinction between personal prejudice and philosophical theory. This distinction often yields the verdict that, though Hegel did not apply them correctly in his own day due to his personal prejudices, Hegel's core philosophical insights about history stand on their own, and can now be expanded upon to include those groups that Hegel marginalized.[31]

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[29] Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*, 73-74.

[30] Bernasconi, "Hegel at the Court of the Ashanti," 41-63. Bernasconi concludes that, "An examination of Hegel's sources shows that they were more accurate than he was and that he cannot be so readily excused for using them as he did."

[31] Hodgson, *Shapes of Freedom*, 92. "Much can be faulted in his approach, especially his account of the Asian world in its *ancient* manifestation only, not as a contemporary phenomenon, but also his neglect of Africa and the Americas. The Hegelian story would have to be written very differently today, but the central plot concerning 'shapes of freedom' remains compelling." Emphasis in original.

Interpreters of Hegel often lament the intrusion of his personal bigotry or "non-philosophical" racial prejudice into the "genuine" philosophical content of the lectures.

This strategy is formally identical to an argument popularly used to dismiss the theological dimensions of Hegel's thought as merely a surface characteristic which does not significantly connect with the philosophical core. Cyril O'Regan's critique of this latter strategy thus proves instructive for the question at hand: "While it is hermeneutically reputable to suggest that there is a split between surface and depth … those who promote such a position have the responsibility of explaining the how and why of the theological surface. This responsibility is taken extremely lightly, the theological surface not so much explained as shunted aside, or, … 'exdenominated.'"[32] Borrowing from O'Regan's insight, one can say that any distinction between an anthropologically prejudicial surface and a philosophical depth must be defended by a close engagement with the textual evidence. Unfortunately, it is more often the case that this distinction is deployed to preempt that engagement—simply ignoring or 'exdenominating' the questions about Hegel's racial or Eurocentric views of global humanity.[33] Over and against this tendency, it is important to assert that the proof of the pudding must be in the eating when it comes to Hegel's anthropological convictions. In this vein, this chapter

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[32] O'Regan, *The Heterodox Hegel*, 4.

[33] Joseph McCarney, "Hegel's Racism?: A Response to Bernasconi," *Radical Philosophy* 119 (2003): 34. "The point may be put in a more general form. This involves the view that, however hard to articulate, there is an indispensable distinction of some kind to be acknowledged between what belongs to the structure of a philosophy and what does not, between contingent facts about the lives and opinions of some Enlightenment thinkers and what is of the essence of Enlightenment philosophy. … The distinction in question is needed because without it, disreputable opinions, or even incidental remarks, instead of being judged to be incompatible with the logic of a philosopher's position, a sad decline from her best insights, are liable to engulf the whole." McCarney does not proceed in this article to make the case that this is in fact how Hegel's lectures ought to be understood.

presents an argument that these views are integrally related to a depth theological grammar that undergirds the lectures, rather than being the inarticulate expressions of irrational and uninformed racial prejudice which can be easily excised without substantially altering Hegel's theory.

Fifth and finally, the questionable status of the actual texts of Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* is sometimes marshaled as a reason to discourage Hegel's readers from taking the problematic views expressed therein too seriously. Several points related to this objection are worthy of consideration. First, in dealing with the lectures we are engaging with material that Hegel himself did not publish. Secondly, the texts of the *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* that we possess today are mostly patchwork documents, combining fragments from Hegel's own manuscripts with transcriptions of the lectures made by Hegel's students. The caution that Nicholas Adams offers with respect to the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* applies equally to those on world history: "Anyone citing Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* is thus not citing Hegel, but citing a text that bears some relation (with luck a close one) to what Hegel delivered in Berlin all those years ago."[34]

However, while for many years the lack of a critical edition of the texts of the lectures on world history—comparable to the critical edition of his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, for instance—proved to be a significant obstacle to sure-footed interpretation and analysis, recent years have seen the publication of the beginnings of a critical edition of the lectures, allowing for a higher degree of certainty about their

[34] Adams, *Eclipse of Grace*, 169.

original structure and content.[35] Whereas the editions of Hegel's lectures published by Eduard Gans (1837), Karl Hegel (1840), George Lasson (1917), and even Johannes Hoffmeister (1955) were compiled with significant editing that makes their relationship to the original lectures somewhat unreliable, a complete transcription of the lectures of 1822/23 was published in 1996, providing a new foundation for analysis of the lectures.[36] This text has recently been translated into English by Robert F. Brown and Peter C. Hodgson, along with fragments of Hegel's manuscripts from the introduction to the lectures of 1822 and 1828, a lengthy manuscript from Hegel's introduction to the lectures of 1830-1, and loose sheets written in Hegel's hand that relate to the lectures of 1830-1.[37] Wherever possible, I engage the texts from the critical editions of Jaeschke and Ilting, Brehmer, and Seelmann (translated by Brown and Hodgson), cautiously supplementing these when necessary with Hoffmeister's edition of the introduction (translated by Nisbet), which is the best of all the previous editions.[38]

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[35] G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion*, 3 vols., ed. Jaeschke (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1983-4). Translated as *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, 3 vols., trans. Brown, Hodgson, and Stewart (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984-1985).

[36] G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte (Berlin 1822/23)*, ed. Ilting, Brehmer, and Seelmann, *Vorlesungen: Ausgewählte Nachschriften und Manuskripte*, xii (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1996).

[37] G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: Volume 1: Manuscripts of the Introduction and the Lectures of 1822-3*, trans. Brown and Hodgson with Geuss (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). The German source for the manuscript materials is *Vorlesungsmanuskripte II (1816-31)*, ed. Walter Jaeschke, *Gesammelte Werke*, xviii (Hamburg: Felix Meiner 1995).

[38] For a comprehensive discussion of the various editions of Hegel's lectures see Bernasconi, "The Ruling Categories of the World," 316-318 and the editorial introduction to Brown and Hodgson's translation of the lectures. In addition to the assurance provided by taking the materials published in critical editions as a starting point wherever possible, it is also important to remember that even in a worst case scenario, in which it is discovered that Hegel did not in fact say the things published under his name in previous editions of these lectures, the purpose of the present investigation—which is to illustrate one way of thinking about the relationship between providence, politics, history, and humanity—would not be frustrated. We would still have such an illustration, but would have to ascribe it to the Hegelian community, rather than to Hegel himself. Anyone who has read the Gospel of John should understand that such a discovery would not render the results of this investigation purposeless.

In summary, there is finally no convincing reason why Hegel's troubling assessment of global humanity ought not to be seriously engaged. However, the objections to such an engagement, while unpersuasive, helpfully highlight two key issues to which such an engagement ought to be attentive.

First, given the fact that Hegel was not using the best available information on global humanity, but was in fact distorting that information to fit his own purposes, the next question that logically ought to be pursued is "What were those purposes?" What guided Hegel's misrepresentation of the inhabitants of Africa, the Americas, and Asia, if not the empirical data available to him? This chapter suggests that the core grammar that shapes these portions of Hegel's lectures is deeply influenced by his distorted understanding of the Christian doctrine of providence.

Second, a serious engagement with these portions of Hegel's lectures must take aim directly at the contention that Hegel's anthropological views are easily separable from the core content of his philosophy of history. Is Hegel's philosophy of world history—centered as it is on the laudable concept of progressive freedom—mostly salvageable, requiring only slight modifications through the inclusion of those portions of humanity that Hegel excluded from his theory due to personal prejudice? Or is the problem deeper? Could it be that Hegel's vision of freedom is in fact structurally predicated upon the denigration of non-European others, in such a way that his account crumbles if you try to expand it to include those others? The reading of Hegel developed in what follows suggests that Hegel's construction of non-European humanity plays an important role in creating the providentially inflected vision of European humanity as the

subject of history, providing the "natural" other in relationship to which Hegel theorizes the "spiritual" European.

2.2 "The Absolute, Rational, Final Purpose of the World": Divine Providence in the Lectures on the Philosophy of World History

The relationship between Christian theology and Hegel's philosophy is not easily pinned down. That such a relationship exists ought to be evident from Hegel's assertions that the object or content of philosophy and religion is identical, that this content is "truth" or "God," and that the normative representation of God is provided by Christianity.[39] However, mapping the particular contours of the path Hegel follows from religious or theological discourse to his philosophy is not a straightforward task, both due to the diversity of opinions and the sheer amount of ink spilled by readers of Hegel on this topic. Rather than attempt to address this issue comprehensively and definitively, in what follows I will adopt a modest and tactical approach by examining these issues with respect to one particular point of theological doctrine—the doctrine of providence—in one particular text: the *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*.

I will argue that Hegel sees the core philosophical grammar that undergirds these lectures as an amplification, expansion, and perfecting culmination of the Christian theological doctrine of providence, utilizing the doctrine as a basic conceptual lens that allows him to imagine a rational theory of history as the progressive incarnation of the divine within history and humanity. While it is tempting here to use the language of "secularization" to describe Hegel's transformation of Christian doctrine, this term

[39] O'Regan, *The Heterodox Hegel*, 3. See also Hegel's remarks on the topic in *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* I:151-154.

unhelpfully suggests the idea of a withdrawal of the transcendent or religious.[40] If anything, Hegel's approach is the opposite. As I will make clear, Hegel wants to intensify and expand upon the concept of providence found in Christian theological discourse in order to bring it to a state of perfection. He does not resolve the tension between the religious and the secular, the divine and the human, or the transcendent and the immanent by removing one and preserving the other, but by seeking their final reconciliation. As Robert Bernasconi suggests, "On Hegel's account of history, the secular and the spiritual are reconciled … without either being diminished."[41] Like Jesus in Matthew 5:17, Hegel asserts that his philosophical account of world history has not come to abolish the Christian doctrine of providence, but to fulfill it.

In mapping the contours of Hegel's reception and transformation of the doctrine of providence in the lectures, I follow the formal outline of the philosophy of world history utilized by Hegel in the introduction to the 1830/1 lecture cycle, examining the general relationship between the doctrine of providence and Hegel's concept of world history (2.2.1) and the specific contours of Hegel's appropriation of the doctrine in his account of the actualization of spirit in history (2.2.2).

2.2.1 Providence and the General Concept of World History

Hegel opens the lectures of 1830/1 by addressing a potentially devastating critique of his impending endeavor to approach history philosophically.[42] This opening

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[40] Fackenheim, *The Religious Dimension in Hegel's Thought*, 9.
[41] Bernasconi, "The Ruling Categories of the World," 328.
[42] The material that Hegel uses in this section of the 1830/1 on "The General Concept of World History" has significant parallels in his account of philosophical world history as the third of three possible types of history in the 1822/3 lectures transcribed by Griesheim and Hotho which will be cross-referenced where appropriate.

defense of the basic principles behind his approach bears decisive witness to the central place occupied by the doctrine of providence in Hegel's own understanding of his enterprise. In these first paragraphs of his introduction to the lectures, Hegel suggests that the time has come for the philosophy of world history to take up the mantle of the Christian doctrine of providence and make good on that doctrine's long unrealized promise to articulate the relationship between God and the world. He does this through an extensive comparison of his philosophical view of history, which is predicated upon the conviction that the world is governed by reason, with the traditional Christian theological view of history, which is predicated upon the conviction that the world is governed by divine providence. Hegel believes that the former conviction, while not opposed to the latter, definitively surpasses it by giving determinant content to the otherwise abstract theological conviction of providential rule. As Hegel understands it, while his philosophy of world history is *more than* a theological doctrine of providence, it is certainly not *less than* one.

Hegel singles out one critique of his philosophical approach to world history in particular as requiring immediate refutation at the outset of his lectures on the topic. This is the critique of the historical positivists—which has since come to be associated, perhaps too closely, with Leopold von Ranke—that a philosophical approach to history necessarily brings with it preconceptions and assumptions which distort its reading of the historical data: "Philosophy … is assumed to have its *own* thoughts, produced by speculation from out of itself without reference to what is. With such thoughts it supposedly approaches history as a material to be treated; it does not leave it as it is but

arranges it in accord with thought and *constructs* a history a priori."[43] By contrast, historical enquiry "[so it is said] just has to grasp in unalloyed fashion what is, what has been—events and deeds. It gains in veracity the more strictly that it confines itself to the given, and … the more that its aim is to discover simply what happened."[44] Hegel emphatically denies the relevance of this critique for his approach, not because he believes that it is acceptable for philosophical preconceptions to play fast and loose with history, but because he does not believe that his approach is founded upon such preconceptions.

Hegel argues that his philosophical approach to history brings with it only one presupposition: "The sole conception that [philosophy] brings with it is the simple conception of *reason*—the conception that reason governs the world, and that therefore world history is a rational process." However, in point of fact, Hegel suggests, this presupposition is rationally demonstrable and therefore exempted from the positivist's critique:

> From the point of view of history as such, this conviction and insight is a *presupposition*. Within philosophy itself this is no presupposition: by means of speculative cognition it is *proved* that *reason* … is *substance* and infinite power. … That only this idea is the true, the eternal, the almighty, that it reveals itself in the world, and that nothing is revealed in the world except it, its glory and honor—this is, as I have said, what is proved in philosophy, and so it may here be *presupposed* as demonstrated.

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[43] *LPWH*, 78. Emphasis in original. See Frederick C. Beiser, "Hegel and Ranke: A Re-examination," in *A Companion to Hegel*, ed. Houlgate and Baur (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2011), 332-350. Beiser suggests that the historical methodologies of Hegel and Ranke are considerably more similar than has been traditionally acknowledged.
[44] Ibid., 78.

The presupposition that history is ruled by reason does not conflict with Hegel's conviction that "history … must be taken as it is; we must proceed in a historical, empirical fashion." As Hegel sees it, all historians—even the most rigorous positivists—approach their task with categories not derived from the historical data, which they introduce as a "medium through which to view the available evidence." Where the positivists delude themselves with feigned objectivity, Hegel sees himself as owning up to his one fundamental preconception and defending it as the right one to have. In the course of his exposition of this most crucial of methodological first principles for the philosophical approach to world history, Hegel narrates this fundamental conviction that "reason has governed and continues to govern the world" as a development of the content of the Christian doctrine of providence.[45]

Hegel locates his own position on these matters by rehearsing a brief genealogy of the conviction that reason governs the world. The conviction has appeared in three paradigmatic forms, each of which has been an improvement on the previous iteration: the Greek conception, the Christian conception, and Hegel's own conception.[46] However, the dialectical progression is not linear. For, according to Hegel, while the relationship between his own conception and the Greek conception of reason's cosmic rule is marked by a difference in *kind*, his conception of reason and the Christian conception of providence differ only in *degree*.

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[45] Ibid., 80, 81, 81, 83. Emphasis in original.
[46] Burleigh Taylor Wilkins, *Hegel's Philosophy of History* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1974), 48-49.

Anaxagoras was the first person to suggest that reason rules the world. However, there were two problems with his account. First, he restricted reason's dominion to the realm of nature. Second, even with respect to nature, Anaxagoras' formulation of nature's rule remained abstract; he failed to apply it to "concrete nature." This is the criticism of Anaxagoras' principle voiced by Socrates in the *Phaedo*.[47]

The Christian conception of the conviction that reason governs the world avoids the first problem of Anaxagoras' account, while succumbing to the second. While Anaxagoras' account remains severely inadequate to the extent that it confines the rule of reason solely to the natural, Hegel asserts that "the complete application of this conception has assumed another shape, one we know full well as our own conviction—namely the form of the religious truth that the world is not given over to chance and external, contingent causes, but is *ruled by providence*."[48] The Christian doctrine of providence presents a decisive revolution and improvement on the Greek conception of rational governance, extending reason's rule from the realm of nature into the realm of spirit.[49] In this respect, Hegel is willing to embrace the Christian doctrine of providence as fundamentally compatible with his own conviction of reason's cosmic rule: "The *truth* that a providence, indeed divine providence, presides over the events of the world is consistent, then, with the indicated principle [that reason governs the world] because divine *providence* is the wisdom that has the infinite power to actualize its purposes, that is, the absolute, rational, final purpose of the world."[50] However, Hegel does not simply

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[47] *LPWH*, 82-83.
[48] Ibid., 83. Emphasis in original.
[49] Wilkins, *Hegel's Philosophy of History*, 48.
[50] *LPWH*, 83. Emphasis in original.

embrace the Christian formulation of providential governance without modification. The second weakness of Anaxagoras' formulation of the conviction that reason governs the world—its abstractness—also plagues the Christian conviction. Hegel styles himself as the Socrates to Christianity's Anaxagoras, bringing concreteness to the conviction of divine providential rule and in so doing finally rendering this conviction perfect.

The inadequacy of the Christian doctrine of providence lies in the traditional Christian assertion that the particulars of God's providential rule remain hidden from humanity in mystery. Hegel suggests that Christianity has been too content to embrace an overly abstract and general belief in God's cosmic governance in the name of protecting and respecting God's transcendence:

> It is *faith* in *providence* in general and does not advance to the determinate; it lacks an application to the whole, to the extensive course of world events. The determinate aspect of providence, the specific acts that it performs, is called the *providential plan* (the plan's end and the means [for its] accomplishment). But this plan is said to be hidden from our eyes, indeed it is supposed to be presumptuous to want to know it.[51]

This epistemological humility may have been acceptable at earlier stages in the progressive revelation of the divine on the stage of history. However, European humanity now inhabits an epoch of world history in which the divine has revealed itself in history clearly enough to have rendered this conviction obsolete. The time has come, Hegel believes, to trace the hand of providence in history: "We cannot, therefore, be content with this petty commerce, so to speak, on the part of faith in providence. … Rather we

[51] Ibid., 85. While Hegel does not mention Kant by name here, it is obvious that this entire line of argument is a direct refutation of Kant's own position on the possibility of knowledge of God in relationship to history. See, for example, Kant's comments on the pretentiousness of claims to have access to cognitive knowledge of God's providence in "To Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch," 120-121.

must be *serious* about [our faith in providence]. Concrete events, the *ways* of providence, are its means, its appearances in history; these lie open before us, and we have only to relate them to the general principle above."[52] Three features of Hegel's case for a more robust application of the doctrine of providence to human history stand out as particularly important for understanding the nature of his modulation of the Christian doctrine of providence.

First, as is evident above, Hegel wants to use the doctrine of providence as a tool for interpreting particular events in history. Hegel believes modern humanity can dispense with the Christian tradition's unnecessary distinction between general and particular providence.[53] In other words, Hegel wants to make the doctrine of providence do political and historical work. He wants to leverage the doctrine as a means for coming to interpretive judgments about the relationship between particular historical happenings and the meta-historical movement of the divine towards self-consciousness.

Second, Hegel believes that the subject to which this particular, concrete providential analysis ought to be applied is most properly collective individuals—states or peoples. He notes that in the rare cases when Christians in the past have embraced belief in God's particular providence it has almost always been related to isolated instances of direct divine intervention in the life of an individual, usually in the form of unexpected aid in a moment of dire need—perhaps a lost tax refund that arrives in the

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[52] Ibid., 84.

[53] The distinction between general and particular providence, which rests on the division between God's care for the entire universe and God's care for individual creatures, should not be mistaken for the distinction between general, special, and most special providence, which addresses God's relationship to different classes of creatures (usually non-humans, all humans, and Christians). See Charles Wood, *The Question of Providence*, 36 n. 13.

mail on the day the rent is due or a bag of groceries mysteriously deposited on the front stoop when one has run out of money to buy food. By contrast, when it comes to world history, Hegel asserts, "The individuals we are concerned with are peoples, totalities, states."[54] Hegel's renovation of the doctrine of providence is characterized not only by a movement from the general to the particular, but also by a movement from the private/personal to the public/political.

Finally, and—for the purposes of the present investigation—most significantly, Hegel frames his transformation of the doctrine of providence as an internal critique of the Christian tradition, rooted in a development of Christianity's own best insights, rather than as a departure from or rejection of Christianity. Indeed, Hegel cites the central truth of Christianity as the warrant for his intensification and particularization of the doctrine of providence into a rational theory of history: "In the Christian religion God has revealed godself; i.e. God has given it to humanity to know what God is, so that God is no longer something hidden and concealed. With the possibility of knowing God, the duty to do so is laid upon us."[55] The parallel passage in Hegel's lectures of 1822/3 makes this argument even more forcefully and is worth quoting at length:

> The more proximate question regarding the providential plan is answered with a confession of humility: God's providence, like God's nature, is said to be inscrutable and inexhaustible. To this humility we must oppose what the Christian religion is about: This religion revealed to humanity God's nature and essence; before that, God was the unknown. The previously concealed God has become manifest. Thus as Christians we know what God is; God is no longer an unknown. To regard God to be just as unknown after God's revelation is an affront to this religion. In doing so we acknowledge that we do not have Christian religion; for

[54] *LPWH*, 84. For a critique of the internal consistency of this position with respect to Hegel's wider philosophical commitments, see George Dennis O'Brien, *Hegel on Reason and History: A Contemporary Interpretation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1975), 58-59.
[55] Ibid., 85.

> that religion lays upon us the one obligation that we should know God. It has vouchsafed this benefit to humanity. … God does not desire narrow-minded hearts and empty heads but rather children who are rich in the knowledge of God and put their merit in it alone. Thus Christians are initiated into the mysteries of God. Because the essential being of God is revealed through the Christian religion, *the key to world history is also given to us*.[56]

Hegel defends his desire to trace the movement of the divine in history through particular events and peoples as the dutiful Christian response to God's self-revelation in the incarnation. Yet, significantly, Hegel expands the scope of divine incarnation to include all of world history. As Andrew Shanks has argued, "Hegel places the Incarnation into a world-historical context. … For him, God is to be grasped as being present throughout the whole length and breadth of human history."[57] He does not exhaustively identify the incarnation with the appearance of Jesus of Nazareth in human history. Rather, the particular incarnation of Jesus of Nazareth is but one—albeit significant—moment in a much wider process of divine incarnation that unfolds progressively throughout world history and culminates, not in the humanity of a first century Jew in Palestine, but rather in modern European humanity.

Hegel thus sees himself as the herald of a new age in which the progressive and self-revelatory incarnation of the divine has reached such a point that "what initially was set before spirit in feeling and representational modes is also grasped by thought."[58] The doctrine of providence does not provide a conceptual analogue or metaphor for Hegel's core conviction that reason governs the world—as if it were merely a popular example that Hegel invokes to help describe "the general type of thing" that he is trying to

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[56] Ibid., 145. Emphasis added.
[57] Shanks, *Hegel's Political Theology*, 16.
[58] *LPWH*, 85.

articulate. At least in these lectures, Hegel locates his philosophical project as a continuation and development of the Christian theological tradition itself—going so far as to suggest that his philosophy in facts *reclaims* the Christian religion from theology itself.[59]

In the light of such passages, it is extremely difficult to argue, as some have, for a purely "secular" or non-theological interpretation of Hegel's philosophy of history without leaving Hegel behind.[60] In the end, the core grammar of Hegel's philosophy of history is not *like* the Christian doctrine of providence. It *is* the Christian doctrine of providence, albeit a Christian doctrine of providence modified in light of Hegel's decisively untraditional understanding of God, the world, and the relationship between them. Having laid this general theological foundation in his articulation of "The General Concept of World History" in the lectures of 1830/1, Hegel goes on to elaborate the distinctive theological shape of his modified account of providence as "The Actualization of Spirit in History."

2.2.2 Divine Providence as the Actualization of Spirit in History

The specific theological contours of the philosophy of history that Hegel develops as a reconstruction of the doctrine of providence at the level of pure thought can be summarized as a slight alteration of 2 Corinthians 3:17b: "Where the Spirit is, there is

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[59] Ibid., 85. "In opposition to certain kinds of theology, philosophy has to take on the content of religion."
[60] O'Brien, *Hegel on Reason and History*, 53. O'Brien develops this "secular" line of interpretation in line with the standard post-war line of interpretation developed by Alexander Kojève in *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the* Phenomenology of Spirit (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1969). While I readily grant that it is possible to argue that Hegel was wrong about his theological assumptions and to develop his philosophy of history without them, I cannot help but feel that it is a case of special pleading to try to read that position back into texts that do not support it.

freedom." The "where," for Hegel, is "here," in history: "World history is the progress of the consciousness of freedom."[61] This is the specific content that follows from the general conception of reason's cosmic rule and—like that general conception—it is structured by a theological grammar drawn from a heavily modified doctrine of providence. History, as Hegel reads it, is a progressive teleological construction of the incarnation of the divine in the world, which is itself structured around three further interwoven theological themes: revelation, reconciliation, and consummation. As the site of divine incarnation, world history unfolds as the progressive *revelation* of the divine, accomplished by means of the *reconciliation* of the divine and the created, the infinite and the finite, the transcendent and the immanent, which progresses towards its final *consummation* in the realization of a state of perfect freedom. The processes of revelation, reconciliation, and consummation cannot be strictly separated from one another, but for purposes of clarity, I treat them here in distinction from one another in relationship to the three major sub-sections of Hegel's treatment of "The Actualization of Spirit in History" in the manuscript for the introduction to the 1830/1 lectures: the general definition of spirit, the means of spirit's actualization, and the material of spirit's actualization.

2.2.2.1 Revelation: The General Definition of Spirit

World history is first of all the providential process of divine revelation. It is the stage upon which the absolute comes both to be known and to know itself. This dynamic, relational conception of divinity that reveals itself and comes to full consciousness of itself in history Hegel identifies as "spirit." However, spirit denotes more than just the

[61] *LPWH*, 88.

revelation in history of an already perfectly constituted divine life. In fact, Hegel bases his concept of spirit in the idea that the process of revelation is constitutive of the divine life itself. As O'Regan suggests, "The self-revealing God of Christianity finds its adequate discursive expression in the term *Spirit*. For Hegel, Spirit does not denote a particular aspect of the divine … but rather the divine considered in its entirety … Spirit is the title Hegel gives to the divine considered as an encompassing act or process of revelation."[62] Hegel's concept of spirit does not simply embody the divine-made-known-in-revelation, but also the divine-as-constituted-through-revelation.

As Peter Hodgson has pointed out, because of this dynamism in Hegel's conception of the life of the divine, spirit operates in multiple senses in Hegel's understanding of history. There is spirit considered in its logically independent or pretemporal aspects, absolute spirit (*absoluter Geist*); there are varieties of spirit in partial consciousness of itself that emerge in particular peoples, national spirits or spirits of peoples (*Volksgeister*), and in individual humans, individual spirits (*Geister*). However, all of these are finally subsumed within spirit as the substance and subject of history, the ongoing, dynamic revelation of the divine, which is simultaneously the development of divine self-consciousness: world spirit (*Weltgeist*).[63] World spirit surpasses absolute spirit as the highest form of the divine life because where absolute spirit exists as immediate, and therefore abstract, divine consciousness, world spirit exists as fully actualized and particularized divine self-consciousness—that is to say, divine consciousness that has first recognized itself in distinction from itself and then been

[62] O'Regan, *Heterodox Hegel*, 29-30.
[63] Hodgson, *Shapes of Freedom*, 25.

reconciled to itself.[64] Thus the process of revelation is simultaneously a process of reconciliation, and both of these historical processes function to constitute the nature of the divine itself.

2.2.2.2 Reconciliation: The Means of Spirit's Actualization

If the nature of the divine is to be known as it comes to consciousness of itself in history, then something must be done to make sense of the seeming chaos that characterizes the passage of time. If history is a divine, teleological process, one certainly wouldn't know it from the appearance of world events: "An initial *inspection of history*, however, indicates that the actions of human beings proceed from their needs, passions, and interests … in such a way that in this spectacle of activity these needs, passions, interests, etc., seem to be the sole *driving force*."[65] Therefore, Hegel's account of the revelation of the divine-in-and-as-history is logically dependent upon an account of the reconciliation necessary to close the gap between the chaos, suffering, and evil that mark historical existence and the spiritual goal toward which that existence is supposed to be marching.

Hegel's concept of reconciliation—at least on its surface—echoes many of the familiar themes of the Christian theological tradition's reflection on the incarnation of Christ. However, Hegel redeploys these Christological tropes as an abstract framework for a providential theory of reconciliation-as-historical-progress. The means of spirit's self-actualization are the passions, interests, and ideals of the manifold individuals who

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[64] Walter Jaeschke, "World History and the History of the Absolute Spirit," in *History and System: Hegel's Philosophy of History*, ed. Perkins (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1984), 115.
[65] *LPWH*, 89.

pour themselves out as an atoning sacrifice on the altar of history. Hegel is under no illusions about the character of historical events. His historical progressivism is not an optimistic idealism that glosses over or suppresses history's chaotic brutality. History, for Hegel, is a "slaughterhouse in which the happiness of peoples, the wisdom of states, and the virtues of individuals are sacrificed."[66] It witnesses to "the destruction of the noblest constructs of peoples and states, the downfall of the most flourishing empires that the human spirit has produced."[67] Therefore, for Hegel to be able to offer a convincing account of spirit as the revelation of the divine in and as the created, of the infinite in and as the finite, of the transcendent in and as the immanent, he must make sense of how spirit manipulates these seemingly ill-suited means to its purposeful goal.

Hegel's response to this conceptual puzzle once again draws upon a central trope of Christian reflection on divine providence: that divine providence works in and through humanity's passions and individual wills, even redirecting evil deeds towards a good outcome. It receives its paradigmatic formulation from Joseph in Genesis 50:20: "Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good." On Hegel's account, world spirit accomplishes its purposes in and through the very passions, interests, and ideals that seem to run wildly and recklessly across the canvas of history:

> The vast number of volitions, interests, and activities constitutes the *instruments* and means by which the world spirit accomplishes its purpose—raising it to consciousness and making it actual. … All these expressions of individual and public life, in seeking and satisfying *their own* ends, are at the same time the *means* and *instruments of a higher* and wider purpose, which they know nothing of but unconsciously carry out.[68]

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[66] Ibid., 90.
[67] Ibid., 90.
[68] Ibid., 93-94. Emphasis in original.

Hegel famously labels the world spirit's creative and subversive instrumentalization of human passions as "the cunning of reason" (*die List der Vernunft*).[69] He appeals to the case of Julius Caesar for an example of this phenomenon. While Caesar's opposition to his enemies grew out of his individual self-interest and thirst for personal honor and security, the outcome of his actions was the unification of sovereignty in Rome under a single figure, which was itself an important positive development in the overall progress of world history.[70] World-historical individuals are those people whose individual desires and self-interest the world spirit uses to move history towards its final rational end.

In articulating this concept of reconciliation, Hegel draws deeply on the language and concepts of Christian theology. The power of reason's cunning operates as the philosophically modulated version of the power of the cross.[71] Hegel's world-historical individuals embody familiar themes of Christ's incarnation: they are human beings whose individual and finite desires are in sync with the movement of the divine in history and it is through their lives and, in the end, their deaths that reconciliation is conceivable. But unlike the main currents of the Christian tradition, Hegel does not exclusively identify the work of reconciliation with the particular historical events of Christ's incarnation, but rather inscribes that work within the *long durée* of world history. For Hegel, world spirit comes to self-consciousness through the work of reconciliation,

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[69] Ibid., 96 n. 44.
[70] Ibid., 95.
[71] Hodgson, *Shapes of Freedom*, 45-6. "Because cunning has the power of apparent weakness, the metaphor can be stretched further to suggest that the power of cunning is like the power of the cross, where God in human shape dies at the hands of human violence but where God's purpose prevails nonetheless. God 'lets' human beings do as they please, but God's will prevails. The cross represents the great reversal, the counterthrust to the idea. … The cross is a negative sign of God's power in the world, and it is by the negation of negation that spiritual power prevails."

weaving a divine tapestry of freedom by running the shuttle of the divine idea back and forth across the loom of human passions.[72] Reason cunningly redirects the chaotic suffering that marks human history, channeling it towards an intrahistorical eschaton and history's final rational end: the *state* of perfect freedom.

2.2.2.3 Consummation: The Material of Spirit's Actualization

The idea of a nineteenth century German intellectual crafting a providential theory of history that culminates in a vision of the state is deeply worrying when viewed retrospectively in light of the horrors of National Socialism. While important work has been done to discredit simplistic interpretations of Hegel's understanding of the relationship between the divine, history, and the state—such as those that read Hegel as a conservative thinker attempting to divinize the Prussian state or as the fountainhead of National Socialism—exonerating him from these charges does not render Hegel's vision of the state above reproach or alleviate the need to critically interrogate his account.[73] Hegel does not need to be read as an advocate of totalitarianism in order for his views on the relationship between spirit, world history, and the state to be problematic. While Hegel does not blindly divinize the state such that whatever political order establishes itself can claim divine right—one misreading of Hegel's (in)famous claim that "what is rational is actual; and what is actual is rational"—he does develop a theologically-

[72] *LPWH*, 147. This is Hegel's preferred metaphor for explicating the means of spirit's self-actualization in the lectures of 1822/3: "Thus we have here the idea as the totality of ethical freedom. Two elements are salient: first, the idea itself as abstract; and second, the human passions. The two together form the weft and warp in the fabric that world history spreads before us."

[73] T. M. Knox, "Hegel and Prussianism," in *The Hegel Myths and Legends*, ed. Stewart (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1996), 70; Fackenheim, *The Religious Dimension in Hegel's Thought*, 3.

inflected vision of human politics in his lectures, which grows out of his commitment to the framework of divine providence.[74]

In addition to being the site of divine revelation and reconciliation, world history is also the location of the eschatological consummation of spirit through its full self-consciousness, which takes the form of human freedom. More specifically, history aims at humanity's conscious realization of the freedom that has always been its intrinsic possession in principle.[75] It is, as Hegel says, "the *application* of this principle to actuality, the penetration and transformation of worldly conditions by the principle of freedom" that marks "the long process that is history itself."[76] The realization of freedom is the intrahistorical eschaton toward which the world spirit drives.

However, this freedom must have a particular character. It is not a negative freedom, the individual's arbitrary will exercised in the absence of restraint. This freedom is too abstract and not objective, substantial, or concrete enough to represent the culmination of the divine life in history.[77] Hegel understands true freedom, as John Plamenatz has argued, "not as mere absence of constraint but also and above all as the ability to live by principles and in pursuit of aims willingly and deliberately accepted."[78] This account of freedom leads Hegel to create a prominent place for the state within his eschatological schema of the final purpose of the divine in history.

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[74] Hegel, *Elements of The Philosophy of Right*, 20.
[75] Hodgson, *Shapes of Freedom*, 9.
[76] *LPWH*, 88.
[77] Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, 48. "When we hear it said that freedom in general consists in *being able to do as one pleases*, such an idea can only be taken to indicate a complete lack of intellectual culture; for it shows not the least awareness of what constitutes the will which is free in and for itself."
[78] John Plamenatz, "History as the Realization of Freedom," in *Hegel's Political Philosophy: Problems and Perspectives*, ed. Pelczynski (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 45.

For world history to realize the final actualization of spirit through full consciousness of freedom, that freedom must be concretely instantiated in positive forms of communal life. The state is, therefore, the literal *material* of spirit's actualization, in that it allows spirit to take up concrete, objective form within history.[79] By state, Hegel does not mean strictly "the government" or the institutional mechanisms of political authority and rule, but rather the "spiritual totality" of a people's laws, institutions, land, history, culture, and morality. The state expresses the particular spirit of a people—the *Volkgeist*.

Hegel treats the concept of the state most fully in the lectures of 1822/3. There he makes clear that the state he imagines is not based upon a contract that negates freedom, in which individuals trade freedom for security. Rather, the state is the *actualization* of freedom—it provides the conditions and possibilities for humans to be truly free.[80] The state has an objective meaning and purpose because it is drawn into the divine movement of spirit in history: "The interest of reason is that the state, this ethical whole, should exist, and that the singular will should be united with this absolute. … The state does not exist for the sake of its citizens; rather it is the end in and for itself. … The state is the idea as it is present on earth."[81] Hegel articulates the state, not as a subjective human construct, but as the concrete form through which the divine providential governance of history is carried out. Even Alan Patten, a committed proponent of a non-theological, "humanistic" reading of the lectures, admits that the Hegelian vision of the state makes

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[79] *LPWH*, 100.
[80] Ibid., 178. For Hegel's full exposition of the state as the realm of objective freedom, see *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, 275-282.
[81] *LPWH*, 179.

little sense apart from its place within Hegel's wider spiritual meta-narrative: "Human freedom and subjectivity are the correct ideals for thinking about social and political questions ultimately because God wants, or even needs, to be freely known and worshipped."[82] The eschatological goal of history is the state that enables perfect freedom.

The purpose of the foregoing analysis of the conceptual framework of Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* was to establish the presence and shaping influence of a Christian theological grammar at the heart of Hegel's approach to world history. As should now be clear, Hegel models this framework on the Christian doctrine of divine providence, imagining his own reading of world history as finally realizing the potential of the doctrine of providence to provide a lens through which to read the development of the incarnation of the divine in history.[83] In these lectures, Hegel articulates a philosophically revised doctrine of providence structured around divine-historical processes of revelation, reconciliation, and consummation.

However, the articulation of this providential construct is of secondary importance for Hegel. Hegel's chief aim in these lectures is to put this construct to work, using it as a lens through which to read history with unprecedented clarity as the stage

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[82] Alan Patten, *Hegel's Idea of Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 204. Cited in Hodgson, *Shapes of Freedom*, 71.

[83] It should be noted that for Hegel this reading is always *retrospective*. That is to say, Hegel had no pretensions to be able to leverage his reading of history in order to predict the future—thus, his assertion in the *Philosophy of Right* that, "the owl of Minerva begins its flight only with the onset of dusk" (23). Nevertheless, Hegel does seek to exercise the power of philosophy to interpret the past and the present and his particular approach to these tasks carries with it enough trouble of its own, as I shall demonstrate below. Shlomo Avineri aptly captures the ambiguity of Hegel's disavowal of philosophy's relationship to social criticism and the future: "To borrow and invert a phrase from Marx, philosophy cannot change the world, only interpret it; but by its very act of interpretation it changes it, it tells the world that its time is up." Shlomo Avineri, *Hegel's Theory of the Modern State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 130.

upon which the divine comes to self-consciousness. The majority of the lectures are actually dedicated to this latter task of coming to specific interpretive judgments about the relationship between particular events, movements, and peoples and the meta-historical trajectory of progressive revelation, reconciliation, and consummation of the incarnation—and constitution—of the divine life-in-and-as-history.

The sacralization of history is, therefore, one of the central tropes of Hegel's lectures. As Cyril O'Regan suggests, "The eschaton for Hegel is an intrahistorical gestation. If everything is under providential sway, then *everything*, for Hegel, is sacred or holy."[84] Yet O'Regan's conclusion is only partially accurate. For while it is true that Hegel enfolds eschatology into divine providence, rendering history sacred, not *everything*—or, more importantly, *everyone*—participates equally in history. Rather, Hegel's providential reading of history enables the construction of a very *particular* divine historical subject. It is to an analysis of this subject—and the way in which Hegel's particular construal of divine providence enables its construction—that I now turn.

2.3 Reading Providence in Time, Space, and Race: World History and Global Humanity in Hegel's Lectures

In the hands of Hegel, the doctrine of providence became a powerful tool for interpreting world history. As I have argued, in the opening sections of the *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, Hegel constructs the doctrine of providence as a lens through which to read the movement of the divine in history with—what he believes to

[84] O'Regan, *The Heterodox Hegel*, 274. Emphasis added.

be—unprecedented clarity of intellectual vision. However, given that Hegel fashions providence as a hermeneutical lens in this way, what does he actually see when he peers through it? In what remains of this chapter, I seek to explicate the specific interpretation of history and global humanity that emerges from Hegel's application of his providential imagination to the empirical data of history, geography, and anthropology.

In his lecture cycles, Hegel calibrates his providential interpretation of world history around a vision of European man as simultaneously the contemporary site and teleological goal of the intrahistorical processes of revelation, reconciliation, and consummation that constitute the incarnation of the divine in the world. In order to see that this is the case, one must first understand that Hegel imagines world history as unfolding in three dimensions: the temporal, the spatial, and the anthropological. For Hegel, the *temporal* progress of the consciousness of freedom, which defines the trajectory of spirit's movement through world history, is also organized along *spatial* and *anthropological* lines. Indeed, Hegel correlates the progressive unfolding of the divine life in history not just with different historical epochs or *times*, but also with different geographical *spaces*—and the *peoples* that inhabit them. Thus he can just as easily speak of "history" progressing from "east to west" as from past to future.[85]

When interrogated in light of this multi-dimensional conception of world history, it becomes clear that, while Hegel's philosophy of history does indeed sacralize history and humanity, it is in fact a *selective* sacralization. Specifically, Hegel exclusively envisions *European* humanity as the bearers of divine presence in history, viewing

[85] *LPWH*, 201.

European Christian civilization as both the site of complete divine revelation and of the eschatological consummation of the divine life on earth—or, both the condition of possibility for genuine knowledge of the divine and the final end towards which history progresses. In short, Hegel looks through his providential lens and sees European man as the divine subject of sacred history.

In what follows, I will first map Hegel's conception of history as the progressive movement of spirit towards self-consciousness, drawing out its temporal, spatial, and anthropological dimensions. I will then explore Hegel's concrete application of this multi-dimensional conceptual framework to world history, surveying his differential assessment of the fittingness of different regions of the world and their inhabitants for participation in the divine world-historical life of spirit, ranging from those places and peoples who are totally cut off from participation in the divine—Africa and the Americas and their inhabitants—to those in whom the divine fully manifests itself—Western Europe and its inhabitants.

2.3.1 The Temporal, Spatial and Anthropological Dimensions of World History

Considering that his topic is self-avowedly *history*, Hegel spends a surprising amount of time discussing *geography* and *anthropology* in his lectures. Editors of the *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* have not always known what to do with this expansive material, which can understandably seem somewhat out of place. More often than not, the editors of the lectures have chosen to separate these portions of Hegel's lectures from the main body of the text—either placing it between the introduction and the division of subjects, as found in the editions of Eduard Gans and Karl Hegel, or

attaching it as an appendix, as in the editions of Lasson and Hoffmeister.[86] Unfortunately, this decision functionally solidifies the appearance of a significant disjunction between the temporal and spatial/anthropological dimensions of Hegel's account of the progress of spirit.

While this disjunction—if genuine—would provide a convenient way to vindicate Hegel's account of historical progress from its guilt-by-association with his account of geographical and anthropological progress, it has become increasingly clear in the wake of the publication of critical editions of the manuscripts and transcriptions of Hegel's lectures that Hegel himself would not have supported such a bifurcation. Rather, Hegel explicitly and systematically connects history, geography, and anthropology into a single, seamless theory of the development of spirit in the succession of world-historical states/peoples.[87]

Hegel defends his decision to systematically treat geography and anthropology as inextricable features of his philosophical account of world history by linking it to his axiom that the historical emergence of spirit is the result of a reconciliation of the divine and the natural: "World history is spirit in the element of worldliness; thus we must also recognize the natural and the corporeal in it. The natural and the spiritual form one shape, and this is history."[88] Because world history results from the confluence of spirit *and*

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[86] Hodgson, *Shapes of Freedom*, 80.
[87] For a similar argument, see Robert Bernasconi, "With What Must the Philosophy of World History Begin? *On the Racial Basis of Hegel's Eurocentrism*," *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 22 (2000): 172. "[Hegel] does not simply append his views about non-European peoples to his philosophy; these views are elevated above the level of mere prejudice by the logical framework which helps sustain them and to which they in turn lend support."
[88] *LPWH*, 198.

nature, Hegel argues that a philosophical account of world history would be incomplete without some account of the latter's world-historical role. Precisely to avoid this would-be lacuna in his theory, Hegel offers an account of the geographical basis of world history—"the external natural setting" of the state:

> World history, as we have said, is a series of spiritual shapes that lead to the actualization of the principles of spirit and that end in such a way that spirit grasps itself. A necessary principle is allotted to each world-historical people. These principles have a necessary succession in *time*, and likewise a concrete *spatial* specificity, a geographical position. So we speak here about geography in world history.[89]

Hegel indexes the successive principles of spirit—which appear on the stage of world history incarnate in particular peoples—both temporally and spatially, as a function of both spirit and nature. As Hodgson notes, "Geography adds a spatial coordinate to the temporal coordinate by which each people is analyzed."[90] Hegel suggests that this method of triangulation—a spiritual GPS of sorts—enables him to chart a complete picture of the differential relationship of the divine to various parts of the globe and of the human community.

In Hegel's account, geography functions as the natural baseline of spirit's development. Spirit takes its first step on the journey to self-consciousness by positing itself over and against the immediacy of nature. Nature's role in the process of world history is both relatively preliminary and vital. Nature provides the original basis—the preliminary conditions and possibilities—for the development of spirit in world history. Hegel adopts an agricultural metaphor to clarify his point: "History indeed lives on the

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[89] Ibid., 191. Emphasis added.
[90] Hodgson, *Shapes of Freedom*, 81.

soil of the natural; but this is only one aspect, and the higher aspect is that of spirit. Therefore nature is an element of lesser influence."[91] Nature functions like the soil in which spirit grows—either hampering or encouraging spirit's growth depending on its quality. Just as the quality of the soil is not the only determinative factor in the growth of crops, so nature does not exert a particularly strong influence upon the growth of spirit.

However, Hegel qualifies this point immediately after making it, noting that, in extreme cases, nature plays a limiting function in relationship to spirit. These exceptions occur when extreme natural conditions amplify nature's strength to the point at which a people cannot separate themselves from their immediate natural existence. For these peoples, spiritual development is simply not possible. To extend Hegel's agricultural metaphor, one could say that while there are a whole range of soils in which seeds can successfully develop, there are certain soils that are so poor that no seed, no matter how well cared for, can grow. The extreme depravity of the soil simply overwhelms all the other factors. Hegel identifies climate as the independent variable that determines the relative strength of nature in relationship to spirit: "Neither the frigid nor the tropical zones create world-historical peoples, for these extremes constitute such a powerful natural force that human beings are unable to move about freely or acquire adequate means by which to pursue higher spiritual interests." The peoples who inhabit these geographic regions are "under the thumb of nature and cannot separate themselves from it. The natural force is so great that the spiritual aspect remains in identity with it and thus cannot position itself over against the natural." [92] According to Hegel, these peoples who

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[91] *LPWH*, 191.
[92] Ibid., 191, 192, 192.

are oppressed by nature cannot participate in world history. Thus, ironically, world history is not actually *world* history.

2.3.2 Narrating World History: Hegel on Geography and Anthropology

Hegel's mapping of world history onto global space excludes Africa from history entirely, locates Asia at the sparse beginnings of history, identifies the progress of history with the geographical movement from Asia to Europe, positions the climax of history in Western Europe—the land of the Reformation and the Enlightenment—and, revealingly, equivocates about the significance of the New World for world history. However, a close inspection of these portions of Hegel's lectures reveals that Hegel attempts to correlate historical progress, not simply with certain geographical spaces, but more specifically with the peoples who inhabit them. Indeed, Hegel's spatial indexing of the temporal is simultaneously an endeavor in comparative anthropology. Reading Hegel's exploration of the geographical basis of world history in light of his assessment of different peoples' fitness for participation in world history reveals that Hegel envisions a global-historical and sociopolitical order calibrated, not, in fact, around the *space* of Europe, but around a particular kind of human being: Western European man.

Hegel entirely excludes sub-Saharan Africa—"Africa proper"—from world history.[93] In Hegel's judgment, Africa's "points of contact [with history] are minimal." Africa is a fundamentally static space, standing entirely apart from the dynamic flow of world history. It "remains in its placed, unmotivated, self-enclosed sensuality and has not yet entered into history."[94] For this reason, Hegel concludes that Africa "has no history

[93] Ibid., 196.
[94] Ibid., 196, 197.

… and need not be mentioned again. For it is an unhistorical continent, with no movement or development of its own."[95] Africa—which Hegel repeatedly calls a "continent," despite the fact that he does not include Egypt and North Africa within its bounds, providing, as they would, clear counter-examples to his theses about Africa—simply lies outside the threshold of world history itself.[96]

It is only in Asia, therefore, that one encounters the primitive beginnings of world history. Hegel calls it the "world of dawning (*Aufgang*)," which connotes both its association with the rising of the sun in the east and the beginning point of the world-historical process.[97] In Asia, spirit is first able to posit itself in distinction from the immediacy of nature, and thus the first step towards spirit's self-consciousness occurs with the emergence of the first state.[98] However, this first state—"essentially that of the Chinese Empire"—reflects only the "infancy of history," because the ethical life (*sittlichkeit*) of the imperial state exists in antithesis to the individual subjectivities of its citizens: in Asia, only "one is free."[99] Hegel verges on ruling the "Far East" out of history entirely, settling on the judgment that these earliest dawnings of history constitute an "unhistorical history." World history then progresses eastward across the Asian continent through the Middle East—where, in Islam, "the antithesis has arrived at its greatest freedom"—to the "Near East," which is "oriented toward Europe."[100]

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[95] Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: Introduction*, trans. Nisbet, 190.
[96] Bernasconi, "Hegel at the Court of the Ashanti," 43; Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: Introduction*, trans. Nisbet, 190. Hodgson confirms the presence of these sentiments in the critical texts of 1830-1, which have not yet been published, in *Shapes of Freedom*, 85.
[97] *LPWH*, 198.
[98] Ibid., 205.
[99] Ibid., 206, 87.
[100] Ibid., 206, 200.

Europe, for Hegel, is both the "center" and "the endpoint" of world history. However, the "heart of Europe is the western part," which includes Germany, France, and England.[101] It is here, among the specifically Germanic peoples of Western Europe, that one can find free spirit subsisting finally for itself in "the full maturity of spirit."[102]

Revealingly, however, Hegel is unsure of what to make of the New World in relationship to world history—particularly with respect to North America. On the one hand, the New World "has shown itself to be much feebler than the old world."[103] America is "a new, feeble, powerless world"—hardly an auspicious staging ground for the development of spirit. Yet at the same time, "America can have the aspect of a new land, a land of the future." Indeed, Napoleon—as well-respected an authority as any for Hegel—is "supposed to have said that the old world wearied him." The United States is "a country of becoming, of the future."[104] On a first reading, Hegel seems unsure of whether to locate the New World outside of history, with Africa, or to see it as the land of the future. His ambivalence has everything to do with the types of human beings that one identifies with this geographic space. Indeed, this moment of confusion in Hegel's geographical analysis betrays the influence of an anthropological variable upon his spatial calculations. Upon closer inspection, Hegel does not confine his mapping of world history simply to geographical space in accord with climate, but bases his analysis on a comparative anthropological vision of global humanity.

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[101] Ibid., 198, 201.
[102] Ibid., 208.
[103] Ibid., 193.
[104] Ibid., 193, 193, 193, 194.

In an article exploring Hegel's views on the indigenous peoples of the Americas, Michael Hoffheimer displays the paradox in Hegel's thought about the place of the New World and its peoples in world history. He argues, on the one hand, that Hegel "amalgamated America and Africa in locating both entirely outside history."[105] However, Hoffheimer recognizes that this conclusion is difficult to square with Hegel's assertion that America is "the land of the future." Hoffheimer largely sidesteps this aporia in Hegel's account, suggesting, "Whatever Hegel meant by calling America 'the land of the future,' this future did not include American Indians."[106] I want to suggest that Hoffheimer's pithy retort reveals—perhaps unwittingly—a fissure in the "geographical" basis of Hegelian world history and exposes an underlying anthropological schema that guides Hegel's analysis.

In Hegel's account, the *land* or *geographical space* of the Americas does not have a fixed position in relationship to spirit. He speaks of it, on the one hand, as lying outside of history entirely, with Africa, and, on the other hand, as the land of the future. Instead, Hegel ties his analysis of the Americas to their inhabitants: the indigenous peoples of the Americas lie outside of history, while the rising Euro-American civilization of North America earns the title of "land of the future." Hegel notes:

> America is a new, feeble, powerless world. Lions, tigers, and crocodiles are feebler there than in Africa, and the same is true of human beings. The original inhabitants of the West Indies have died out. Some of the tribes of North America have disappeared and some have retreated and generally declined, so that we see that the latter lack the strength to join the North Americans in the Free States.[107]

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[105] Hoffheimer, "Hegel, Race, Genocide," 35.
[106] Ibid., 37. This is not to suggest that Hoffheimer's analysis is somehow flawed. He chooses to focus his attention on Hegel's comments about the indigenous peoples of North America rather than on this aporia in Hegel's geographical theory.
[107] *LPWH*, 193.

The original inhabitants of North America, unable to join the fledgling project that is the United States, do not participate in world history in Hegel's estimation. Indeed, in some manuscripts, Hegel goes so far as to justify the genocide of the indigenous populations of the Americas as an outworking of the extreme differential in spiritual development between themselves and the Europeans. Native culture, suggests Hegel, "had to perish as soon as the spirit approached it."[108] While Hegel is under no illusions about the fact that contact with Europe proved deadly for these populations, his explanation exonerates European colonial practices of all responsibility for the mass suffering of the indigenes: "Few descendants of the original inhabitants survive, for nearly seven million people have been wiped out. … Their degeneration indicates that they do not have the strength to join the independent North American states. Culturally inferior nations such as these are gradually eroded through contact with more advanced nations."[109] The European colonists were simply unable to "amalgamate" with them.[110]

However, while the indigenous peoples of the Americas embody the New World's pre- or a-historical existence, the presence of peoples of European descent in the New World is the principle piece of evidence for Hegel's speculation that America may be the land of the future: "They bring with them the whole treasure of European culture and self-awareness without the burdens that the European states impose on individuals, without re-encountering the hardships they have left behind."[111] In short, Hegel describes

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[108] Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: Introduction,* trans. Nisbet, 163.
[109] Ibid., 163; Hoffheimer, "Hegel, Race, Genocide," 37-38.
[110] Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: Introduction,* trans. Nisbet, 163.
[111] *LPWH*, 193.

the world-historical location of the same geographic region in nearly opposite ways, depending upon the type of people who call it home, suggesting that it is in fact Hegel's *anthropological* commitments that provide the determinative variable which fixes America's place in Hegel's global economy of spirit.

While it reveals itself most clearly in his treatment of the New World, Hegel's deep interest in comparative anthropology manifests itself throughout the portion of his lectures concerned with geography. In his treatment of Africa, Hegel boldly asserts, "Anyone who wishes to study the most terrible manifestations of human nature will find them in Africa."[112] Africans are "under the thumb" of nature so completely that they have no place in the story of spirit's progress in history:

> Man as we find him in Africa has not progressed beyond his immediate existence. As soon as man emerges as a human being, he stands in opposition to nature, and it is this alone which makes him a human being. But if he has merely made a distinction between himself and nature, he is still at the first stage of development: he is dominated by passion, and is nothing more than a savage.[113]

Hegel's account of African peoples defines them principally in terms of supposedly rampant and unrestrained practices of cannibalism, fetishistic religion, and human slavery.[114]

As those peoples most thoroughly dominated by nature, Africans provide the anthropological baseline or "control group" against which other peoples can be evaluated to discern their position relative to spirit.[115] It is not just African *space*, but African

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[112] Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: Introduction,* trans. Nisbet, 190.
[113] Ibid., 177.
[114] Ibid., 174-190.
[115] Bernasconi, "Hegel at the Court of the Ashanti," 51: "Hegel's account of Africa served as a null-point or base-point to anchor what followed."

people, that Hegel positions outside of history. Indeed, like his treatment of North America, Hegel undermines the idea that he is engaged in a strictly "geographical" mapping of the trajectory of spirit. This becomes clear from the way that he ties any faint hope for African progress to contact with European *peoples*, as opposed to European *spaces*. In his Berlin lectures on the *Philosophy of Spirit*, Hegel notes that Africans have surprisingly demonstrated a capacity for culture through the reception of European Christianity, which has given them at least preliminary access to the consciousness of freedom that is the content of spirit's incarnation in the world.[116] Thus it is contact with European people—and not migration to European spaces—through which the divine is mediated to peoples of sub-Saharan Africa, Hegel's iteration of the white man's "spiritual" burden.[117]

While Hegel fixes the original inhabitants of Africa and the Americas as the negative limit of his global anthropological vision, he envisions Western European humanity as its apex. He is quite explicit about the Christian eschatological significance of European civilization: "Up to now, the periods [of world history] involved relating to an earlier and a later world-historical people. But now, with the Christian religion, the principle of the world is complete; *the day of judgment* has dawned for it."[118] The "Christian world" of Western Europe is, according to Hegel, "inwardly consummate," which means that it is now the exclusive site of any further developments in the life of

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[116] Cited in Bernasconi, "Hegel at the Court of the Ashanti," 61 n. 83.
[117] Rudyard Kipling, "The White Man's Burden," in *100 Poems Old and New* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 111-113; Bernasconi, "Hegel at the Court of the Ashanti," 61.
[118] *LPWH*, 463. Emphasis added.

the world spirit. Just as history moves spatially—from "east to west"—in Hegel's account, so Hegel's eschaton is not only a *time*, but also a *place*.

The fact that history attains its spatial-anthropological eschaton prior to its temporal endpoint leaves Hegel with an untidy theoretical loose end to tie up. Hegel attempts to explain this disjunction between the temporal and spatial endpoints of history by suggesting that all relationships between Europe and the outside world that occur after spirit comes to rest upon the former can only be ones in which that outside world "is intrinsically overcome."[119] For Hegel, spirit has come to full maturity and perfection in Western European civilization in such a way that European peoples are now the mediators of divine presence to the rest of humanity: "The Christian world has circumnavigated the globe and dominates it. For Europeans the world is round, and what is not yet dominated is either not worth the effort, of no value to rule, or yet destined to be ruled. Outward relationships no longer constitute epochs, are no longer the determinative factor; the essential revolutions occur inwardly."[120] While the divine becoming of spirit in history continues to unfold temporally, world history's geographic and anthropological trajectories have reached their eschatological *telos* in Western Europe. The previous dynamism of spirit is replaced by a condition of stasis in which European Christian civilization becomes the final bearer of the incarnation of the divine in the world.

In summary, I interpret Hegel as conceptualizing world history as a progressive, teleological process of the revelation, reconciliation, and consummation of the divine life

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[119] Ibid., 463-4.
[120] Ibid., 464.

in and as history, which unfolds along three axes: the temporal, the spatial, and the anthropological. Hegel thus exemplifies a phenomenon that Judith Butler has diagnosed elsewhere, in which certain conceptions of "temporality" are "organized along spatial lines" in such a way that "Europe and its state apparatus" become "the avatar of both freedom and modernity."[121] Butler argues that European conceptions of freedom—the very subject of Hegel's account of world history—are often parasitic upon an implicit cultural ground, which functions for those concepts "as both transcendental condition and teleological aim."[122] While Butler articulates these ideas with a concern for the way in which progressive sexual politics have been too easily coopted by far-right, Islamophobic, anti-immigrant politicians in places like France and the Netherlands, her analysis quite clearly applies to the theoretical structure of Hegelian world history as well. In *The Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, Hegel traces the hand of providence across time, space, and humanity, mapping the movement of the divine in and through history, geography, and peoples until it comes to rest on the Christian peoples of Western Europe.

2.4 Conclusion

Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* exemplifies the problem that this study has set out to address. He formulates an understanding of divine providence calibrated around a vision of European humanity as the divine subject of history—the final manifestation of divine presence in history and the mediator of that presence to the

[121] Judith Butler, "Sexual Politics, Torture, and Secular Time," *The British Journal of Sociology* 59, no. 1 (2008): 1-2.
[122] Ibid., 2.

rest of the world. Hegel reads the movement of the divine in history as a rational, teleological operation of historical, geographical, and anthropological progress, imagining Western Europe as an eschatological state of freedom in opposition to those places and peoples who remain trapped in mere nature and deprived of relationship to the divine. Simply put, Hegel resources the doctrine of providence as a global hermeneutical lens through which he conceptualizes European humanity as the center and endpoint of the world-historical drama, enabling him to quite literally rationalize the genocide of the indigenous populations of the Americas and render an apology for the African slave trade as having had a civilizing effect upon African peoples. By way of conclusion, I want to flag three particular features of Hegel's understanding of providence that enable him to press the doctrine into service to aide in the construction of a vision of European man as the divine subject of providential history. These will serve as key points for further theological interrogation in the chapters to come.

First, Hegel inscribes his understanding of divine providence within a heavily revised understanding of the relationship of creation, fall, and redemption, leading him to misidentify the condition of creaturely human existence as a temporary condition to be overcome through the world-historical process. As has been already established, Hegel identifies the Christian theological admonition towards modesty in estimations of humanity's epistemological participation in God's rule over the *kosmos* as a needlessly self-abnegating expression of "pious humility" that is no longer relevant in light of the consummation of the life of spirit in European humanity.[123] For Hegel, providence

[123] *LPWH*, 85.

becomes a way of superseding the finitude of creaturely human historical judgment and vision, enabling certain human subjects—including Hegel himself—to acquire a divine perspective on history.

It is not surprising, therefore, that Hegel spends several manuscript pages discrediting the idea of an "original paradisiacal human condition" prior to the fall. Because he imparts a teleological and progressive character to divine providence, Hegel has to go to great lengths to re-narrate the relationships of creation, fall, and redemption in light of his own rational construction of spirit's emergence from the immediacy of natural consciousness. Hegel addresses this problem in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, suggesting that the fall must be regarded as "divine necessity" and therefore that creation cannot be thought of as an original state of perfection, but rather as only "one single moment in the divine totality … that is not absolute and truthful."[124] Hegel's dominant metaphor for the condition of creaturely finitude is that of the child.[125] The child's state of youthful innocence is one to be eventually overcome, rather than embraced as an end in itself. Similarly, humanity's status as finite and limited creatures that do not possess the ability to read the movement of the divine in world history from a "God's-eye view" is a temporary condition to be overcome through processes of divine revelation and reconciliation in history that, when consummated, release humanity's historical judgment from the finite conditions of creaturely existence and bind it to the very life of the divine itself.

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[124] Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 2, 239-249.
[125] *LPWH*, 145; Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 2, 244.

Second, Hegel collapses the history of creation into the history of salvation, thereby constructing an account of humanity's journey through world history as a soteriological process of progressive divinization that enables humanity to overcome the previously identified limits of creaturely finitude. In so doing, Hegel effectively collapses the theological boundaries between providence and soteriology—infusing the latter directly into the former. As Patricia Altenbernd Johnson suggests, for Hegel, "An eternal history of Absolute Spirit is not a separate history that falls into another world. It is not the history of a divine world that has a distinct temporal and spatial framework, separate from the world of historical experience."[126] Hegel radically closes the distance between providence and eschatology, making possible a sacralization of the historical and political as bearers of ultimate significance. This sets the stage for a soteriological interpretation of world history that correlates the movement of the divine with conceptions of temporal, spatial, and anthropological progress.

Finally, Hegel displaces Jesus of Nazareth from the center of the doctrine of providence, relativizing the significance of the incarnation as the paradigmatic instance of God's action in world history. Divine providence thus becomes little more than a formal teleological construct, which can be calibrated to a vision of a divine subject of history who is not the Jew from Nazareth. In Hegel's hands, European humanity replaces Jesus of Nazareth as the paradigmatic site of divine revelation, reconciliation, and consummation. Joseph McCarney describes—albeit approvingly—the theological

[126] Patricia Altenbernd Johnson, "Comment for Walter Jaeschke," in *History and System: Hegel's Philosophy of History*, ed. Perkins (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1984), 117.

operation that I am suggesting lies at the heart of Hegel's elevation of European man as the subject of the incarnation:

> [Hegel] conspicuously fails to endorse what is surely the simple essence of the matter for ordinary Christians, the unique status of Jesus as the incarnate second person of the Trinity. His role for Hegel is that of making manifest a universal truth rather than of personally embodying a singular one. Jesus is the emblem of and witness to the unity of the divine and the human, not its sole exemplar and meeting point. … A shift of perspective on the traditional Christian doctrine of incarnation may be said to have taken place, one that subverts it utterly. Instead of being a doctrine of God taking on human form, it becomes the revelation of humanity as the highest form of expression of the divine, thus turning the central drama of Christian theism against its origins.[127]

McCarney's account, while helpful, fails to fully identify what is at stake in Hegel's theological transformation of the doctrine of the incarnation because he sees Hegel replacing Christ with an abstract "general humanity." Yet as I have argued, Hegel's understanding of the incarnation of the divine in history does not culminate in a vision of *abstract* "humanity" as "the highest form of expression of the divine." Hegel progresses beyond abstraction in his anthropological sublation of the incarnation of Jesus Christ within the formal framework of providential world history, identifying one particular figuration of humanity to replace Jesus Christ at the apex of the Christian theological system: European man—the "center" and "endpoint" of the divine world-historical drama.[128] Hegel's interpretation of divine providence inserts modern European man in the place of Jesus of Nazareth, as the "highest form of expression of the divine" incarnate in world history.

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[127] McCarney, *Hegel on History*, 48.
[128] *LPWH*, 198.

In sum, Hegel's transformation of the doctrine of providence into a global hermeneutic of temporal, spatial, and anthropological progress pivots around his reconfiguration of the relationship between creation, fall, and redemption, the relationship between creation history and salvation, and the relationship between providence and the incarnation. The first reconfiguration manifests in a soteriological vision of flight or escape from the finitude and contingency of creatureliness. The second reconfiguration enables Hegel to imagine this flight from creatureliness as a form of intrahistorical, progressive divinization of the human subject. The third reconfiguration recapitulates the results of the first two and brings them to a climax inside of a Christological vision of European humanity as the paradigmatic incarnation of the divine in world history and global humanity. The doctrine of providence provides the governing theological trope within which creation, incarnation, soteriology, and eschatology are sublated—not done away with, but relativized and transcended in light of the larger whole. The doctrine so dominates his theological imagination that it subsumes all others within itself.

In his lectures on world history, Hegel utilizes the doctrine of providence as a means to escape from the creaturely, contingent, and finite character of human political judgments about divine meaning and purpose in history and politics, and in so doing constructs European humanity as the site of divine revelation, reconciliation, and eschatological consummation, binding the incarnation of the divine in the world to white European peoples. Hegel understands himself to be bringing the Christian theological concept of divine providence to its final destiny by rearticulating it as a philosophical

account of the rational unfolding of spirit in world history in which, as Denise Ferreira da Silva suggests, "reason finally displaced the divine ruler and author to become the sovereign ruler of man."[129]

Indeed, *The Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* provide a paradigmatic example of what Denise Ferreira da Silva describes as "the productive role the racial plays in post-Enlightenment conditions."[130] In Hegel's construction of a global anthropological hierarchy, it is the active, positive movement of a teleological reason/providence in the world that culminates in the production of European identity as the site of universality and freedom. Thus, it is not the case that Hegel harbors a crude racial prejudice that causes him to exclude "the others of Europe" from this site—as if he deviated from his true philosophical commitments in order to maintain his personal prejudice. Rather, the production of a hierarchically differentiated humanity constitutes the process whereby the universal itself is produced—there can be no *telos* without the teleological apparatus. As da Silva suggests, "While the tools of universal reason … produce and regulate human conditions, in each global region it establishes mentally (morally and intellectually) distinct kinds of human beings, namely, the self-determined subject and its outer-determined others, the ones whose minds are subjected to their *natural* (in the scientific sense) conditions."[131] Racial difference thus emerges as "an effect of the play of universal reason" itself. Hegel's lectures exemplify this enactment of differentiation, not as an act characterized by prejudicial exclusion, but as a

[129] Da Silva, *Toward a Global Idea of Race*, 2.
[130] Ibid., xiii.
[131] Ibid., xiii.

“constructive” way of imagining human difference as the outcome of a divine/rational process that culminates in a vision of the European as the eschatological subject of universality and freedom.

Chapter 3

Karl Barth:
Divine Providence Between East and West

By 1945, just over a century after Hegel delivered his *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* for the last time, the providential world-historical order that he had envisioned therein lay in ruins in the aftermath of two world wars and the Holocaust. European humanity, who was supposed to have embodied the consummation of the divine life in human history, had instead spent three decades destroying itself. With the detonation of the first nuclear weapon on July 16 of that year—in a test that was ironically code-named "Trinity"—the eschatological day of judgment that Hegel had heralded seemed more likely to manifest itself in the final annihilation of human civilization than in its consummation. If, as Hegel had thought, spirit had reached its full maturity in Europe, then it seemed that it might well have been a demonic spirit, intent on ushering in the end of history by condemning global humanity to nuclear obliteration.

Furthermore, by the middle of the twentieth century it had become clear that Hegel had not *only* misjudged the place of European man in world history, as the supposedly "ahistorical" peoples of Africa, Asia, and the Americas had refused to be confined to the world-historical position that Hegel had assigned them. Hegel's verdict that European humanity had definitively "dominated" and "overcome" the rest of the globe had proven premature, as an increasing chorus of revolutionary voices emerging from global anti-colonial movements were willing to testify.[1] As the first half of the

[1] *LPWH*, 463-64.

twentieth century drew to a close, the world order that Hegel had confidently articulated—barely a century earlier—as the absolute, rational, final, and *divine* purpose of history had collapsed, along with the doctrine of providence that had animated it.

Yet no sooner had the old European world order been eulogized than new candidates emerged to replace it from the East and West. Following the cessation of hostilities in 1945, Soviet Russia and the United States—each trumpeting its own providentialist rhetoric—competed for the right to oversee the establishment of a new world order. The experience of Hungary in the nineteen-forties bears particularly clear witness to this final collapse of the old order and the consequent struggle over the new that dominated European politics in that decade.[2]

Barely two and a half decades after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Hungary found itself suffering through the final months of the Second World War as the last ally of Nazi Germany. Hungary paid the price for its loyalty to the Germans through the death and destruction of its peoples, infrastructure, and lands during Hitler's increasingly desperate attempts to stave off defeat. As the Soviet army slowly advanced west towards Budapest in the last months of 1944, the retreating German and Hungarian militaries destroyed much of the country's industrial, commercial, and transportation infrastructure in order to prevent it from falling into Russian hands. In early 1945, both Hitler and Stalin became personally invested in the siege of Budapest, as victory became as much a political objective as a military one. Hitler in particular became increasingly

[2] My account of post-war Hungarian history is particularly indebted to Deborah S. Cornelius's *Hungary in World War II: Caught in the Cauldron* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011) and Peter Kenez's *Hungary from the Nazis to the Soviets: The Establishment of the Communist Regime in Hungary, 1944-1948* (Cambridge University Press, 2006).

stubborn in his desire to hold the city at all costs, repeatedly ignoring the pleas of his commanders to retreat.[3] His obstinacy produced catastrophic results: 23,624 civilians died in the siege. When Budapest fell, its German and Hungarian defenders sustained ninety-percent casualties in just five days.[4] Following the war, Hungary's woes continued. With the death of nearly one million Hungarians out of a total population of less than ten million and the loss of another half a million of the country's skilled laborers and bureaucrats to emigration, the country was ill-suited for the task of reconstruction. Massive reparation payments collided with skyrocketing inflation, leaving the country destitute.[5]

With the cessation of armed conflict, the battle for control over Hungary moved to the ballot box. Underestimating Hungarian resentment of the brutal Soviet conquest, Stalin allowed democratic elections to take place in October and November of 1945. The Communist party won only seventeen percent of the vote and was awarded just four of the eighteen cabinet posts in the subsequent coalition government.[6] On February 1, 1946, Hungary became a republic and elected Zoltán Tildy, a Calvinist minister, as president.

The Communists, however, were undeterred by their electoral defeat. Backed by the Hungarian military and police—and supported by the Soviet occupiers—they quickly began eliminating their political opponents through forced deportations.[7] New elections were held in August of 1947. Helped along by Communist interference, they yielded a

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[3] Cornelius, *Hungary in World War II*, 370.
[4] Ibid., 373.
[5] Ibid., 384, 402. At its highest, the daily inflation rate was 158,486 percent.
[6] Ibid., 398.
[7] Ibid., 399, 412.

second coalition government tilted decisively in favor of the Communists. Following the election, the Communists consolidated full control of the country, nationalizing the banks in September 1947, all factories employing more than one hundred workers in the spring of 1948, and the schools in June 1948.[8] By the elections of 1949, voters were presented with a single list of Communist candidates and the Communists, not surprisingly, won ninety-five percent of the vote. In August of 1949, a near duplicate of the Soviet constitution was adopted and the country became the People's Republic of Hungary.

Given all that took place in Hungary from 1944 to 1949, one could be forgiven for overlooking a comparatively minor event that occurred in the midst of the violent collapse of the old order and the struggle to establish its successor during these tumultuous post-war years: the visit of a Swiss theologian during the spring of 1948. At the invitation of the Hungarian Reformed Church, Karl Barth, along with his colleague Charlotte von Kirschbaum, spent several weeks traveling throughout the struggling, conflict-torn country, delivering lectures, preaching sermons, and meeting with leaders from the church and theological academy. As they traveled and worked, Barth and Kirschbaum were surrounded by evidence of the devastation of the war and the rapidly deteriorating political situation. Barth preached on Good Friday in the "Great Church" in Debrecen, which, he noted, "had just been restored after sustaining heavy bomb damage."[9] He met with President Zoltán Tildy, the former Calvinist minister, mere months before Tildy was forced to resign from office and placed under house arrest for

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[8] Ibid., 414-417.
[9] Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts*, trans. John Bowden (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1975), 354.

virtually the remainder of his life. He spent an entire morning in Budapest holding a public question and answer session, during which he responded to questions about the concept of the constitutional state, the relationship between Romans 13 and Revelation 13, the proper Christian attitude to a State that pretends to tolerate the church for purely instrumental reasons, and the permissibility of joining a political party in order to keep one's job. As Barth noted afterwards, some of the questions were "uncannily specific."[10]

Fresh from this experience in Hungary, Barth returned to Basel in the early summer of 1948 and immediately began work on the next installment of the *Church Dogmatics*—volume III/3—which prominently featured Barth's account of the doctrine of providence in §48, "The Doctrine of Providence, Its Basis and Form," and §49, "God the Father as Lord of His Creature." It took Barth almost exactly a year to finish *Church Dogmatics* III/3, which included, in addition to the doctrine of providence, his discussions of Nothingness and of angels, demons, and the kingdom of heaven.

While working on this part-volume between the summers of 1948 and 1949, Barth found himself engaged in high-profile discussions of the new world order beginning to take shape through the tug of war between the Eastern and Western superpowers. He gave the opening address at the inaugural meeting of the World Council of Churches, became embroiled in heated public disputes with both Reinhold Niebuhr and Emil Brunner over his refusal to condemn Communism, and composed his famous essay on the church's response to Cold War politics, "The Church Between East and West," which made him a persona non-grata in many theological and political circles in

[10] Ibid., 354.

Europe and the United States. I recount this historical background at the outset of this chapter because, as will become evident, the significance of Barth's doctrine of providence can only be understood when it is placed within this specific context.

In this chapter, using tools of interpretation derived from the discipline of intellectual history, I will argue that Barth composed his doctrine of providence in *Church Dogmatics* III/3 as a means of engaging with a European world that was only just beginning to grapple with the historical and cultural ramifications of the Holocaust and the Second World War as it found itself caught up in a new ideological conflict of global proportions.[11] I will demonstrate that Barth, like Hegel before him, deploys the doctrine of providence as a conceptual lens through which to interpret history, politics, and humanity in light of an understanding of the nature and shape of God's relationship to the history of the cosmos between creation and eschaton. Yet the particular accounts of divine providence worked out by Hegel and Barth could scarcely be more different.

As I have argued previously, Hegel's concept of providence emerges as a sublation of the doctrine of the incarnation within an abstract, teleological theory of historical, geographical, and anthropological progress, culminating in a vision of western European man as the soteriological center and eschatological endpoint of world history. Barth casts his own doctrine of providence in radical antithesis to this Hegelian vision, offering an alternative theological exposition of the relationship between divine

[11] Barth's efforts place him within a wider stream of European intellectual reflection on the meaning and consequences of the catastrophic events of the first half of the twentieth century for European civilization. For more on this wider intellectual current within which Barth was moving, see Anson Rabinach, *In the Shadow of Catastrophe: German Intellectuals between Apocalypse and Enlightenment* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); A. Dirk Moses *German Intellectuals and the Nazi Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

providence, history, and humanity centered upon the God revealed in the covenant with Israel and the incarnation of the Jewish human being Jesus of Nazareth. While Hegel wields the doctrine of providence as a conceptual resource through which to forge a vision of Western man as the subject of history, Barth bases his own doctrine of providence on an alternative vision of Jesus Christ as the center and *telos* of world history. In sum, Barth's doctrine of providence contains a radical critique of the very theological processes by which Hegel was able to theorize the divinization of Western humanity.

However, it must be said at the outset of this investigation that this interpretation of Barth's doctrine of providence does not arise self-evidently from the pages of *Church Dogmatics* III/3. This is due to the fact that Barth intentionally minimized explicit references to contemporary events in writing the *Church Dogmatics*, preferring to address political issues through the use of oblique and indirect reference. In this chapter, I will argue that, in order to overcome this interpretive challenge created by Barth's deliberate use of strategies of oblique and indirect reference, it is necessary to develop an intertextual interpretation of *Church Dogmatics* III/3. In addition to the *Church Dogmatics*, Barth produced a staggering quantity of occasional lectures, sermons, letters, and essays that directly and explicitly engaged the political and cultural issues of his day. Careful analysis of these materials gives the contemporary reader a window into Barth's political context at any given time in his life, providing a hermeneutical key for interpreting the political significance of his dogmatic writings. To grasp the political import of Barth's doctrine of providence, therefore, it is necessary to read it in

conversation with the other, more explicitly political writings that he produced while working on *Church Dogmatics* III/3 between the summers of 1948 and 1949.

When properly contextualized in light of Barth's perspective on the political events of his day, his doctrine of providence can be understood as a critique of a distorted understanding of Christian identity, proclamation, and witness which Barth held responsible for the rise of National Socialism and which he worried was reincarnating itself in the emerging conflict between East and West. Therefore, Barth's Christological reformulation of the doctrine of providence in *Church Dogmatics* III/3 is not simply a dogmatic reclamation of Christian orthodoxy from his liberal theological predecessors. It is also an attempt to articulate a radically Christological doctrine of providence that will be able to challenge, interrogate, and subvert the pseudo-Christian providential discourses of world-governance that lay at the heart of National Socialism and which threatened to be reborn in the Western capitalist order's opposition to Soviet Russia.

In what follows, I will defend this interpretation of Barth's doctrine of providence in three stages. First, I will outline the intertextual methodology adopted in this chapter in light of similar conversations within contemporary Barth scholarship in section 3.1. My approach shares much with those who have attempted to draw out the connections between Barth's theology and his political and cultural contexts, but attempts to be more careful and systematic in establishing those connections. Rather than trying to correlate loosely the publication of Barth's dogmatic texts with contemporaneous political events and cultural issues, I seek to establish specific connections between Barth's theology and his political situation through an intertextual interpretation of particular dogmatic texts

and particular occasional writings that Barth composed contemporaneously. In the context of this specific inquiry, I will interpret Barth's doctrine of providence in *Church Dogmatics* III/3 in light of his occasional essays, speeches, sermons, and correspondences from 1948 and 1949.

To this end, in section 3.2 I engage the body of occasional literature that Barth composed contemporaneously with *Church Dogmatics* III/3, arguing that in these writings, Barth explicitly deploys the basic theme of his doctrine of providence—that world history and salvation history are held together in Jesus Christ—as the basis of his theological interpretation, analysis, and critique of the political situation in Europe at the end of the nineteen-forties. I focus in particular on (1) Barth's 1946 essay, "The Christian Message in Europe Today," (2) the documents from his Hungarian voyage in spring 1948, which include a contentious exchange with Emil Brunner, (3) his opening address at the founding of the World Council of Churches in August 1948, and (4) his major essay on the East-West conflict from 1949, "The Church Between East and West." In these writings Barth diagnoses a theological error that lies at the root of the socio-political and cultural dangers of his time: a distorted conception of divine providence that identifies Western Christian man with the presence and activity of God in world history.

In light of this analysis, in section 3.3 I offer a political-theological interpretation of the first two paragraphs of *Church Dogmatics* III/3: §48, "The Doctrine of Providence, Its Basis and Form," and §49, "God the Father as Lord of His Creature." When read in the context of Barth's occasional writings, these paragraphs appear in a new light, as an extended and careful articulation of the theological foundation upon which Barth bases

the political judgments expressed contemporaneously in his occasional writings. In *Church Dogmatics* III/3, Barth engages in a "radical correction" of the traditional Reformed doctrine of providence.[12] This revision of the doctrine takes the form of a Christological delimitation of the divine Subject of providence.

According to Barth, Christian theologies of providence have too often been content to identify the God who providentially rules over creation with an abstract—and ultimately anonymous—divine being, with the result that the doctrine of providence has functioned as little more than a formal framework for articulating "divine world-governance."[13] Lacking specifically Christian content, this formal framework has been constantly in danger of being ideologically colonized by other interpretations of the meaning and significance of the world-historical process. Over and against this error, Barth's doctrine of providence locates the incarnation of Jesus Christ as the center and endpoint of the entire historical relationship between God and creation. In so doing, Barth forecloses upon the possibility that an abstract, teleological concept of providence might wed itself to a non-Christian—or even anti-Christian—vision of the human subject as the one who gives world history its meaning and purpose and directs it to its final *telos*.

By way of conclusion, in section 3.4 I draw together Barth's reflections on providence in both his occasional and dogmatic writings in 1948-49, and normatively assess the political-theological vision present therein. While in *Church Dogmatics* III/3 Barth offers a *general* critique of the ideological colonization of the Christian doctrine of providence, in his occasional writings Barth makes clear that he has one, very *specific*

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[12] *CD* III/3.
[13] Ibid., 164.

instance of this ideological colonization in mind: a pseudo-Christian distortion of the doctrine of providence that identifies the divine Subject of history with Western man.

3.1 The World and Work of Karl Barth: An Intertextual Approach to the Church Dogmatics

Contemporary efforts to understand the relationship between theology and politics in Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics* have been frustrated by a persistent methodological quandary. This interpretive dilemma stems from two well-established facts about the *Church Dogmatics*. First, Karl Barth believed quite strongly that the *Church Dogmatics* ought to be understood as a thoroughly political text, written as an engagement with the social, political, and cultural issues of his day. Second, the actual text of the *Church Dogmatics* is largely devoid of explicit references to these social, political, or cultural matters, due both to the constraints of genre and to Barth's self-conscious decision to employ oblique and indirect reference as a deliberate strategy for engaging politics in his dogmatic writings. Taken together, these facts constitute an awkward and problematic truth: the actual text of the *Church Dogmatics* seems to provide little explicit evidence in support of the interpretation of that text endorsed by the author himself.

Barth's preference for oblique and indirect political reference had its advantages in his own time, not only in light of his well-founded concerns about the danger of allowing dogmatic theology to be determined by political ideology, but also due to the fact that Barth's frank political speech was not welcome in either Germany or Switzerland for the better part of his career. However, Barth's use of this strategy poses a significant interpretive challenge to those who, due to their historical distance from Barth, lack the "ears to hear" the political undertones that would have resonated within his

dogmatic compositions in their original contexts. Barth's commitment to political indirection in the *Church Dogmatics* confronts his twenty-first century readers with a difficult question: is it possible to developing an interpretive methodology that reconciles Barth's stated understanding of the *Church Dogmatics* with the fact that Barth quite deliberately withheld most of the explicit evidence of that understanding from the work itself?

In what follows, I address this question in three parts. First, I explicate the nature of the interpretive dilemma created by the discrepancy between authorial intention and textual evidence in the *Church Dogmatics* in more detail. Second, I demonstrate the insufficiency of the two dominant responses to this dilemma within contemporary Barth interpretation, arguing that both "textualist" and "contextualist" responses assume a false dichotomy between dogmatic text and political context. I suggest that textualists problematically remove the text from its context, treating it as a source of timeless ideas about the nature of the divine, while contextualists unconvincingly attempt to "leap the gap" between a text and context that have been artificially separated from one another. Third, drawing on methods of interpretation developed by the intellectual historian Quentin Skinner, I offer a constructive solution to this dilemma, proposing an intertextual interpretation of the *Church Dogmatics* in light of the occasional lectures, sermons, letters, and essays that Barth composed contemporaneously with his dogmatic *magnum opus*. I argue that these occasional writings provide a hermeneutical basis for an interpretation of Barth's dogmatic arguments that is as politically attuned as it is

methodologically sound, thereby avoiding the pitfalls of both textualist and contextualist approaches.

3.1.1 The Political Ramifications of the *Church Dogmatics*: An Interpretive Dilemma

A survey of contemporary analyses of the relationship between theology and politics in the *Church Dogmatics* reveals two things. First, Karl Barth not only believed that such a relationship existed, but also took it to be a vital aspect of his understanding of the purpose of the *Church Dogmatics* as a work. Second, the actual text of the *Church Dogmatics* itself rarely bares explicit witness to the existence of such a relationship.[14] This disparity between authorial intention and textual evidence creates a methodological dilemma for contemporary interpretation of the *Church Dogmatics*, as the interpretation of the text endorsed by the author seems unavailable from the text itself. The specific nature of this dilemma emerges from a closer examination of each of these two theses about the relationship between theology and politics in Barth's *magnum opus*.

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[14] My primary concern is not to offer yet another investigation of these claims, but to reflect upon the methodological difficulties that they create for contemporary Barth interpretation. In the last several decades, these claims have been ably explored and substantiated in English-language Barth scholarship by George Hunsinger, Eberhard Busch, Bruce McCormack, Timothy Gorringe, Mark Lindsay, and Paul Chung. See George Hunsinger, ed., *Karl Barth and Radical Politics* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976); Eberhard Busch, "'Doing Theology as if Nothing had Happened'—The Freedom of Theology and the Question of its Involvement in Politics," trans. Martin Rumscheidt, *Studies in Religion* 16, no. 4 (1987): 459-71; Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts*; Bruce McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); Timothy Gorringe, *Karl Barth: Against Hegemony* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Mark Lindsay, *Barth, Israel, and Jesus: Karl Barth's Theology of Israel* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007); Mark Lindsay, *Covenanted Solidarity: The Theological Basis of Karl Barth's Opposition to Nazi Antisemitism and the Holocaust* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001); Paul Chung, *Karl Barth: God's Word in Action* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co, 2008). For similar efforts within German-language scholarship, see Peter Winzeler, *Widerstehende Theologie: Karl Barth 1920-35* (Stuttgart: Alektor Verlag, 1982); Peter Eicher and Michael Weinrich, *Der gute Widerspruch: Das unbegriffene Zeugnis von Karl Barth* (Düsseldorf: Patmos Verlag, 1986); Bertold Klappert *Versöhnung und Befreiung: Versuche, Karl Barth kontextuell zu verstehen* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1994); Sabine Plonz, *Die herrenlosen Gewalten: Eine Relektüre Karl Barths in befreiungstheologischer Perspektive* (Mainz: Grünewald, 1995); Eberhard Busch, *Unter dem Bogen des einen Bundes: Karl Barth und die Juden 1933-1945* (Neukirchener: Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1996).

First, Karl Barth insisted again and again over the course of his life that he composed the *Church Dogmatics* as both a response to and an engagement with the key social, political, and cultural questions and concerns of his day. In his 1932 preface to the very first volume of the *Church Dogmatics*, Barth defended precisely such an account of his dogmatic endeavors over and against those critics who might misinterpret the work as a retreat into theological scholasticism: "I am firmly convinced that, especially in the broad field of politics, we cannot reach the clarifications which are necessary today … without first reaching the comprehensive clarifications in and about theology which are our present concern."[15] In Barth's opinion, "A better Church dogmatics might well be finally a more significant and solid contribution even to such questions and tasks as that of German liberation than most of the well-meant stuff which even so many theologians think in dilettante fashion that they can and should supply in relation to these questions and tasks."[16] From its inception, Barth affirmed an understanding of the *Church Dogmatics* that held theology and politics closely together.

Barth maintained this conviction throughout his life. When he was asked to refrain from speaking on political subjects in a lecture in Leiden in 1939, Barth responded, "Wherever there is theological talk, it is always implicitly or explicitly political talk also."[17] In an interview in 1956, Barth urged the interviewer to underline the political dimension of his self-understanding as a theologian: "Don't forget to say that I have always been interested in politics, and consider that it belongs to the life of a

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[15] *CD* I/1, xvi.
[16] Ibid., xvi. See also Gorringe, *Karl Barth: Against Hegemony*, 19.
[17] Busch, *Karl Barth*, 292.

theologian."[18] The following year, Barth again affirmed in the strongest possible terms that he intended the *Church Dogmatics* as a response to and engagement with the social, political, and cultural issues of his day:

> As far as I can recall there was no stage in my theological career when I had more than the very next step forward in mind and planned for it. … I used what I thought I had learned and understood so far to cope with this or that situation, with some complex of biblical or historical or doctrinal questions, often with some subject presented to me from outside, often in fact by a topical subject, e.g. a political issue. It was always something new that got hold of me, rather than the other way round … My thinking, writing, and speaking developed from reacting to people, events, and circumstances with which I was involved … That is what working on the *Church Dogmatics* was like for twenty-five years.[19]

Barth proclaimed this theme for a final time just before his death in a radio interview: "The theology which I tried to fashion out of Scripture was never a private affair, foreign to the world and humanity. … My whole theology always had a strong political component, explicit or implicit."[20] From the beginning of his work on the *Church Dogmatics* until his death, Karl Barth consistently maintained the conviction that the *Church Dogmatics* was a political document, intended to engage, interpret, and respond to the events and issues of its author's world.

However, the political ramifications of Barth's dogmatic theology cannot simply be read off the surface of the text of the *Church Dogmatics*. As Barth noted in both 1939 and 1968, while his theology was always concerned with politics, he formulated this concern in two very different modes in his written work: "implicitly or explicitly." With regard to the *Church Dogmatics*, Barth strongly preferred the former mode. Reacting

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[18] John Deschner, "Karl Barth as Political Activist," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 28, no. 1 (1972): 55.
[19] Busch, *Karl Barth*, 418-21.
[20] Cited in Gorringe, *Karl Barth: Against Hegemony*, 18.

against a German Christian movement that had allowed political judgments about the Third Reich to determine the content of Christian proclamation, Barth intentionally minimized explicit references to contemporary figures and events, instead addressing political issues almost exclusively through the use of oblique and indirect reference—a practice he described as "doing theology as if nothing had happened."[21]

While Barth sought to respond to the social, political, and cultural issues of his day in his theology, he did not want to allow the content of his theology to be determined by any reality besides the Word of God. Where the German Christians had erroneously allowed their theology to be determined by their support for the Third Reich, Barth was careful not to make the equal and opposite error of allowing his theology to be authoritatively determined by his political opposition to Hitler. Instead, Barth adopted an alternative approach, the basic principle of which has been aptly summarized by Eberhard Busch: "A theology bound to God's Word alone implied as such an *indirect* political stance even when that stance remained *unexpressed*."[22] The *Church Dogmatics* represents a paradoxical instance of a thoroughly contextual theology written "without direct allusions" to the context that it seeks to address.[23] The absence of direct social

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[21] Karl Barth, *Theological Existence Today: A Plea for Theological Freedom*, trans. R. Birch Hoyle (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1933), 9. Those who might be tempted to take Barth's phrase "as if nothing had happened" as a call for separation between theology and politics should remember that he wrote it in a pamphlet that he personally sent to Hitler, announcing, in not so many words, his refusal to allow theology to be swept up in—and aid in the production of—the messianic fervor of the National Socialist project. As Barth later remarked in a letter to Emil Brunner, "I urged the Germans to fulfill their duties of Christian witness 'as though nothing had happened,' i.e. ignoring Adolf Hitler's alleged divine revelation." See Karl Barth, "Karl Barth's Reply," in *Against the Stream: Shorter Post-war Writings 1946-1952* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1954), 118. For further analysis of this phrase, see Busch, "Doing Theology as if Nothing had Happened," 459-71; Gorringe, *Karl Barth: Against Hegemony*, 19-23.
[22] Busch, "Doing Theology as if Nothing had Happened," 471.
[23] For a similar conclusion, see Gorringe, *Karl Barth: Against Hegemony*, 19-23.

commentary in the *Church Dogmatics* is a result of Barth's commitment to craft a theology that was *addressed to*, but not *determined by*, the social, political, and cultural issues of his time.

While this explanation of the disparity between authorial intention and textual evidence helpfully addresses concerns about Barth's own consistency as a thinker and writer, it does not resolve the methodological challenge facing contemporary interpretation of the *Church Dogmatics*. Indeed, while it has become increasingly clear *that* present-day interpretations of the *Church Dogmatics* ought to address these implicit and unexpressed contextual and political dimensions of Barth's dogmatic theology, it is not at all clear *how* this ought to be done.

3.1.2 Addressing the Dilemma: Two Insufficient Methodological Responses

Contemporary interpreters of the *Church Dogmatics* have largely responded to the methodological quandary created by Barth's intentional use of oblique and indirect reference by adopting one of two different approaches, which I will classify as "textualist" and "contextualist" approaches respectively.[24] In what follows, I evaluate these two approaches in turn, delineating their basic commitments, displaying each approach's characteristic methodological insufficiency, and examining a representative example of each approach drawn from contemporary Barth interpretation.

[24] My analysis in this section draws on the categories developed by Quentin Skinner in his essay "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas," transposing his critique of the reigning paradigms for the interpretation of historical texts into an analysis of the governing orthodoxies of contemporary Barth interpretation. See Quentin Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas," *History and Theory* 8, no. 1 (1969): 3-53.

The textualist approach remains the dominant approach in English-language Barth interpretation. The foundational principle of textualist interpretation is that the text of the *Church Dogmatics* is a self-sufficient object of investigation.[25] On a textualist approach, therefore, proper interpretation begins and ends with the accurate representation and analysis of the textual evidence of the *Church Dogmatics.* Predictably, the textualist approach largely ignores questions about the political implications of the *Church Dogmatics* because—as has been previously established—there is little explicit textual evidence of those implications. Textualist interpretations therefore tend to treat the *Church Dogmatics* as an apolitical document containing Barth's formulations of timeless ideas about the nature of God and all things as they are related to God.

The obvious shortcoming of the textualist approach is that Karl Barth repeatedly and explicitly rejected this understanding of the *Church Dogmatics* in favor of one that saw the *Dogmatics* as integrally engaging Barth's political circumstances. As John McDowell has suggested, "Failing to read a thinker such as Barth in his context not only misses what he is up to, but also too readily anaesthetizes the radical nature of his message."[26] Ironically, by failing to attend to contextual issues, textualists actually undermine their ability to produce an accurate representation and analysis of the text itself—the very task to which their approach is dedicated.

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[25] Timothy Stanley also addresses the tendency among Barth scholars to interpret Barth's dogmatic texts in isolation. See Timothy Stanley, "Barth After Kant?," *Modern Theology* 28, no. 3 (2012): 423.
[26] John McDowell, "Timothy Gorringe's Contextualised Barth: An Article Review," *The Evangelical Quarterly* 74, no. 4 (2002): 336.

Christopher C. Green's *Doxological Theology: Karl Barth on Divine Providence, Evil, and the Angels* provides a representative example of the textualist approach.[27] Green's exegetical study of *Church Dogmatics* III/3 purports to "focus on accurately interpreting and expositing [Barth's] own position," so that, "the reader can come as close as possible to hearing *Barth*."[28] For all the nuance and care with which Green interprets the text of *Church Dogmatics* III/3, it must be said that if the reader "hears" Barth in Green's text, it is as a disembodied voice, largely cut off from a particular social, political, or cultural context.[29]

Given Green's account, one would not know that the Karl Barth who wrote *Church Dogmatics* III/3 in 1948 and 1949 was the same man who—in that same span of time—traveled to Hungary in the midst of a communist takeover of the country, engaged in high profile debates about Communism with Emil Brunner and Reinhold Niebuhr, delivered a controversial opening address at the founding of the World Council of Churches in Amsterdam, and published a major essay on the emerging Cold War conflict.[30] Because Green adopts the text of *Church Dogmatics* III/3 as a self-sufficient object of interpretation, he is methodologically precluded from considering the

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[27] Christopher C. Green, *Doxological Theology: Karl Barth on Divine Providence, Evil, and the Angels* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2011). The selection of Green's work as a representative of the textualist approach should not be interpreted as an attempt to single Green out for particular criticism. Given that the present essay adopts *Church Dogmatics* III/3 as a case study for the exemplification of its methodological agenda, Green's work provides a particularly relevant point of methodological contrast.
[28] Ibid., 9. Emphasis in original.
[29] While Green gestures toward contextual issues at several points in the study, they do not factor substantively in his interpretation. Green makes passing comments about the European cultural moment in 1949, Barth's love of Mozart, the lectures on the Lord's Prayer that Barth delivered while writing *Church Dogmatics* III/3, and the National Socialist crisis in Germany. Furthermore, the one contextual issue that receives significant attention from Green is the least political: the lectures on the Lord's Prayer.
[30] Karl Barth, "The Church Between East and West," in *Against the Stream: Shorter Post-war Writings 1946-1952* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1954), 125-46.

significance of these events—and the writings that resulted from them—for an understanding of *Church Dogmatics* III/3. This is particularly problematic given the considerable conceptual and thematic similarities between *Church Dogmatics* III/3 and these occasional writings. The result of Green's methodological commitment to interpret dogmatic theological texts in abstraction from the social, political, and cultural contexts in which they were produced is a thoroughly depoliticized interpretation of the *Church Dogmatics*. While there might be something to be said about the advantages of such a textualist approach, one cannot say that it produces an interpretation of the *Church Dogmatics* that comports with Karl Barth's own understanding of the nature and purpose of that work.

Given this significant shortcoming in the textualist approach, there have been increasing efforts made by interpreters of the *Church Dogmatics* to develop an alternative interpretive methodology that takes seriously Barth's insistence on the political significance of his dogmatic theology. This alternative methodology, which I will call the "contextualist" approach, rejects the textualist preoccupation with the "text alone" and interprets the *Church Dogmatics* in light of the social, political, and cultural contexts of its composition. For the contextualist camp, proper interpretation of the *Church Dogmatics* requires more than simply reading the text over and over again until one "gets it right." It also includes a reconstruction of the context within which the text was written and an attempt to explain the text in terms of that context. From this perspective, the *Church Dogmatics* represents not only Barth's contribution to a timeless theological conversation, but also his attempt to politically engage with the events of his day.

In contrast to the textualist approach, the contextualist method offers a picture of the *Church Dogmatics* that, at least formally, comports with the understanding of that work endorsed by Barth himself. However, the contextualist approach is not without weaknesses. In the absence of clear substantiating textual evidence in the *Church Dogmatics* itself, contextualists have struggled to develop a methodology that offers reliable and definitive criteria for evaluating possible connections between particular dogmatic texts and particular political contexts. As critics of the contextualist approach have noted, simply because an event occurred during the time in which Barth was working on a volume of the *Church Dogmatics* does not necessarily mean that he composed that volume as an engagement with that event. Temporal correlation does not imply causation. While the contextualist approach has been highly successful at fleshing out possible correlations between text and context, it has faltered when pressed to make clear distinctions between such possible correlations—which may or may not have been intended by Barth—and actual substantive connections evidencing authorial intention. Timothy Gorringe's *Karl Barth: Against Hegemony* offers a paradigmatic representation of the contextualist approach, displaying both its promise and its limitations.

In *Karl Barth: Against Hegemony*, Gorringe outlines an interpretation of the *Church Dogmatics* as a work of "contextual theology," or a theology "in which a theologian actively seeks to respond to the events of the day."[31] Choosing breadth of analysis over depth, Gorringe surveys the entirety of Barth's theological career against its corresponding socio-political and cultural backdrops in order to draw out the many and

[31] Gorringe, *Karl Barth: Against Hegemony*, 16.

shifting ways in which the different political contexts that Barth found himself in throughout his life shaped his dogmatic texts.[32] Gorringe reconstitutes the political and cultural referents that Barth had originally been able to take for granted when writing his theological texts and, in so doing, attempts to draw out the political ramifications of Barth's dogmatic theology.

The clear strength of Gorringe's contextualist approach is that the formal conception of Barth's theology that emerges from Gorringe's book comports quite closely with Barth's own stated understanding of the nature and purpose of his theological writings. In sharp contrast to the depoliticized Barth of the textualist approach, Gorringe offers a reading of the *Church Dogmatics* that is consonant with Barth's assertion that "My thinking, writing, and speaking developed from reacting to people, events, and circumstances with which I was involved."[33] *Karl Barth: Against Hegemony* helpfully restores the "people, events, and circumstances" of Barth's world—which are lost on a textualist approach—in order to gain a fresh understanding of the "thinking, writing, and speaking" of Barth's work. Yet while Gorringe's book displays the promise of the contextualist approach, it also is hampered by its characteristic weakness.

A number of engagements with *Karl Barth: Against Hegemony* have raised questions about the connections that Gorringe makes in the book between theological

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[32] For example, Gorringe interprets the second edition of Barth's Romans commentary (1922) in light of the Russian revolution, his critique of religion in *Church Dogmatics* I/2 (1937) as an attack on the *Deutsche Christen*, and his treatment of sin in volume IV of the *Church Dogmatics* (1951-1958) as a reflection on post-war capitalist society.
[33] Busch, *Karl Barth*, 419-21. See also Gorringe, *Karl Barth: Against Hegemony*, 16.

texts and socio-political contexts.[34] In a lengthy review of the book, Bruce McCormack suggests that Gorringe's analysis tends to blur the lines between "possible correlations" and "real substantive connections" between text and context.[35] McCormack's criticism exposes a key question for the contextualist approach: what are the standards by which the validity of particular connections between text and context might be evaluated? Mere contemporaneity of text and context does not provide such a standard. It can at best support a type of "educated guesswork."[36]

When pressed at this point, the limitations of Gorringe's contextualist method become apparent. For example, in relation to Barth's discussion of nothingness in *Church Dogmatics* III/3, Gorringe writes, "Obviously he is thinking of nuclear weapons, used less than a year before the lecture, but of course the Holocaust also exemplifies what nothingness is and how it works."[37] This comment succinctly captures the ambiguity of Gorringe's method. Was Barth thinking of the Holocaust or nuclear weapons or both in *Church Dogmatics* III/3? How would one know? Does it matter whether Barth intended these references or not? Gorringe does not provide a satisfactory answer to these questions. He attributes intentionality to Barth with respect to nuclear weapons: "[Barth] is thinking of nuclear weapons." However, with respect to the Holocaust, he leaves the question of authorial intention unanswered: the Holocaust only "exemplifies"

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[34] Bruce McCormack, review of *Karl Barth: Against Hegemony*, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 55, no. 2 (2002): 236-39; Kathryn Tanner, review of *Karl Barth: Against Hegemony*, *The Journal of Religion* 83, no. 2 (2003): 298-99; Stephen H. Webb, review of *Karl Barth: Against Hegemony*, *Anglican Theological Review* 83, no. 4 (2001): 901-2.
[35] McCormack, review of *Karl Barth: Against Hegemony*, 236.
[36] Ibid., 236.
[37] Gorringe, *Karl Barth: Against Hegemony*, 180.

nothingness. Gorringe does not reflect further on the difference between these two types of assertions or the consequences of that difference for the type of argument that he is trying to make. Therefore, while Gorringe's method certainly represents a significant improvement on textualist approaches that largely ignore Barth's context, it leaves unresolved some significant methodological questions about how to substantiate connections between the text of the *Church Dogmatics* and Barth's socio-political and cultural contexts.

As is now apparent, neither of the two dominant methodological responses to the interpretive dilemma created by the discrepancy between authorial intention and textual evidence in the *Church Dogmatics* is sufficient. On the one hand, the textualist approach focuses strictly on the textual evidence, even to the point of producing depoliticized interpretations of the *Church Dogmatics* that are at odds with Barth's stated intentions for the work. On the other hand, the contextualist approach interprets the *Church Dogmatics* in a way that formally comports with Barth's assertions about the political nature and purpose of the text. However, without explicit textual evidence of the specific socio-political and cultural issues that Barth engages in different portions of the *Dogmatics*, contextualists struggle to convincingly substantiate the connections they wish to establish between the text and a reconstructed context.

While it might seem as though the textualist and contextualist approaches are diametrically opposed to one another, both approaches are actually predicated upon the shared assumption of a false dichotomy between theological texts and political contexts. While textualists respond to this assumption by separating dogmatic text from political

context, contextualists attempt to "leap the gap" between dogmatic text and political context by a method of loose correlation. However, both approaches assume that there is little to no textual evidence of the specific political consequences envisioned by Barth for specific sections of the *Church Dogmatics*. Importantly, this shared assumption is false.

While Karl Barth may have composed the *Church Dogmatics* using strategies of oblique and indirect political reference, he did not *only* compose the *Church Dogmatics*. Over the course of his career, Barth produced a staggering quantity of occasional lectures, sermons, letters, and essays, which directly and explicitly engaged the social, political, and cultural issues of his day from the perspective of his dogmatic theological convictions. In many of these documents, Barth explicitly identified the specific political judgments that he believed to be warranted by a certain aspect of his dogmatic theology. Therefore, what is needed in order to recover the connections between theology and politics in the *Church Dogmatics* is not a textualist approach, or even a contextualist approach, but rather an *intertextual* approach that interprets the *Church Dogmatics* in light of Barth's contemporaneously composed occasional writings.

3.1.3 An Alternative Proposal: The Intertextual Approach

Methodological questions about the relationship between authorial intention, textual evidence, and socio-political context may feel somewhat foreign to systematic theologians. However, they are not at all unfamiliar to practitioners of intellectual history. Indeed, developing and debating the appropriate procedures for the proper interpretation of the meaning of complex historical texts is one of the central activities of that discipline. It is not at all surprising, therefore, to find that many of the methodological

issues discussed in the present essay overlap considerably with important debates within the guild of intellectual history. One of the key contributors to these debates has been the Cambridge School intellectual historian Quentin Skinner. In particular, Skinner's methodological reflections on the interpretation of historical texts—developed most notably in his 1969 essay "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas"—intersect with and shed considerable light on the methodological concerns of the present essay. Skinner's constructive methodological proposals provide a template for an intertextual approach to the *Church Dogmatics* that interprets Barth's dogmatic theology in relationship to the whole of his literary output from a given period of time.

In "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas," Skinner articulates a critique of the dominant methods deployed in the study of the history of ideas that bears considerable similarity to the concerns expressed in the present essay about textualist and contextualist approaches to the interpretation of the *Church Dogmatics*. On the one hand, he exposes serious shortcomings in an interpretive method which takes "the *text* itself as the sole necessary key to its own meaning, and so dismisses any attempt to reconstitute the 'total context.'"[38] On the other hand, Skinner is also critical of methodological proposals founded on the assumption that "it is the context 'of religious, political, and economic factors' which determines the meaning of any given text."[39] For Skinner, while a text cannot be properly understood when treated as a self-contained unit, simply reconstituting the socio-political and cultural contexts within which the text was originally composed is not a sufficient method for understanding a text either.

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[38] Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas," 3. Emphasis in original.
[39] Ibid., 3.

Fittingly, one of the main examples that Skinner chooses to illustrate the shortcomings of these interpretive methods is also the source of the interpretive dilemma facing contemporary interpretation of the *Church Dogmatics*: strategies of indirect and oblique reference. Skinner argues that interpretive methods that approach the text as "a self-sufficient object of understanding" are useless in situations where an author uses "oblique reference as a deliberate strategy": "The problem is … that we need to understand what strategies have been *voluntarily* adopted to convey their meaning with deliberate obliqueness. And the point is that it is hard to see how any amount of reading the text … could possibly serve as the means to gain this understanding."[40] Similarly, Skinner argues that a reconstruction of the social context of a text does little to address the issue of deliberate oblique reference either: while knowledge of social context may shed light on the *meaning* of a given statement, it does not provide any evidence about what the author is intending to *do* with that statement in that particular text.[41]

Skinner's analysis cuts to the heart of the methodological confusion surrounding contemporary interpretation of the *Church Dogmatics*, demonstrating why neither a textualist nor a contextualist approach is able to substantively demonstrate the presence and character of Barth's oblique and indirect social, political, and cultural commentary in the *Church Dogmatics*. As Skinner makes clear, no amount of careful textual exegesis or painstaking reconstruction of social context will be able to reliably illuminate a text in which the author has deliberately adopted strategies of oblique and indirect reference. In

[40] Ibid., 32. Emphasis in original.
[41] Ibid., 46. Following J. L. Austin, Skinner calls this latter feature of the text its "intended illocutionary force."

order to accurately interpret such a text, an alternative interpretive methodology is necessary. Fortunately, Skinner proposes the basic form of such a method in the concluding paragraphs of "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas."

After thoroughly critiquing the dominant methodologies employed by intellectual historians in his day, Skinner turns to the constructive task of outlining "an alternative methodology which need not be open to any of the criticisms I have so far advanced."[42] The animating principle of his alternative methodology is a commitment to intertextual interpretation. Skinner argues that, in order to decode the "complex intention" of an author in communicating through a written text, it is necessary to place that text within its "wider *linguistic* context."[43] As Skinner has elaborated elsewhere, this is a matter of situating "the texts we study within such intellectual contexts and frameworks of discourse as enable us to recognize what their authors were *doing* in writing them. To speak more fashionably, I emphasize the performativity of texts and the need to treat them intertextually."[44] On Skinner's account, texts are not stand-alone units of discourse. Rather, all texts are part of a larger historical-linguistic whole. Locating individual texts within this larger discursive framework is the key to understanding what an author could have been doing in writing that text. In Skinner's own work, this commitment has led him to focus less on the classic texts of leading thinkers and more on the analysis of the social and intellectual frameworks within which those thinkers operated.[45] However, one

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[42] Ibid., 48.
[43] Ibid., 49. Emphasis in original.
[44] Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics: Regarding Method*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), vii. Emphasis in original.
[45] See, for example, Quentin Skinner, *Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

need not exhaustively embrace Skinner's method in order to recognize that its central principle contains significant potential for illuminating contemporary interpretation of the *Church Dogmatics*.

An intertextual approach to interpreting the political ramifications of the *Church Dogmatics* succeeds precisely at the point where both textualist and contextualist approaches fail. Where the latter two approaches understand Barth's dogmatic texts as stand-alone units of discourse—which must either be interpreted as such or artificially correlated with a reconstructed social context—an intertextual approach sees the part-volumes of the *Church Dogmatics* as organic parts of the wider linguistic whole that is Barth's entire literary output from a given period of time. This wider whole includes, in addition to the *Church Dogmatics*, Barth's occasional lectures, sermons, letters, and essays.

Reading the *Church Dogmatics* in light of these other literary materials reveals a surprising fact: these occasional writings provide the exact textual evidence for a political interpretation of the *Church Dogmatics* which is missing from the text of the *Dogmatics* itself. Indeed, in his occasional writings Barth often did the very thing that he resolutely refused to do in the *Church Dogmatics*. He frequently placed contemporary social, political, and cultural issues into direct conversation with the dogmatic theological agenda that he was at that time pursuing in the *Church Dogmatics*. Thus, in these occasional pieces, one often finds Barth "connecting the dots" between the *Church Dogmatics* and his social, political, and cultural worlds *himself*. These instances of reflexivity in Barth's occasional writings provide an important hermeneutical basis for

establishing the specific nature of Barth's engagements with social, political, and cultural issues in the *Church Dogmatics*. Such an intertextual interpretation resolves the contradiction between authorial intention and textual evidence that has plagued contemporary interpretation of the *Church Dogmatics*. In the remainder of this chapter, I put this methodological conclusion to the test, analyzing Barth's doctrine of providence in *Church Dogmatics* III/3 in light of the occasional writings that he composed contemporaneously with that part-volume in 1948 and 1949.

3.2 The World of Karl Barth, 1948-1949: Barth Between East and West

In the previous chapter of this study, I argued that a particular construal of the doctrine of divine providence provided the theoretical framework within which Hegel was able to theorize world history as an intrahistorical process of divine incarnation in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*. I suggested that this providential incarnation of spirit in history was, on Hegel's account, an abstract, teleological process of historical, geographical, and anthropological progress, the net effect of which was to sacralize European humanity and its civilization, portraying it in eschatological terms as the apex of anthropological and cultural development and the final site of divine revelation and divine presence in human history. Within Hegel's understanding of divine providence, European man subsumes and surpasses the person and work of Jesus Christ as the final subject of the incarnation and therefore as the definitive subject of world history: the human subject around whose flesh all the rest of time, space, and humanity finds meaning and receives its ordered place.

Fittingly, in Barth's occasional writings from the period in which he was composing his own doctrine of providence, he repeatedly identifies almost this exact sublation of divine incarnation within a providential conception of European Christian civilization as the animating principle of the theological imagination that made National Socialism bewitchingly appealing to the church in Germany and was now threatening to help stoke the fires of Western anti-communist sentiment. Barth argues that the National Socialist crisis revealed a powerful and dangerous theological heresy at the heart of European Christianity as a whole: a distorted conception of divine providence that identifies the content of divine election and incarnation with the person of Western man, thereby sacralizing Western humanity and rejecting the election of the people of Israel and the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Viewed within this context, Barth's attempt to recast the relationship between divine providence, the Christian subject, and the incarnation of Jesus Christ in *Church Dogmatics* III/3 takes on politically radical significance.

Barth offers his theological analysis of the political and cultural turmoil in Europe in the late nineteen-forties in a number of texts composed contemporaneously with *Church Dogmatics* III/3. Two particularly important documents serve to bracket Barth's political-theological efforts during this period. First, "The Christian Message in Europe Today," a lecture that Barth delivered repeatedly in the summer of 1946, offers an analysis and critique of the cultural moment in which post-war European humanity found itself after the cessation of hostilities between the Allied and Axis powers. Second, Barth's major statement on the East-West conflict, "The Church Between East and West," which first appeared in the spring of 1949, contains Barth's argument against

taking the side of the supposedly "Christian West" in the rapidly intensifying struggle between the two new global superpowers.

In between the composition of these two pieces, two important events occurred in Barth's life. First, Barth took his previously mentioned trip to Hungary in the spring and early summer of 1948, immediately prior to commencing work on his doctrine of providence. He produced a number of written pieces during his Hungarian voyage, the last of which led to a high-profile dispute with Emil Brunner. Second, in August 1948 Barth delivered a controversial opening address at the founding of the World Council of Churches in Amsterdam, the text of which drew heavily on the themes of his then in-progress doctrine of providence as it warned the newly formed council against embracing a certain socio-political posture in the midst of the uncertain times in which it found itself.[46]

In what follows, I will examine these written materials in order to outline Barth's *theological* analysis of the emerging East-West conflict and the apparent "collapse" of Europe following the National Socialist crisis. I will then proceed in section 3.3 to compare the theological content of Barth's occasional writings with that of the contemporaneously written *Church Dogmatics* III/3, arguing that the central theme of Barth's doctrine of providence in *Church Dogmatics* III/3—that world history and

[46] After the World Council of Churches event, Barth found himself embroiled in a second highly publicized controversy with another famous Christian intellectual. This time it was the American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr who publicly lambasted Barth for his position on contemporary socio-political issues. However, Niebuhr's attack on Barth so badly misconstrues the logic of Barth's position that the resulting correspondence adds little real substance to the present investigation. For an overview of the Barth-Niebuhr correspondence, see Gary Dorrien, *The Barthian Revolt in Modern Theology: Theology without Weapons* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 134-139.

salvation history are held together in Jesus Christ—is in fact the exact theological position that Barth places at the center of his political judgments about the East-West conflict, giving them the critical power to expose the danger posed by the Western capitalist order to the Christian church.

3.2.1 1946: "The Christian Message in Europe Today"

In the summer of 1946, Barth and Charlotte von Kirschbaum traveled to Bonn to contribute, in their own way, to the task of reconstruction in Germany. Traveling via a freighter on the Rhine, Barth and Kirschbaum "saw sunken ships, broken bridges, bombed cities one after the other" as they made their way back to the university from which Barth had been dismissed at the end of 1934 for his refusal to give the oath of loyalty to Hitler. In Bonn that summer, Barth held class "in the semi-ruins of the once stately Kurfürsten Schloss," lecturing over "the noise of the demolition crane which was breaking up the ruins."[47] When he was not teaching, Barth traveled throughout West Germany, offering public lectures to large audiences. In one of these lectures, later published under the title "The Christian Message in Europe Today," Barth attempted to help the church in Europe grapple with the significance of the Second World War and the Holocaust and their consequences for Christian identity and proclamation in relationship to the new, seemingly perilous cultural moment in which European humanity found itself.

Barth opens the essay with his own description of the post-war European cultural moment. He refuses to endorse the popular notion of a twentieth century European collapse, arguing that it is only an equal and opposite reaction to prior narratives of

[47] Busch, *Karl Barth*, 333, 337, 341.

European progress and cultural supremacy. Instead, Barth argues that the greatest threat to European Christianity is not Europe's cultural decline, but the colonization of Christian proclamation in the service of a providential narration of the place of Europe in world-historical time and global space.

"As far as the situation today is concerned," Barth begins, "many things seem to point to the fact that Europe has lost its former position as the political, cultural, and religious center of the world." Indeed, "For centuries," Barth continues, "the European was left to believe that his idea of might and right, science and education, religion and the moral code must necessarily be the right one, and that the great spirits of humanity must of course be those whom we hold to be such, and honor accordingly." However, after two world wars were birthed from the heart of Europe, "This idea seems to have lost its power." Europe's role seems to be that of a dethroned queen "who has become more or less a servant or even a beggar."[48]

How can this great upheaval in Europe's self-understanding be explained? Barth writes, "It came about that at the height of European development, here in the heart of Europe, an unparalleled revolutionary movement arose—called the revolution of nihilism … From the Christian point of view it was in its most critical aspect, under the name of anti-Semitism, a revolution against Israel and thereby against the mystery of the incarnation." Barth argues that National Socialism was not an aberration from European development, but its logical conclusion. Indeed, this revolution revealed something that was true of Europe as a whole: "The great German mistake was fundamentally a

[48] Karl Barth, "The Christian Message in Europe Today," in *Against the Stream: Shorter Post-war Writings 1946-1952* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1954), 167, 167, 167, 168.

European mistake. And now it may be that with this great German mistake not only Germany but Europe as well has for ever lost … its position and significance in the world." As Barth sees it, National Socialism was the logical and final *telos* of the project of modern Europe as a whole. All of Europe was implicated in the National Socialist project. Having been rescued from itself by the Soviets and the Americans, Europe in 1946 finds itself "being ground between two millstones."[49]

Having framed the contemporary European moment in this way, Barth moves on to discuss the place and role of the church in it: "What is expected of it in the light of the Word of God, which, it claims, is its source and substance?"[50] Barth outlines three concrete prescriptions for the church in Europe, intended to help the church extricate itself from its relationship with the problematic constructions of European identity that helped to bring about Europe's near self-immolation on the altar of National Socialism.

First, Barth asserts that the church must disentangle its *Christian* identity from its *European* identity: "The Christian message cannot and may not rely upon the fact that it is surrounded and sustained, as it was previously, by the glory and the pathos of the culture and the politics of a Europe rapidly rising to prominence and power."[51] For Barth, Nazi anti-Semitism was the flower that finally bloomed from the stem of European Christian civilization, revealing as its true content that which had been suppressed for centuries: the rejection of the God revealed in the election of Israel and the incarnation of Jesus Christ. By bringing this hidden truth to the surface, National Socialism bore witness

[49] Ibid., 168, 169, 171.
[50] Ibid., 174.
[51] Ibid., 175.

to the stark contradiction between the project of constructing European civilizational identity and the content of Christian proclamation—a contradiction that the Christian church in Europe had proven itself mostly incapable of grasping up until that point. Thus, for Barth, National Socialism offered the Christian church the possibility of a moment of chilling clarity, an opportunity to free itself from its self-imposed captivity and bewitchment.

Second, Barth argues that the church must eschew all abstract, teleological narrations of the direction of history. It must not allow its proclamation to be circumscribed by narrations of European historical development—whether positive or negative: "It is essential that the Christian message should on no account become entangled with the problem of whether the future of Europe will somehow lead us upwards again or whether it will carry us further downwards." The Christian church does not possess the authority to proclaim either a coming rebirth of Europe or its immanent collapse. To endorse either message as a *Christian* message is to perpetuate the church's identification of Europe as the primary referent of Christian proclamation. The church's objective is not Europe, but "the Kingdom which, whatever the circumstances, means for all men, living or dead, peace, joy, and freedom. … Let the Christian message proclaim this future!"[52]

Third, Barth urges the church to re-center itself upon the person of Jesus Christ as the center of its life and proclamation in order to prevent the identification of the content of the kingdom of God with a providential interpretation of the European future. Where

[52] Ibid., 176, 176.

the providential narration of European development climaxed in the rejection of the Jews—and therefore the rejection of Jesus—the content of the kingdom of God is nothing but Jesus Christ himself. Barth writes, "The grace of God and the Kingdom of God, and thus the source and the end of Christian teaching, bear a name, the name of Jesus Christ. Thus in Europe today this teaching can only consist in proclaiming this name … Jesus Christ is Himself free grace, is Himself the Kingdom of God."[53] Barth underlines the contradiction between the Christian proclamation of the kingdom of God and quasi-Christian proclamations of European religious and cultural superiority. At the heart of the latter proclamations, Barth insists, lies a rejection of Israel and Jesus. This contradiction has too often gone unrealized, leading the Christian church to unwittingly proclaim the quasi-Christian good news about European humanity as though it were the gospel of Jesus Christ. This was the mistake of the *Deutsche Christens* under Hitler, a mistake that, Barth insists, must at all costs not be repeated again.

Yet it is precisely the imminent risk of a repetition and continuation of this error that deeply troubles Barth in this essay. Already in 1946, Barth sees a new ideological context emerging that will tempt the Christian church to repeat its past mistakes and once again bind its own proclamation to a quasi-Christian providential narration of world history centered elsewhere than the person of Jesus Christ. While the catastrophic events of the thirties and early forties had powerfully and terribly disabused Europe of the notion that it was the center of world history, new candidates for this role were already emerging from the East and West. Barth's insistence on the freedom and independence of Christian

[53] Ibid., 177.

proclamation in Europe is not simply intended as a retrospective analysis of the errors leading to National Socialism. It is also a prospective admonition to the Christian church not to allow its proclamation to once again fall ideologically captive to a powerful narration of the direction of world history that has as its subject anything or anyone besides Jesus Christ: "The Christian message in Europe today must once more be free and independent—not blown about by each prevailing wind, not dependent on the alternatives of revolution or tradition, optimism or pessimism, *West or East*."[54]

3.2.2 1948: The Hungarian Voyage and the World Council of Churches

After two summers spent in Bonn, Barth stayed in Basel for the summer semester of 1948 where he began lecturing on the doctrine of providence while composing *Church Dogmatics* III/3. Just prior to this, Barth visited Hungary, touring the country at the invitation of the Hungarian Reformed Church just as the Communists were consolidating control of the government and expelling the last of their political opponents from the country. Needless to say, his Hungarian hosts expected Barth to have something to say about these matters: how would the great opponent of German National Socialism respond to the rise of Hungarian Communism? In a series of lectures delivered throughout the country, Barth reiterated many of the central themes from "The Christian Message in Europe Today," reminding the Hungarian church that its freedom and independence in Christ meant that it had to resist any and all attempts made to ideologically colonize its proclamation.

[54] Ibid., 175. Emphasis added.

However, in the materials from Hungary, Barth adds a further level of specification to this thesis in light of the development of East-West hostilities. This is his judgment that the greater threat of such an ideological colonization of Christian discourse lies in the West as opposed to the East. As Barth sees it, Communism's open hostility towards Christianity makes it an unlikely candidate to pose this type of threat. Yet this is not to say that Barth in any way embraces Communism. As far as Barth is concerned, Communism may very well be a wolf, but it is at least not a wolf in sheep's clothing. The latter figure seemed much likely to emerge from the West, where Christian and anti-communist forces were rapidly uniting into an ideological front: the forces of the Christian West arrayed over and against the "godless" Soviets.

In his first lecture of the tour, a talk given in Sarospatak and Budapest entitled "Modern Youth: Its Inheritance and Its Responsibility," Barth repeats more forcefully the indictment of European Christian civilization that featured centrally in his lecture on the Christian message in Europe from 1946:

> Western civilization is out of joint. Instead of leading us to still further heights, the progress of the centuries has suddenly brought us to the depths of two world wars which have left a sea of ruin behind them and destroyed millions upon millions of lives, though no one can say what they all really died for … We have seen how the morality of modern civilized man has turned out to be a terribly thin covering of ice over a sea of primitive barbarity. … There is no doubt but that in recent years the whole conception of a Christian civilization in the West has been pitilessly exposed as an illusion.[55]

As he did in 1946, Barth quickly pivots to make clear that the demise of the illusion of a "Christian civilization" should be seen, not as a threat to the Christian church, but as a

[55] Karl Barth, "Modern Youth: Its Inheritance and Its Responsibility," in *Against the Stream: Shorter Post-war Writings 1946-1952* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1954) 56-57.

liberating opportunity to free itself from ideological entanglement in the project of Western civilization: "Where do we go from here? … In many matters it will be almost impossible for you to establish any link with the past. I wonder if you realize what a privilege that is, however? … Your poverty implies a splendid freedom from preconceived ideas and judgments."[56] Barth reaffirms his opposition to narrations of Christian identity and Christian temporal existence that are enfolded within accounts of the providential progress or decline of European civilization.

Barth offers his definitive response to the question of the proper Christian attitude towards the political upheaval then being experienced in Hungary in a second essay entitled "The Christian Community in the Midst of Political Change." Here Barth turns to the doctrine of providence as a resource for understanding contemporary political events, deploying it as a theological framework for thinking about the place of the church in relationship to the political order from the perspective of God's action in world history.

Barth argues that any attempt to think about God's relationship to contemporary political events must begin with the definitive instance of God's activity in history, the incarnation of Jesus Christ: "The Christian Church commemorates the great change in earthly and heavenly history, which has already taken place in the death of Jesus Christ … which has already been proclaimed in His resurrection from the dead and will be revealed in his second coming, as the goal of all the temporal ways of God."[57] One does not begin with a general theory of God's providential relationship to historical events, but

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[56] Ibid., 57.
[57] Karl Barth, "The Christian Community in the Midst of Political Change," in *Against the Stream: Shorter Post-war Writings 1946-1952* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1954), 77.

with the particular reality of God's specific relationship to history in Jesus Christ. Barth approaches the question of political change from this Christological starting point: "There is—and this must be said before all else—a change which is infinitely more incisive and important than all the changes in the political realm. We may call this great change quite simply Jesus Christ in the twofold aspect of His death on the Cross and His second coming in glory, as made known in His resurrection." Therefore, Barth continues, "The alternation and the changes of political systems stand in the light of this great change which is called Jesus Christ. This is the standpoint from which we must view political change to see it clearly."[58] In a preview of one of the central themes of *Church Dogmatics* III/3, Barth asserts that, in Jesus Christ, world history is definitively determined by salvation history.

Barth goes on to argue that locating world history in relationship to and distinction from salvation history both increases the seriousness of Christian political participation and relativizes the stakes involved in earthly politics. Because world history is not independent from, but related to salvation history, the church "sees a divine commission above and behind" the political life of humanity. The political realm is a realm of serious concern for the church because it is a realm integrally related to God. Yet because world history is distinct from salvation history, human political activity is relieved of any messianic pretensions. Politics pursues "provisional and limited aims": "The preservation of the common life from chaos. Political systems create and preserve a space for that which must happen in the time between the beginning and the end."[59] The

[58] Ibid., 78, 79.
[59] Ibid., 80, 80, 80.

church is therefore called to serious, but critical participation in political life, marked by both a sincere commitment to politics rooted in the connection between world history and salvation history and a perpetual readiness to engage in critique and protest in recognition of the distance between world history and salvation history.

Barth's understanding of the relationship between divine providence and politics enables the church to remain free and independent in the midst of political change. Because world history is not salvation history, the stakes involved in political change are lessened: it is a temporal human matter, not an eternal divine one. The church is "grounded in the Word of God and committed to Him alone. … It cannot therefore ally itself with any political system, old or new, for better or for worse, just as it cannot oppose any system unconditionally. … The Word of God is not tied to any political system."[60] This rejection of ideological entrapment is not an excuse for the church to withdraw from political participation, but the starting point of true concern and interest in politics.

Rather than fusing divine providence with either of two opposed ideological frameworks in a moment of political change, the church is freed to make discrete judgments about particular political issues in light of the good news revealed in Jesus Christ: "The Church's business is to proclaim that God is on man's side and therefore opposed to man's destruction; to defend the cause of man in whom God Himself has taken a personal interest and to defend it under all circumstances whatsoever. … It cannot make itself responsible either for any –ism or for rejecting it. … It recognizes no political

[60] Ibid., 86.

supporters and no political enemies—it only recognizes human beings." When confronting any political issue, the church will actively undertake the task of discernment and action, taking Jesus Christ as its criterion of judgment: "The question the Church asks is what difference will these things make to the men on whom God has bestowed His grace in Jesus Christ, for whom Christ died and rose again?"[61] In sum, Barth's Christological conception of divine providence provides him with critical resources to protect the political activity of the church from all forms of ideological capture while also enabling the church to embrace rigorous and critical political participation.

Barth's theological position led him to some unpopular conclusions about the Communist takeover in Hungary. In "The Reformed Church behind the 'Iron Curtain,'" a report on his Hungarian journey published upon his return, Barth made these conclusions explicit. As Barth remarked in a letter to Alphons Koechlin, the report was met with a "shower of rotten eggs and dead cats" from the Swiss press.[62] The most notable response to Barth's views on the Hungarian situation came from Emil Brunner, who wrote an open letter to Barth sharply criticizing him for not opposing Communism in the way he had opposed National Socialism. In his letter, Brunner rehearsed a harsh indictment of Barth's political position, accusing him of showing deference to Communism by minimizing and overlooking its necessary commitment to totalitarianism. As Brunner saw it, Barth—the great critic of the church's collaboration with Hitler—had made

[61] Ibid., 91, 93.
[62] Karl Barth to Alphons Koechlin, 20 September 1948, cited in Busch, *Karl Barth*, 355.

himself the "spokesman" of the collaborationist position with respect to another, equally dangerous variety of anti-human, anti-Christian totalitarianism.[63]

In his response dated June 6, 1948, Barth wastes no time in getting to the point: "Dear Emil Brunner,—You do not seem to understand."[64] The bulk of Barth's defense rests upon the distinction he makes between the situation with National Socialism in the nineteen-thirties and the present situation with Communism. Where Brunner wants to minimize any difference between them, Barth emphasizes the uniqueness of the two moments. In order to do so, Barth draws a distinction between the political problem of totalitarianism and the theological problem of the colonization of Christian discourse by a political ideology. As a theologian, Barth approaches these issues in light of this latter perspective, which leads him to offer two very different verdicts about Communism and National Socialism. Barth first explains the logic of his determined resistance to National Socialism:

> What made [National Socialism] interesting from the Christian point of view was that it was a spell which notoriously revealed its power to overwhelm our souls, to persuade us to believe in its lies and to join in its evil-doings. … We were hypnotized by it as a rabbit by a giant snake. We were in danger of bringing, first incense, and then the complete sacrifice to it as to a false god.[65]

When one understands the true danger of National Socialism in this way, Barth contends, it becomes clear that Communism does not come close to posing the same sort of threat:

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[63] Emil Brunner, "An Open Letter to Karl Barth," in *Against the Stream: Shorter Post-war Writings 1946-1952* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1954), 106-113. For background on the emergence and uses of totalitarianism theory—which sheds much light on Brunner's intention in strategically attacking Barth precisely on the grounds of a failure to reject totalitarianism—see James Chappel, "The Catholic Origins of Totalitarianism Theory in Interwar Europe," *Modern Intellectual History* 8, no. 3 (2011): 561-590.
[64] Karl Barth, "Karl Barth's Reply," in *Against the Stream: Shorter Post-war Writings 1946-1952* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1954), 113.
[65] Ibid., 115. Emphasis in original.

> In the last few years … I met no man of whom I received the impression (as one did with almost everybody in 1933) that he felt that this 'monster' was a vexation, a temptation, an enticement, or that he was in danger of liking it or condoning its deeds and of co-operating with it. … Is the situation any different here in Switzerland? In France, England, or America? Are we not all convinced, whether we have read *I Chose Freedom* or not, that we cannot consider the way of life of the people in Soviet territory and in the Soviet-controlled "peoples' democracies" to be worthy, acceptable, or of advantage to us, because it does not conform to our standards of justice and freedom? … Anyone who would like from me a political disclaimer of its system and its method may have it at once. However, what is given cheaply can be had cheaply. Surely it would cost no one anything—not even a little thought—certainly nothing more, to add his bundle of faggots to the bonfire? I cannot admit that this is a repetition of the situation and of the tasks during the years 1933-1945. For I cannot admit that it is the duty of Christians or of the Church to give theological backing to what every citizen can, with much shaking of his head, read in his daily paper.[66]

The difference between Communism and National Socialism is not, as Brunner suggests, merely the difference between two different shades of totalitarianism. Rather, it is the difference between a political ideology that has aroused widespread Christian opposition and one that proved itself to be incredibly effective at colonizing, subjugating, and systematically distorting Christian belief and practice in support of an anti-Christian agenda.

Furthermore, in addition to asserting the fundamental *dissimilarity* between the dangers posed by Communism and National Socialism to the Christian church, Barth hints at a worrying *similarity* between the bewitchment of the German church by National Socialism and the ease with which the Christian church in the United States and Western Europe has been swept up inside of "Western Christian" civilization's opposition to Communism: "Where is the spiritual danger and need which the Church

[66] Ibid., 116.

would meet if it witnessed to this truth, where is its commission to do so? Whom would it teach enlighten, rouse, set on the right path, comfort, and lead to repentance and a new way of life? Surely not the 'Christian' peoples of the West, nor the Americans! Are they not already sure enough of the justice of their cause against Russia without this truth and our Christian support?"[67] Barth would articulate this second point more explicitly just a few months later when he gave the opening address at the inaugural assembly of the World Council of Churches.

In August 1948, Barth traveled to Amsterdam to deliver his address to the World Council of Churches on the theme "Man's Disorder and God's Design."[68] In a speech that Barth could not have expected to garner much praise, he presented a critique of the conference theme—arguing that it should instead be "God's Design and Man's Disorder"—and called into question the mission and work of the newly formed ecumenical body on theological grounds. Barth feared that the Council had insufficiently guarded itself against the temptation to envision God's providential rule of the cosmos as bound to, and therefore controlled by, the Christian church. This address provides yet another example of how Barth engaged the doctrine of providence as a key resource for negotiating socio-political existence in the very moment at which he was composing the volume on providence in the *Church Dogmatics*. Once again, his understanding of the relationship between providence and Christology proves to be the critical center that fuels his theological critique.

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[67] Ibid., 117.
[68] Busch, *Karl Barth*, 357.

Barth opens his address by informing his audience that the conference theme "the world's disorder and God's design" was a non-starter. Nothing can be gained by beginning with an account of the present moment of cultural, political, and economic crisis and then turning to God's design for some sort of solution. To attempt to build up from certain conceptions of the world's disorder—and various proposals for ameliorating that disorder—to a picture of God's order can only be an idolatrous Babel-like endeavor. Barth insists that the starting point for the conference proceedings must be "God's design" and not "Man's Disorder."

However, not content simply to invert the conference theme, Barth also suggests that the theological meaning and significance of "God's design" must itself be carefully and critically examined. His remarks on this point take the form of an explication of the doctrine of providence in which Barth draws out the political stakes involved in the accurate formulation of the doctrine.

Barth's central thesis is that the person of Jesus Christ is wholly determinative of God's providential design: "'God's design' really means his plan; that is, his already come, already victorious, already founded Kingdom in all its majesty—our Lord Jesus Christ." This rules out an otherwise tempting, but deeply distorted, interpretation of God's providence: "'God's design' therefore does not mean the existence of the church in the world, its task in relation to the world's disorder, its outward and inward activity as an instrument for the amelioration of human life, or finally the result of this activity in the Christianization of all humanity and, consequently, the setting up of an order of justice

and peace embracing our whole planet."[69] This latter account of providence is not only theologically inaccurate, but politically dangerous.

By construing the church as "a continuation of the incarnation of the Word of God," Christians are tempted to imagine that "the power of God's providence would have fallen under the sovereign power and administrative control of Christendom and enslaved mankind would have to expect its salvation from us—from our clear grasp of the world-historical situation." This opinion is "the root and ground of all human disorder: the dreadful, godless, ridiculous opinion that man is the Atlas who is destined to bear the dome of heaven on his shoulders."[70] If the church's understanding of God's providential design is not thoroughly determined by the authoritative revelation of that design in Jesus Christ, then "it might turn out that what we think we ought to show the world under the authority of God's word is a program like other programs, and—who knows?—only too closely related to the programs of particular parties, classes, and nations." Barth issues a pointed warning: "We must be very sure that in carrying out our prophetic task we really point to *God's* Kingdom, and not, though in the best of faith, to some other kingdom."[71] Any attempt to understand God's providential design and activity in the world apart from the paradigmatic instance of that design and action in the incarnation of Jesus Christ opens the door to precisely the kind of ideological colonization of Christian proclamation that the church in Germany embraced under National Socialism. In the present conflict between East and West, Barth worries that the church will repeat this exact same error.

3.2.3 1949: "The Church Between East and West"

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[69] Karl Barth, "No Christian Marshall Plan," *The Christian Century* 65, no. 49 (1948): 1330, 1330.
[70] Ibid., 1330, 1331.
[71] Ibid., 1331, 1331. Emphasis in original.

First published on February 6, 1949—just as Barth was pressing towards the end of *Church Dogmatics* III/3—"The Church Between East and West" was Barth's attempt to draw together the various lines of argument that had appeared in his letters, lectures, and essays over the past several years into a cohesive statement on the East-West conflict. In this essay, the close connections between Barth's political and dogmatic views are on full display, as the core theological rationale that Barth presents for his position on the East-West conflict is an almost exact reproduction of the fundamental theme of his doctrine of providence in *Church Dogmatics* III/3: world history and salvation history are bound together in Jesus Christ.

Barth's argument about the East-West conflict directly follows from this dogmatic position. Because world history and salvation history are *bound together* in Jesus Christ, the church is called to vigorous engagement with worldly politics and is obligated to take the risk of judgment and action in the political realm. However, because world history and salvation history are bound together *in Jesus Christ*, the church must remain free and independent in its political work and witness, making Jesus Christ the sole criterion for its judgment and action. This necessarily rules out the possibility that the church can rely on any human program, philosophy, or ideology as an alternative criterion. For this reason, Barth refuses to take sides in the East-West conflict, and is sharply critical of those who want to align Christian judgment and action with anti-communist ideology.

In the opening two paragraphs of the essay, Barth lays the theological groundwork upon which he will build his argument. First, he asserts that the church is called to serious engagement with the East-West situation. Barth is not in any way a

quietist: "This problem of the situation of the Church between East and West is a real one … As it affects us so nearly, it certainly is also the concern of the God who became the brother of man—of all men in all ages—in His Son. And if it is His concern, then it must also be the concern of His Church which is His witness on earth. The Church must seek an answer to the problem."[72] God is concerned about the unfolding of human political life within world history because that history has been joined to God's own history in the incarnation of Jesus Christ.

Second, Barth contends that, in its serious engagement with the East-West problem, the church must measure any answer it might wish to formulate against the one true criterion of judgment: Jesus Christ. Barth writes, "We can seek for the answer to this problem only in this community of Christians. By that I mean that we must all bring what stirs and concerns us in this problem before the judgment seat of Him in whose name we are all baptized, in whom we trust that He alone will judge aright in this matter, as in all others."[73] For Barth, world history is illuminated by God's eternal history at the single point at which God Godself entered into it in Jesus Christ. To see any event in world history clearly, Christians must view it in the light of Christ. Having laid this theological foundation, Barth proceeds to engage the world-historical matter at hand.

Barth outlines two distinct aspects from which the East-West conflict must be viewed. Considered from the first aspect, it is "a world-political struggle for power" between Russia and the United States. It is a struggle between the two "children of old Europe," who, having grown into giants, wish to take the place of their mother: "Each in

[72] Barth, "The Church Between East and West," 127.
[73] Ibid., 127.

his own way, would like to be teacher, patron, protector, benefactor—or, to put it more frankly, the master of their old mother, Europe, and with that of the rest of the world as well."[74] As Barth sees it, the Christian response to this first aspect of the conflict is quite simple: the church must not act out of fear, must not take part in the conflict, and must be there for the victims produced by the struggle. Yet there is, Barth thinks, a higher and more complex form of the conflict than this world-political struggle, the Christian response to which is not so easily discerned.

This second, more complex aspect of the East-West conflict defies concise description. It is a conflict between two different conceptions of man," two different orderings of humanity's "social and politico-economic life," two "powerful intellectual principles and systems," two "modes of living." In sum, it is a comprehensive dispute about "two textures of life, in which not merely America and Russia, but under their leadership a great part of the world is involved."[75] Both sides accuse the other of the most severe inhumanity, nourished on the mistruths of a false faith: West charges East with treating humanity like an economic automaton and subscribing to a demonic faith in social progress, while East charges West with hypocritically espousing a spiritual conception of humanity and a faith in democracy which is only "dust in the eyes of the masses," preventing them from realizing that their lives are dominated by the power of "anonymous capital."[76] Barth uses the theological framework laid out in his introduction to outline a Christian response to this second form of the conflict.

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[74] Ibid., 128, 129, 129.
[75] Ibid., 132.
[76] Ibid., 134.

Barth's basic argument is that because world history and salvation history do not connect at any point other than in Jesus Christ—who as a Jew is not a partisan of either East or West—it is impossible to identify the cause of God with the cause of either side: "The cause of the West may be our cause because we happen to live in the West, happen to inherit Western traditions, but it is not therefore necessarily God's cause—just as the cause of the East is certainly not God's cause either."[77] Rather than choosing between East and West, the church must seek "a third way."[78]

Barth anticipates that his audience might respond to his assertion with a certain degree of disbelief: how could the man who had written in 1938 that every Czech soldier who fought against the Nazis would "stand and fall not only for the freedom of Europe, but also for the Christian church," now advocate for ecclesial neutrality in the face of Communism?[79] Barth attempts to preempt such criticism with a lengthy comparison of the two situations, arguing for a fundamental continuity between his differing responses to each: "Ten years ago we said that the Church is, and remains, the Church, and must not therefore keep an un-Christian silence. Today we say that the Church is, and remains, the Church, and must not therefore speak an un-Christian word. We have reason to say precisely that today and for the same reason as ten years ago."[80] He cites three major differences between the two situations.

First, National Socialism presented the church with a "single and absolutely clear-cut political and spiritual menace … a mixture of madness and crime in which there was

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[77] Ibid., 136.
[78] Ibid., 136.
[79] Karl Barth to Josef Hromádka, 19 September 1938, cited in Busch, *Karl Barth*, 289.
[80] Barth, "The Church Between East and West," 137.

no trace of reason." However, the present conflict is different in that the church finds itself torn between two sides, each of which presents its own temptation and threat to the church: "To turn against the wild boar then was not to commit the folly of exposing one's rear to the wolf."[81] Barth shows no love for Communism. It is "abominably and horrifyingly aggressive." Its methods are "disgusting." He decries its "totalitarian atrocities."[82] Nevertheless, Barth admits that Communism represents a genuine, if failed, attempt to address "the social problem" that plagues the West. Therefore, Barth suggests, "Our Western 'No' to the solution of this question in Russia could only be a Christian 'No' if we had a better conscience with regard to what we mean and intend with our Western freedom, if we, too, were attempting a more humane but no less energetic solution." The cause of God—which in Christ is also the cause of genuine *humanity*—cannot be the cause of the West as long as the East can accuse the West of inhumanity "with the slightest semblance of truth."[83]

Second, Russian Communism is openly godless, whereas National Socialism was founded upon something far more dangerous: false godliness. The church's true enemy, Barth insists, is not the non-Christian, but the anti-Christ:

> In its relationship to Christianity, Communism, as distinguished from Nazism, has not done, and by its very nature cannot do, one thing: it has never made the slightest attempt to reinterpret or falsify Christianity, or to shroud itself in a Christian garment. It has never committed the basic crime of the Nazis, the removal and replacement of the real Christ by a national Jesus, and it has never committed the crime of anti-Semitism. There is nothing of the false prophet about it. … It is brutally, but at least honestly, godless.[84]

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[81] Ibid., 136, 136.
[82] Ibid., 139.
[83] Ibid., 139-40, 140, 140.
[84] Ibid., 140.

When persecuted by the godless, the church's duty is not to respond with "a summons to political warfare," but to joyfully persevere and fearlessly proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ.[85] Furthermore, the confrontation with godlessness presents the church with an opportunity for self-examination. When the godless reject the Christian message, the church must make sure that the fault does not lie with the truthfulness of the message it has proclaimed: "We are being asked about our own faith: where, then, is the Christian West that could look straight into the eyes of the obviously un-Christian East even with a modicum of good conscience? … Where is our justification for talking about a 'Christian West' and all of a sudden wanting to come to the aid of this 'Christian West' with a summons to an intellectual, political, and one day even a military crusade?"[86] In this instance, the church must be sure that its message has not been adulterated by confusing its loyalty to Jesus Christ with an unquestioning identification of itself with Western civilization.

The last difference between the National Socialist and Communist moments is the cost involved in speaking out. While Barth's vehement rejection of National Socialism was almost universally unpopular at the time, to speak a word against Communism today would be to do nothing more than pour one's own small can of gasoline on the West's raging bonfire of "cheap, idle, and useless talk" against the East. Furthermore, to speak out against National Socialism was to oppose the anti-Christ. However, to turn against the East in the present conflict would be in fact to encourage the antichristic pretensions of the West. If Christians are going to pray for the destruction of the East, Barth argues,

[85] Ibid., 141.
[86] Ibid., 141.

then they "should have to pray in the same breath for the destruction of the bulwarks of the Western Anti-Christ as well." Christians should be immediately suspicious when their Christian duty seemingly requires "no kind of intellectual effort and demands no self-sacrifice," but seems to flow perfectly in sync with the rip tide of Western anti-communist hysteria.[87]

In each of these three distinctions between National Socialism and Communism, Barth appeals to the same theological criterion to demonstrate the fundamental continuity between his differing judgments: Jesus Christ, the Word of God made flesh. First, Jesus Christ's humanity exposes the West's inhumanity with regards to "the social problem" and prevents the church from identifying the cause of God with the cause of the West. Second, Barth's extreme partisanship against Nazism emerged because it threatened to colonize and subvert the church's one and only criterion of judgment, Christ himself. National Socialism's rejection of the Jews, of Jesus' Jewish human flesh, and therefore of the God revealed in that flesh, exposed its anti-Christian core. Therefore, to oppose the Nazis was to oppose the anti-Christ, while to oppose the Russians may very well be to encourage the West's antichristic tendencies. Third, Christian political action that centers itself upon Jesus Christ requires speaking the truth of Jesus Christ in the midst of the lordless powers. This is what Barth urged the church to do in the nineteen-thirties. However, it is decidedly inconsistent with the cheap, idle, and useless chatter requested of the church in the East-West conflict.

[87] Ibid., 142, 142, 142.

In sum, Barth deploys the central theme of his doctrine of providence—that world history and salvation history are held together in Christ—as a critical lens through which to make visible the differences between National Socialism and Communism, render intelligible his political judgment about the place and role of the church in the East-West conflict, and expose the threat posed to the Christian church and its message by the idea of a "Christian West." Barth argues that a truly Christological politics, which judges world-historical events in the light of the history of salvation revealed in the person of Jesus Christ, must be a politics of genuine humanity. He therefore concludes that the positive task of the church between East and West is "to call men back to humanity" in both directions: "It can only stand for the right faith, which has just as little to do with hypocrisy, which might well be hidden behind our all too boastful Western justice and wisdom, as it has to do with the admittedly all too great godlessness of the Eastern persuasion. It stands for reconstruction."[88]

Barth's doctrine of providence provides the basic theological rationale for his interpretation of the political and cultural situation of Europe at the end of the first half of the twentieth century. World history and salvation history are held together in the person of Jesus Christ in a dialectical relationship. First, the two histories are *distinct*. Therefore, there can be no sacralization or divinization of human politics, culture, or civilization. Yet, second, the two histories are *related* in Christ. Therefore, there can be no independent or natural theological account of human politics, culture, or civilization that can function authoritatively for the Christian church. While world history and salvation

[88] Ibid., 145, 145.

history are intimately connected, their point of connection is Jesus Christ alone. Therefore Christ is the final criterion of Christian political judgment and action. In *Church Dogmatics* III/3, Barth articulates the constructive dogmatic account of providence that underlies this political theological account of the church's role in the world-historical moment in which it found itself at the mid-point of the twentieth century.

3.3 The Work of Karl Barth, 1948-1949: Divine Providence, World History, and Jesus Christ in Church Dogmatics *III/3*

Reading §48 and §49 of *Church Dogmatics* III/3 in light of Barth's essays and speeches on the East-West conflict enables a new interpretation of the text, both in terms of its formal significance and its theological content. Recent studies of Barth's doctrine of providence have variously interpreted the text as a "lengthy, theological prayer," as an intervention in the history of Reformed theology, or as a theological experiment in personalist philosophy.[89] While there is a degree of truth in each of these perspectives, all of them heavily sanitize Barth's doctrine of providence, stripping it of any political significance. Given Barth's extensive use of the doctrine of providence in his occasional writings in 1948 and 1949, it would be highly unusual if the dogmatic formulation of that doctrine that he composed at the exact same time as these occasional pieces could be interpreted without substantial attention to its political significance.

Whatever else it may be, *Church Dogmatics* III/3 is also—and, given Barth's own sentiments on the subject, perhaps even first and foremost—an exercise in theological

[89] Green, *Doxological Theology*; Kim, *Deus providebit: Calvin, Schleiermacher, and Barth on the Providence of God*; Darren M. Kennedy, *Providence and Personalism: Karl Barth in Conversation with Austin Farrer, John Macmurry, and Vincent Brümmer* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2011).

ideology critique which seeks to unmask and oppose the dangerous distortion of the doctrine of providence that allowed Western man to substitute himself into the place of Israel and Jesus as the center and *telos* of God's providential activity in world history. Over and against this idolatrous conception of divine providence—which Barth traces from its roots in early Reformed and Lutheran theology all the way to its flowering in National Socialism—Barth enacts a "radical correction" of the doctrine in *Church Dogmatics* III/3. This correction takes the form of a Christological delimitation and specification of the divine Subject of the doctrine of providence. Where the Christian tradition has too often adopted an abstract and formal account of the identity of the God whose lordship over creation is the subject matter of the doctrine of providence, Barth reconstructs the doctrine of providence in light of the fact that the identity of this God—as well as the nature and purpose of God's sovereignty and providential lordship—has been revealed in and as the Jewish human being Jesus Christ. Barth's Christological specification of the divine Subject of providence prevents the doctrine from becoming an abstract theological framework of divine world-governance whose Subject might just as easily be some other god—or some other human being.[90]

In what follows I will not seek to conduct an exhaustive exegesis of *Church Dogmatics* III/3. Rather, I will offer an overview of Barth's doctrine of providence that draws out the key passages, features, and themes in which the political dimensions of his

[90] Christopher C. Green argues that the heart of Barth's "radical correction" is a "reordering of divine providence to follow the doctrine of election." While this is certainly true in part, it does not quite capture the crucial role played by Christ's humanity in Barth's formulation of providence. If Barth writes *CD* III/3 with an eye toward his doctrine of election in *CD* II/2, then his other eye is firmly fixed on his soon to be written account of the incarnation in *CD* IV/1. See Green, *Doxological Theology*, 28-36.

dogmatic theology are most fully on display. I will first explore §48, in which Barth articulates the fundamental theme of his account of the doctrine and lays out the methodological and dogmatic frameworks that govern his approach, before turning to Barth's more detailed exposition of the doctrine in §49.

3.3.1 §48: The Doctrine of Providence, Its Basis and Form

In §48, Barth outlines the general theological framework within which he will articulate the four specific aspects of the doctrine of providence in §49. Given the deep confusion about the doctrine of providence that Barth observes in the history of Christian theology, he uses §48 to carefully outline the dogmatic and methodological "rules of engagement" that must be observed when discussing the doctrine.

Barth argues that the Christian tradition has too often identified the divine Subject of the doctrine of providence with an anonymous deity whose chief characteristic is an omnipotent divine will, rather than the triune God revealed in Jesus Christ. Lacking this substantial basis and content, the doctrine has functioned as little more than a formal framework for the articulation of an abstract concept of "divine world-governance," which has been perpetually in danger of being detached from its original content—the triune God revealed in Jesus—and given a new referent. This in fact came to pass, Barth asserts, when modern Christian humanity idolatrously claimed for itself the place previously occupied by the Christian God, fashioning itself as the center of the providential economy, the *telos* of world-historical development, and the sovereign power who rules over all created time and space.

In §48, Barth outlines a theological approach to providence that definitively rules out such a misappropriation of the doctrine. Rejecting all attempts to abstractly correlate divine history and creation history, Barth develops an approach to providence rooted in the paradigmatic instance of the historical relationship between God and creation: the incarnation of Jesus Christ.[91] Barth outlines this account in three stages in §48, discussing in succession the concept of divine providence, the Christian belief in providence, and the Christian doctrine of providence.

3.3.1.1 The Concept of Divine Providence

Barth opens *Church Dogmatics* III/3 with his basic definition of providence: "By 'providence' is meant the superior dealings of the Creator with his creation, the wisdom, omnipotence, and goodness with which He maintains and governs in time this distinct reality according to the counsel of His own will."[92] Given that its basic content includes both God and creation, the question naturally follows whether the doctrinal home of providence ought to lie in the doctrine of God or the doctrine of creation. In answering this question, Barth outlines a typology of the various aspects of the relationship between God and creation.

The first aspect of the relationship between God and the world is God's eternal decree concerning his will for creation, which Barth classifies as *predestination*. It rightly belongs to the doctrine of God because it is "a matter primarily and properly of the

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[91] See Kathryn Tanner, "Creation and Providence," in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. John Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 122: "God's special history with Israel, as it finds its fulfillment in God's becoming human in Jesus Christ, becomes the model for God's history with the world generally."
[92] *CD* III/3, 4.

eternal election of the Son of God to be the Head of His community and of all creatures."[93] Because God's election takes place from all eternity, it does not presuppose the act of creation. Providence, however, does presuppose creation. Providence, therefore, exists within the second aspect of the relationship between God and the world: the *execution* of God's eternal decree.[94] To ground the doctrine of providence in the doctrine of God, as medieval scholastics like Peter Lombard, Bonaventure, and, to a certain extent, Thomas Aquinas did, is to forget that "the being of God does not intrinsically and necessarily include God's knowing, willing, and acting in relationship to His creature."[95] Providence, as the doctrine of the relation between Creator and creature, must therefore reside within the doctrine of creation.

Providence is not, however, simply identical with the doctrine of creation. The subject matter of providence begins where creation ends: providence concerns the ongoing history of the completed work of creation. However, this history of creation itself is actually two closely related but nevertheless distinct *histories*: the history of the covenant and the history of the creature. What follows the act of creation, "first and decisively," is the history of the covenant, or salvation history, whose content is the intrahistorical execution of God's eternal election of the creature. Running parallel to this first history—but "strictly related to the first and determined by it"—is the history of the

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[93] Ibid., 4.
[94] Ibid., 5.
[95] Ibid., 5. Barth gives Thomas credit for attempting to avoid this error by limiting his account of providence in the doctrine of God solely to the eternal *ratio ordinandorum* within God Godself, while locating his account of the activity of God's providential government within the doctrine of creation. However, for Barth, even this goes too far towards suggesting an "integration" of the creature into the being of God. For Thomas's "split" account of providence, see Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologiae*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Bro., 1948), I.22-24 and I.103-119.

creature. The creaturely covenant partner of God is distinct from God, having its own being that, while determined wholly by God's election, is not exhausted by it: "The creaturely partner in the covenant of grace is not merely this but also a mere creature needing creaturely life."[96] However, the creature is wholly dependent on the Creator for this mere "creaturely life." God must therefore be active in accompanying, surrounding, and sustaining the creature in its basic historical existence. This, Barth finally concludes, is the territory of the doctrine of providence:

> The history of the covenant which follows creation also needs an external basis. Its external basis is the sway of divine providence. This does not repeat or continue creation. It corresponds to it in the continued life and history of the creature, proving the faithfulness which its Creator will to maintain and does maintain in relation to it.[97]

God's providence is not a property of God's own nature. It is not a part of God's eternal decree of election. It is not even primarily responsible for the execution of that decree within created time and space. Rather, God's providence maintains the basic creaturely existence of the covenant partner of God. Providence concerns God's relationship to world history, but only as world history is itself always and already determined by salvation history.

3.3.1.2 The Christian Belief in Providence

Having externally delimited the place of the doctrine of providence in relationship to the doctrines of God and creation, Barth turns to address the doctrine itself. Providence concerns the Creator's faithful and constant association with the creature "to precede, accompany, and follow it, preserving, co-operating, and overruling, in all that it does and

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[96] *CD* III/3, 6, 6.
[97] Ibid., 7.

all that happens to it." The Christian belief in providence, then, is the creature's conviction that it is "upheld, determined, and governed in its whole existence … by the fact that the Creator precedes it every step of the way."[98] Barth clarifies this definition by making three strict delimitations regarding the basis, object, and substance of the belief in providence. Each of these seeks to prevent the use of the doctrine as an ideological framework through which to sacralize a certain conception of the human subject.

The basis of the belief in providence is strictly and only faith. The only possibility for rightly affirming belief in God's providential care for creation is when one does so in response to "a hearing and receiving of the Word of God." Barth sharply rejects the alternative viewpoint, which "regards the Christian belief in providence as an opinion, postulate, or hypothesis concerning God, the world, man, and other things … ventured as if it were a pious outlook which has a good deal in its favour and may be adopted if we ourselves are pious."[99] Barth opposes any formulation of the belief in providence that would make human judgments about God's providential activity determinative: "If the Christian belief in this lordship were a view which ultimately had behind it only the thinking, feeling, choosing, and judging human subject, both it and its confession would always be unstable."[100] As Barth goes on to explain, this instability consists in the fact that the doctrine whose content is the lordship of *God* over creation will always threaten to deteriorate into a doctrine whose content is the lordship of the *believing human subject* over creation. The confession of providence, if it is not a confession of faith, stands

[98] Ibid., 14, 14.
[99] Ibid., 15, 16.
[100] Ibid., 16.

poised to become "only the believer's confession of himself." The Christian subject then becomes the one who is capable of taking the measure of all things: "Everything now depends on himself. Hence he cannot rate himself too highly."[101]

To this specification about the basis of the belief in providence, Barth adds a second delimitation of that belief, this time with regard to its object. The object of the belief in providence is simply God Godself. Here too, Barth is concerned to rule out a conception of belief in providence that would reduce God's action in history to a postulate under the control and judgment of the believing human subject: "No human conception of the cosmic process can replace God as the object of the belief in providence."[102] Echoing his warnings from "The Christian Message in Europe Today" and "Modern Youth," Barth points out the danger in binding a conception of divine providence to an abstract theory of the shape and direction of history. Belief in providence "cannot, then, become belief in a human system of history invented by man, even when this system is the one to which the believer himself would give the preference and his heartiest approval."[103] If this were to happen, then theological discourse about providence would merely become a way for humanity to cover its own judgments about history with a thin religious veneer.

Having clarified the basis and object of the belief in providence, Barth turns to the "third and most important delimitation" of this belief: its substance. Here Barth initiates the Christological turn in his formulation of the doctrine. The substance of the Christian

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[101] Ibid., 18, 18.
[102] Ibid., 20.
[103] Ibid., 21, 21.

belief in providence is faith in Christ: "The Word of God which it believes, in which it believes, and which sets it in the light in which it may see the lordship of God in the history of creaturely being, is the one Word of God beside which there is no other—the Word which became flesh and is called Jesus Christ."[104] The Christological determination of the doctrine of providence definitively rules out the possibility that any other human subject might position itself at the center of God's providential action in history: "The lordship of God over world occurrence … is not a general form which might have a very different content."[105] Only at this one point, in Jesus Christ, does the Christian belief in providence have any grounding or merit, because it is the one point at which world history, salvation history, and divine history can be seen to align:

> It is here that the will which rules the history of created being is not concealed. It looks to the history of the covenant which is fulfilled in the mission, in the person and work of the incarnate Son, of the 'God for us.' And through and beyond this it looks to the divine election of grace. And it thus sees the Father, the 'God over us,' as it sees the Son. As it sees Him it hears the Word of God, and as it hears the Word of God it receives the light on God's rule in the world beside which there is no other.[106]

All other attempts to illuminate world history with the light of salvation history are doomed to fail, especially those that would attempt to refract the light of salvation history through a human being other than Jesus Christ.

At the end of his discussion of the Christological substance of the belief in providence, Barth offers one of his few explicit reflections on the political stakes involved in his dogmatic formulation of the doctrine of providence. Barth rehearses a

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[104] Ibid., 26, 26.
[105] Ibid., 26.
[106] Ibid., 29.

genealogy of the concept of providence that runs from Calvin to Adolf Hitler, in which he identifies the theological error that allowed the church in Germany to fall under National Socialism's spell: the use of an abstract conception of divine lordship as the basis and starting point of the doctrine of providence.

Both Lutheran and Reformed theologians taught "the divine lordship over all occurrence both as a whole and in detail without attempting to say what is the meaning and purpose of this lordship." Instead, they understood it only as "the act of a superior and absolutely omniscient, omnipotent, and omnioperative being whose nature and work do of course display such moral qualities as wisdom, righteousness, and goodness, etc. But this is all." Without realizing it, they constructed magisterial accounts of divine providence upon this "empty shell": "It does not seem to have occurred to whole generations of Protestant theologians to ask what this lordship has to do with Jesus Christ."[107] In the older orthodox traditions, the doctrine of providence became a theological Trojan horse, containing a dangerous void at its very center.

When not specifically tied to the triune God revealed in the human subject Jesus Christ, providence became a formal framework for mapping the relationship between God and the world that could just as easily be tied to some other God or some other human being. In this way, Barth asserts, "the hour had to come, and has now come, when belief in history and its immanent demons could replace faith in God's providence, and the word 'providence' could become a favorite one on the lips of Adolf Hitler. It was the older, genuine orthodoxy which first opened the sluices to this flood."[108] By placing Jesus

[107] Ibid., 31, 31, 31.
[108] Ibid., 33.

Christ at the center of the doctrine of providence, Barth fills the divine-human abstraction implanted in the heart of the doctrine by the "older orthodox theologians." The critical intent of this decision is clear: if Jesus Christ is the subject of world history, no other construction of the human may lay claim to that title.

3.3.1.3 The Christian Doctrine of Providence

Barth closes his introduction to the doctrine of providence in §48 with a brief exposition of the content of a truly *Christian* doctrine of providence—meaning one which is founded upon a Christological basis. Here he explicates the fundamental theme of his doctrine of providence which will guide his detailed exposition of the doctrine in §49. This theme corresponds exactly to the theological position from which he was at that very time deriving his political judgments about the East-West conflict in his occasional writings: the history of the covenant and the history of creation—salvation history and world history—are held together in Jesus Christ. Therefore, there is "no obscurity concerning the nature and will and work of the Lord of history," because the God who "so wonderfully foresees and provides is not a mere supreme being but the God who … acted as the Lord of the covenant in the fulfillment of which He Himself was finally not to spare his own Son."[109] The God who preserves, accompanies, and rules over the creature is the same God who has elected that creature to be God's covenant-partner.

The Christian doctrine of providence begins with the recognition that the history of creation is ordered to and determined by the history of the covenant. World history gains its meaning and purpose from this fact:

[109] Ibid., 34, 35.

> God establishes His fellowship with man, and prepares and accomplishes its completion in His own self-giving to human nature and existence, to conduct it to its manifestation at the expiration of the last time. As the creation of all the reality distinct from God took place on the basis of this purported covenant and with a view to its execution, so the meaning of the continued existence of the creature, and therefore the purpose of its history, is that this covenant will and work of God begun in creation should have its course and reach its goal. There is no other meaning or purpose in history.[110]

The significance and value of world history can only be found here in God's covenant faithfulness revealed in the covenant with Israel and in the incarnation of Jesus Christ.

The history of creation, though determined by the history of the covenant, is not identical to it or exhausted by it: "The covenant is not creation, but its internal basis. And creation is not the covenant, but its external basis."[111] Indeed, Barth writes, "The history of the covenant … is within the totality of this creaturely occurrence a particular history selected for this purpose and determined and directed accordingly. It is an astonishingly thin line in a confusion of apparently much more powerful and conspicuous lines which seem to be independent and mutually contradictory, and especially to run quite contrary to the narrow line of the history of the covenant."[112] The doctrine of providence addresses the way in which, despite all appearances, God causes the many lines of world history—*the history of the creature*—to "cooperate" and be "coordinated" and "integrated," with the one thin line of salvation history—*the history of the covenant*.[113]

Barth proceeds to lay out two crucial qualifications to his claim about the coordination, integration, and cooperation of the history of the creature with the history

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[110] Ibid., 36.
[111] Ibid., 38.
[112] Ibid., 36.
[113] Ibid., 36, 41.

of the covenant. First, it is only possible through grace. It is always and only the direct work of God that causes this to happen and never any creaturely possession, property, or potentiality. Creation has no cause for boasting: "It is not glorious in itself; it can become so only in the right hand of the living God. That He uses it in the service of this kingdom; that He coordinates and integrates it with His work in this kingdom; that He causes it to cooperate in the history of this kingdom, this is the rule of His providence."[114] The history of the creature cannot in any way participate in the history of the covenant apart from God's grace. However, the history of the creature really is the external basis of the history of the covenant as God graciously causes it to be so.

Barth's second qualification about the coordination, integration, and cooperation of creaturely history and salvation history is that this coordination, integration, and cooperation takes place definitively in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. The doctrine of providence does not look to a theory or system for its conception of God's relationship to world history. It looks to a person. The history of the covenant and the history of the creature cannot be abstractly related to each other. They intersect very concretely in the person of Jesus. When the doctrine of providence addresses the cooperation of the creature in God's saving work in history, it can look nowhere else but Jesus: "The doctrine of providence presupposes that this special history is exalted above all other history. It can and will understand all other occurrence only in its relation to this special occurrence, namely, as an occurrence under the lordship of the One who there pursues the work in which His will for the whole is revealed and operative."[115] From the light cast by

[114] Ibid., 43.
[115] Ibid., 37.

God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ, world history is illuminated—but only by this very particular light. Therefore human judgments about the activity of God in world history can be made, but only ever falteringly, partially, and fragmentarily, in total dependence on the Holy Spirit. The attempt to abstract God's general activity in world history from "God's work of grace and the kingdom of Jesus Christ" leads, not to a Christian doctrine of providence, but to the elevation of the human subject into the place of Christ as the center and *telos* of divine action in history.[116]

In §48, Barth gives an account of the Christian doctrine of providence whose starting point is not world history in the abstract, but the very concrete and specific line of salvation history that runs inconspicuously through this larger whole. At the core of Barth's argument is his conviction that knowledge of God's providence is strictly and only possible on the basis of revelation: he argues that the shape and purpose of God's action in history is discernable in no other way than by looking, first, at the covenant with Israel and the incarnation of Jesus Christ, and then back from these events to world history in general. Any other approach to conceiving of God's relationship to world history cannot be called a Christian doctrine of providence. Yet, if the Christian subject really does take this approach, she can, in the power of the Spirit, have "open eyes for the ways of God in creaturely occurrence."[117]

3.3.2 §49: God the Father as Lord of His Creature

In §49, "God the Father as Lord of His Creature," Barth articulates his constructive account of the doctrine of providence in detail, carrying out the

[116] Ibid., 54.
[117] Ibid., 57.

Christological reconfiguration of the doctrine which he outlined in §48. Barth grafts his Christological revision of the material content of providence onto the traditional scheme of the doctrine found in the "older orthodox dogmatics," adopting the three-part structure of *conservatio*, *concursus*, and *gubernatio*, while adding a fourth section: "The Christian under the Universal Lordship of God the Father."[118] Barth maintains the formal scheme of the doctrine as it had been developed in Reformed and Lutheran traditions, while revolutionizing its content in light of his steadfast determination to "hold fast at all costs and at every point to the Christological thread."[119] In what follows, I will trace this Christological thread as it runs through each of the four major sections of Barth's doctrine of providence, showing at each point how it enables Barth to formulate an account of the doctrine with the critical potential to unmask and critique the ideological distortion and subversion of Christian proclamation and witness in Europe in Barth's day.

In each of the three main aspects of the doctrine of providence, Barth argues that a Christological revision of the content of divine preservation/*conservatio*, accompaniment/*concursus*, and ruling/*gubernatio* resolves a problem that has traditionally plagued each of these aspects of the doctrine respectively. Thus, with his account of divine preservation, Barth attempts to resolve the seeming contradiction between God's potentially unlimited power to preserve the creature and the reality of the creature's limited preservation. In regards to the divine accompaniment, Barth's Christological reconstrual of the doctrine allows him to articulate a non-competitive

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[118] Ibid., xii.
[119] Ibid., xi. See also Randall C. Zachman, "Response to: 'I See Something You Don't See'" in *For the Sake of the World: Karl Barth and the Future of Ecclesial Theology*, ed. George Hunsinger (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 139.

account of divine and human agency within the operations of *concursus*. Finally, Barth's Christological account of divine government addresses questions about the nature of divine sovereignty over creation. However, Barth's concerns are not solely dogmatic and philosophical.

At each of these points, Barth's Christological renovation of the traditional conception of providence bears significant political ramifications. Barth's resolution of the contradiction between God's unlimited power and the creature's limited preservation rules out a providential conception of creaturely self-preservation that leads to the "titanism of the creature."[120] Barth's non-competitive account of *concursus* guards against an account of providence that would blindly stamp creaturely activity with the *imprimatur* of the divine. Finally, his strict Christological delimitation of the divine-world government forecloses upon the possibility that God's divine rule over the *kosmos* could be articulated as an abstract schema of global governance that could be associated with ruling powers other than the triune God. At each point, therefore, Barth's articulation of the doctrine of providence serves to critique the theological imagination that he identifies in his occasional writings as enabling the church's captivity to National Socialist and anti-communist ideologies: a providential vision of the Christian, Western subject as an incarnation of the activity and cause of God in world history.

3.3.2.1 The Divine Preserving

The first affirmation of the Christian doctrine of providence is that God preserves the creature. God does this, according to Barth, "By upholding and sustaining its

[120] *CD* III/3, 82.

individual existence … and by giving to this existence its continuity."[121] In this formal definition, Barth aligns himself with the Reformed tradition's understanding of the divine *conservation*.[122] However, he quickly proceeds to offer an important Christological qualification of that formal definition that differentiates him from the tradition, giving his doctrine "a point which it does not have in the older dogmatics, for we differentiate between the God who sustains the creature and a mere supreme being, identifying that sustaining God with the God of the biblical revelation."[123] The divine Subject of preservation is not an anonymous deity characterized primarily by an abstract, omnipotent will, but the Triune God revealed in the covenant. Therefore, the divine power that preserves the creature is not ambiguous with regards to its basis or purpose: "The power in which He sustains the creature is the mercy with which in His Son Jesus Christ He is revealed and active within creation and in creaturely form."[124] Over and against the tendency of the older Reformed thinkers, Barth refuses to separate God's sustaining power and God's loving mercy.[125]

The preservation of the creature by God is not primarily, therefore, a matter of a general and metaphysical causal necessity, but of the particular will of God to be in covenant relation with the creature. Consequently, the doctrinal basis of divine

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[121] Ibid., 58.
[122] Ibid., 60.
[123] Ibid., 60.
[124] Ibid., 58.
[125] To be fair, Calvin did attempt in his own way to hold together God's power with God's justice and love in his concept of providence. He asserts that the doctrine is not a matter of "that absolute will of which the Sophists babble, by an impious and profane distinction separating his justice from his power—but providence, that determinative principle of all things, from which flows nothing but right." See Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 214. See also John T. McNeill, *The History and Character of Calvinism* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 212.

preservation is not an abstract doctrine of God, but Christology. To understand the divine preservation, one must look to Jesus: "It is He who is the divine basis of the preservation and continuance of that existence … It can be, and indeed it must be, because He is. This is what makes the preservation of the creature a divinely meaningful and a divinely effective work."[126] The God who preserves the creature is the God at whose right hand Jesus Christ sits.

Therefore, there can be no ambiguity about the character or purpose of God's preservation of the creature. It is neither the "self-seeking care of the owner for the preservation of his possession," nor the "the logical necessity with which a given B is maintained by a given A." Instead, "It is the love of God which preserves the creature."[127] Barth grounds this reconfiguration of the relationship between God's power and God's mercy and love in the witness of Scripture. When Scripture talks about preservation, Barth argues, it is always tied to the history of the covenant. There is little attention paid to a general, abstract preservation of creaturely existence as such. The Old Testament addresses divine preservation primarily as God's particular preservation of the people of Israel. The New Testament identifies Jesus Christ as the one who preserves the creature so that the creature may participate in the covenant.[128] The basis of the divine preservation of the creature is not the omnipotent power of an abstract deity, but God's self-emptying love revealed in Jesus Christ.

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[126] *CD* III/3, 58.
[127] Ibid., 59, 59.
[128] Ibid., 59. Cf. Ps. 36:6, Ps. 73:23, Neh. 9:6, Rom. 11:36, 1 Cor. 8:6, Heb. 1:3.

Reading Barth's exposition of divine preservation against the background of his socio-political context reveals the critical potential latent within his Christological revision of the concept: a Christological construal of divine preservation enables an account of the *finite* and *limited* preservation of the creature that does not stand as an affront to the power or quality of God's preserving action. If the basis of the divine preservation of the creature were God's unlimited power, then the limitation of that preservation would problematically call into question either the efficacy of that power or the disposition of God towards the creature: if, given God's unlimited power, God could preserve the creature indefinitely, then why does God not do this?

Barth's Christological approach to preservation resolves this apparent contradiction. There is no incongruity between the limited, finite existence of the creature and God's eternal preservation of the creature because the two converge in Jesus Christ: "There is no contradiction between the death and end and passing of the individual and of creation as a whole, and its eternal preservation by God. For in its relationship to Jesus Christ, in its participation in the continuing history of His people from the beginning of the world to the end, each in its limited time and space can receive and enjoy its own perfectly satisfying participation in eternal life in fellowship with God."[129] The creature is preserved in its limited time so that in that time it may come to participate in Christ's eternal life. In that finite preservation the creature truly can participate in eternal life.

Because the preservation of the creature is ordered toward the salvation of the creature in Christ, the creature is free to embrace his or her limits and finitude and has no

[129] Ibid., 63.

need to attempt to overcome them through projects of self-salvation: "There can never be any question of its secretly regarding itself as its own preserver. … [God] has not so much destroyed that claim, the concealed or open titanism of the creature; He has simply rendered it superfluous. If it is saved, it is also preserved, and the anxiety or pride in which it might preserve itself is deprived of its object."[130] The creature is free to admit its need and to embrace its creaturely finitude, and therefore must offer a definitive "No!" to all projects of self-salvation. Therefore, the doctrine of providence cannot provide a pretext for the creature to bind itself to the work of God in the world, making itself the locus of divine activity and presence in history. The creature can resist the temptation to construe itself as the incarnation of the divine in history and the subject of its own world-historical drama of salvation, because it already participates fully in the salvation accomplished through the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Thus construed, the doctrine of providence becomes a way to affirm creaturely limits, rather than an idolatrous way for the creature to view history from the standpoint of the Creator.[131] Providence is not a framework for articulating immanent processes of creaturely divinization, but for affirming and embracing the finite, limited character of creaturely existence in the knowledge that the God revealed in Jesus Christ will uphold and sustain the creature within those limits and guide the creature to eternal life through participation in Christ.

3.3.2.2 The Divine Accompanying

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[130] Ibid., 82.

[131] As Darren M. Kennedy notes, for Barth, "'The limitation of human life' actually becomes a sign of providence in Barth's theology," becoming one of the four concrete signs of God's providential activity in world history, alongside Scripture, the history of the church, and the history of Israel. Kennedy, *Providence and Personalism*, 210.

Barth's Christological delimitation of the nature and shape of God's *accompaniment* of the creature in time prevents divine and human agency from being placed in a competitive relationship. As in his account of preservation, the resolution of this problem is not only a matter of dogmatic or philosophical coherence, but also bears significant political consequences. For—Barth believes—if creaturely and divine agency are cast in competition, then the doctrine of *concursus* will always be torn between the two poles of synergism and monism. When, in the former case, divine *concursus* becomes a way to articulate an abstract synergy between divine and creaturely historical action, then humanity will always be tempted to imagine its own history as "the history of God" and the human being as a "God-man."[132]

The doctrine of divine accompaniment addresses "the lordship of God in relation to the free and autonomous activity of the creature." It is the next step beyond the doctrine of preservation. God's providential care of the creature extends past a mere preservation of its existence. God does not preserve the basic existence of the creature and then "abandon it to its own activity."[133] Instead, God actively coexists and cooperates *with* the creature in the creature's activity, enabling that activity to be free and autonomous. In God's accompaniment of the creature, God "affirms and approves and recognizes and respects" the autonomous activity of the creature.[134]

Concursus emerged as an alternative to two problematic conceptions of the Creator-creation relationship: one that made creation independent of the Creator after the

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[132] *CD* III/3, 111.
[133] Ibid., 90, 91.
[134] Ibid., 92, 93. Barth divides the doctrine of *concursus* into three parts: *praecurrit*, *concurrit*, and *sucurrit*. For a helpful account of these distinctions, see Green, *Doxological Theology*, 83-87.

completion of the act of creation—as in deism—and another that merged Creator and creation into an undifferentiated whole—as in pantheism. Barth's doctrine of providence follows a middle way between these two alternatives, attempting to do justice to both the co-existence and the antithesis of divine and creaturely action.[135]

In the attempt to formulate an account of the divine accompaniment of the creature that respects both "the majesty and primacy of God" and the "autonomy and dignity of creaturely activity," Christian thinkers have overwhelmingly relied upon the Aristotelian distinction between primary and secondary causation to render the distinction between divine and creaturely activity intelligible.[136] Identifying God with the *causa prima* and the creature with the *causa secundae*, older Reformed dogmaticians attempted to place the two in non-competitive relationship, rejecting both a synergistic account that tried to combine the two causes into a *tertium quid* and a monistic account that rejected one in favor of the other.

The problem with these efforts is that they subordinated the particular content of Christian revelation to a formal schema of Aristotelian causality. Thus, while the older dogmatic accounts of *concursus* were formally correct, there was nothing in the content of their visions of God and the creature that made them specifically Christian. As it was predominately formulated, *concursus* could apply just as easily to any number of conceptions of the divine besides the Christian one. Too often, this lead to accounts of divine providence that—while they articulated a formally non-competitive account of divine and human activity—"spoke abstractly" of a "neutral and featureless God" and a

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[135] *CD* III/3, 96.
[136] Ibid., 97.

"neutral and featureless creature."[137] In the place of the triune God revealed in Jesus Christ, "God" became "a purely formal concept, denoting a supreme being endowed with absolute, unconditional, and irresistible power."[138] Yet this conception of the supremacy of God could not help but find itself in competition with the autonomy of the creature and the doctrine of *concursus* eventually broke down into a monistic occasionalism on the one hand and a synergistic divinization of the creature on the other.[139]

Barth believes that this entire complex of problems about divine sovereignty and creaturely autonomy can be entirely avoided simply by subordinating a formal account of non-competitive causality to the particular content of revelation.[140] If God is the God revealed in Jesus Christ, then the basis for *concursus* is not an abstract concept of divine power, but the specific concept of divine love revealed in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ, the creature sees that God—though absolutely superior to the creature—has graciously and lovingly willed to cooperate with the creature. Therefore, God's decision to give autonomy and freedom to the creature is not an insult to God's nature; it is the most truthful expression of it. Creaturely autonomy arises from the fact that the absolutely superior God who accompanies the creature is the God who from all eternity has elected to express God's unlimited power as self-giving covenant fellowship with humanity: "The unconditioned and irresistible lordship of God means not only that the

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[137] Ibid., 100.
[138] Ibid., 113.
[139] Ibid., 115-117. For a similar account, see Paul T. Nimmo, *Being in Action: The Theological Shape of Barth's Ethical Vision* (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 118-135.
[140] As Bruce McCormack suggests, Barth reorients *concursus* from being "a solution to a question arising in cosmology" to a "reflex of a christologically grounded soteriology with a very definite content." See Bruce L. McCormack, "The Actuality of God: Karl Barth in Conversation with Open Theism," in *Engaging the Doctrine of God: Contemporary Protestant Perspectives*, ed. Bruce L. McCormack (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 230.

freedom of creaturely activity is neither jeopardized nor suppressed, but rather that it is confirmed in all its particularity and variety."[141] This is the Christian understanding of divine *concursus*.

Barth's Christocentric formulation of *concursus* does more than just resolve a philosophical contradiction that has plagued the doctrine of providence for centuries. Indeed, even here in his account of some of the most abstract and technical portions of the doctrine of providence, Barth continues to have one eye fixed upon the political ramifications of his dogmatic theology. In the heart of his exposition of *concursus*, Barth explicitly discusses the connection between an insufficiently Christological conception of providence and the ideological appeal of National Socialism. Barth argues that if the concept of God's accompanying presence in world history is not understood as the outworking of the love of a God who is qualitatively distinct from creation, then it will always threaten to unravel into a synergistic account that mixes divine and creaturely elements. In so doing, the doctrine of providence will become a way to theorize the divinization of human political agency.

If the Christological basis and content of the divine accompanying of creation is lost, then the doctrine of *concursus* threatens to become a general theory of the divinization of creation. Barth sets himself against this possibility in the strongest possible terms: "It is quite impossible to build upon the doctrine of the *concursus*, the perception that God accompanies all creaturely occurrence, a scheme of things in which the world as such is also divine, nature as such is the nature-God, history as such is the

[141] *CD* III/3, 146. See also 107-109.

history of God, and man as such is the God-man. Such a view can only be a magical one. The godhead or divinity to which it refers can only be a plurality of demons, or a single arch-demon." Why does Barth take such a negative view of this conception of the doctrine? He argues, "This is a possible point of entry for all the dangerous heresies which have first endangered the knowledge of the divine providence and then Christian knowledge as a whole."[142] It is the temptation to identify divine providence with the power of the creature:

> In one connection or another we are given the (within its limits) quite legitimate impression of the power of creaturely activity. … It may be the activity of men as they are caught up and swept forward in a specific movement. It may be the activity of the human spirit in one or other of its different forms. We are so mastered and carried away by the impression that we think it impossible to conceive of anything more majestic or significant, more solemn or overpowering.[143]

Transfixed by this vision of its own power, the creature comes to believe that it is in fact *this* power, *its own* power, that preserves, accompanies, and rules over the universe: "Secretly or openly, a powerful creaturely *causa* is exalted to the divine dignity and function, and under this one sign and at this one crucial point the doctrine of the providence of God becomes the doctrine of the divinity of the cosmos."[144] What initially seemed to pass as a Christian doctrine of providence reveals itself in the end as a profound subversion of the doctrine.

Barth's primary concern here is that the Christian church can be tricked into participating and embracing this subversion of its belief. "It is not impossible," Barth

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[142] Ibid., 111, 111.
[143] Ibid., 111.
[144] Ibid., 111, 111.

says, "that this type of secularized doctrine of providence may for a time be accompanied by what is in the narrower sense a religious doctrine of salvation and redemption, in which on one or another view or interpretation there may even be a place for Jesus Christ." Such was the case, not only with the providential doctrines of Schiller, Goethe, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel, but also with the providential rhetoric of National Socialism: "When the building of the National Socialist temple first began, it was commonly believed that at least in the forecourt there would be a Christian, a German-Christian chapel, and that in that chapel there would be a place and a use for the Bible, and for Jesus and Paul and Luther." Barth argues that this seemingly appealing alliance cannot be sustained. Either the church will abandon Jesus Christ and become the "cult-centre of the god who is really believed to be the world-ruler" or in loyalty to Christ the church will break with this false cult, in recognition that "Jesus Christ Himself occupies the position of World-ruler, and side by side with Him there is no room for another." The latter, Christological conception of providence provides "the only thorough and comprehensive and radical safeguard" against the former type of divine-human "quidproquos."[145]

3.3.2.3 The Divine Ruling

The last of the three major aspects of the traditional Reformed doctrine of providence is divine *gubernatio* or government of creation. God not only preserves creation at the outset, and accompanies creation on its way through time. God also guides creation to its *telos*. The divine ruling is God's directing, guiding, and leading of creation

[145] Ibid., 111, 112, 112, 112.

according to God's final purposes.[146] In keeping with his established pattern, Barth accepts the formal definition of this aspect of the doctrine of providence as it has been formulated in the Reformed tradition, while criticizing the failure of the tradition to specify the Christological content of the doctrine. The "older orthodox theology" too closely identified the divine *gubernatio* with an abstract theory of the cosmic rule of an omnipotent—but anonymous—divine Subject: "It thought and spoke about the divine ruling as about an idea. … In spite of the testimonies from Scripture, it was content with what was basically a quite formal and abstract consideration of the subject. … What is passed off as the authority which controls the whole universe, seems rather to be the concept of a supreme being furnished with supreme power in relation to all other beings."[147] Against this error, Barth outlines a concept of divine rule that corresponds to the God revealed in the covenant with Israel and the incarnation of Jesus Christ.

In order to arrive at a *Christian* doctrine of the divine ruling, Barth contends, one must begin from the foundational premise that the *One* who rules is the King of Israel. This is the only possible "solid foundation" for the doctrine. The "Subject of the divine world-governance" is the particular one who made a covenant with the twelve tribes of Israel and who fulfilled that covenant in Jesus Christ, the Messiah of Israel and the light to the nations.[148] Barth summarizes this entire section of his exposition in a single paragraph:

> When we think of the divine governance we are not thinking of an empty form, of a general and overriding order and teleology in all occurrence. We are not looking either up above or down below. We are simply looking at the Old and New

[146] Ibid., 155.
[147] Ibid., 176.
[148] Ibid., 177, 177, 178.

> Testaments; at the One whom Scripture calls God; at the events which Scripture attests in their relationships the one to the other … and, at the very heart of these events, at Jesus Christ on the cross; at the One who was not crucified alone, but two thieves with Him, the one on the right hand and other on the left (Mt. 27:38); at the One who accepted solidarity with all thieves both Jew and Gentile; at the One who is King over them all and on behalf of them all. It is from this point, and in this sense, and according to this purpose as it is active and revealed in these events, that the world is ruled, heaven and earth and all that therein is. This is the Christian belief in the divine world-governance.[149]

Here Barth articulates the dogmatic claim upon which he was at that very time basing his judgments about the East-West conflict: world history and salvation history are bound together in Jesus Christ, such that the latter illuminates the former through Him. Barth continues, "The history of salvation attested in the Bible cannot be considered or understood simply in and for itself. It is related to world history as a whole. It is the center and key to all events. But again, world history cannot be considered or understood simply in and for itself. It is related to the history of salvation. It is the circumference around that center, the lock to which that key belongs and is necessary."[150] God's rule in world history is of the exact same character as God's saving activities in salvation history. The hand of God that governs, directs, and guides the universe to its final end is the nail-scarred hand of the crucified Jesus of Nazareth.

Throughout his treatment of the divine ruling, Barth attempts to undermine the ability of any pseudo-Christian ideology of world-governance to disguise itself as the Christian doctrine of providence. Barth claims that because the Subject of the divine world-governance is this particular God, all other schemas of cosmic rule are invalid. "God alone rules." Therefore, "No one else has any legitimate claim to rule His

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[149] Ibid., 186.
[150] Ibid., 186.

creature."[151] Indeed, Barth asserts, "God laughs at all our attempts to see His rule with the eye of our human reason, let alone at our efforts to take the throne and play the part of world-ruler ourselves. This divine laughter rings out over the folly of all our crude or refined human imperialisms."[152] The rule of any other would be "usurped, incompetent, weak; the bungling of an amateur. Open or secret opposition to any such rule would be possible, imminent, and probably successful. Certainly it would be legitimate and necessary."[153] Barth's doctrine of providence not only refuses ideological colonization, but also provides a theological basis for political resistance against those who try to make themselves world-rulers in the place of Jesus Christ.

These matters, Barth suggests, are "of the greatest practical importance" for human beings. A conception of the divine rule as little more than "an immanent hierarchy of power and value" in which "the articulated whole is greater and more important than its component parts" leads directly to "the political and economic totalitarianism which has caused us so much anxiety today both in its Western and also in its Eastern forms."[154] Such a conception of world-rule, which sacrifices certain subordinate groups for the sake of the whole, is incompatible with the government of the one true world-ruler who in fact became one of those who was so sacrificed.

This last point takes on an added level of specificity in light of Hitler's attempted extermination of the Jews and the founding of the state of Israel in 1948. Over and against the anti-Semitic and antichristic providential vision of National Socialism, Barth

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[151] Ibid., 157, 157.
[152] Ibid., 160.
[153] Ibid., 157.
[154] Ibid., 172, 173, 173, 173.

makes the endurance of the Jews one of four principal traces of the divine world-governance in world history.[155] Any doctrine of providence that has no place for the Jews has no place for the crucified Jew, Jesus of Nazareth, and therefore cannot be a Christian doctrine of providence. By basing the doctrine of divine rule upon Christology, Barth is able to offer a vicious and thoroughgoing critique of the human imperialisms that were birthed out of counterfeit doctrines of providence in the first half of the twentieth century.

3.3.2.4 The Christian under the Universal Lordship of God the Father

Having completed his reconstruction of the three traditional components of the doctrine of providence, Barth closes his doctrine of providence with an account of the creature's relationship to providence. Barth's fourth section represents a shift in perspective from the objective to the subjective: from the divine *Subject* of providence to its creaturely *subject*. Alongside the divine *conservatio*, *concursus*, and *gubernatio*, Barth places the creaturely *participatio*: "Our sketch would be incomplete if in conclusion we did not expressly consider the creaturely subject which participates in the divine lordship … as a creature which not only experiences this rule in practice but perceives and acknowledges and affirms and approves it."[156] Given Barth's severe critique of any human pretension to replace Jesus Christ as the one who sits upon the judgment seat of world history, this shift in perspective might seem to run against the grain of his previous account. Once again, the Christological basis of Barth's treatment of the doctrine of providence proves crucial. The human subject of providence—the Christian who is under

[155] Ibid., 210-226.
[156] Ibid., 239.

the universal lordship of God—is the one who *participates* in Christ's kingly office.[157] The Christian, therefore, can never sit *upon* Christ's throne. However, *in Christ*, the Christian really does come *to* that throne. She finds herself "at the very seat of government."[158] Barth contends that the legitimacy of the entire doctrine of providence hangs upon this fine distinction.

Who is the human subject that has actual knowledge of the ways of God in world history? It is, Barth contends, "The living member of the Christian community, the Christian. … The Christian alone is the creaturely subject which can join in a confession of the divine providence because it knows this providence, because it participates in the divine world-governance in this special and inward way."[159] On its surface, this assertion seems to run contrary to the central impulse of the previous aspects of Barth's account of providence, as well as to the central themes of his occasional writings from this same time period. Not surprisingly, Barth heavily qualifies this claim about the Christian subject in his subsequent exposition.

The Christian subject who has "actual knowledge" of divine providence can only *receive* this knowledge as she or he participates in Christ's providential lordship. He or she can do nothing to merit it. She has no capacities, potencies, or potentialities that prepare her to receive this knowledge or make the reception of this knowledge fitting for her. Nothing sets the Christian apart from the rest of humanity that could serve as a basis

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[157] For a full account of Barth's understanding of participation in Christ—albeit one that does not treat the manifestation of this theme within *Church Dogmatics* III/3—see Adam Neder, *Participation in Christ: An Entry into Karl Barth's* Church Dogmatics (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009).
[158] *CD* III/3, 288.
[159] Ibid., 239.

for this knowledge. The reason that the Christian has genuine knowledge of providence is not that she has been elevated even the slightest bit from creaturely existence towards divine existence. In fact, Barth argues, it is the opposite. The thing which distinguishes the Christian subject from all others is that "he accepts and affirms the fact that he is only a creaturely subject like the others … Of all creatures the Christian is the one which not merely is a creature, but actually says Yes to being a creature." Barth suggests that the "advantage" that the Christian has over all other creatures is that only the Christian truly affirms the fact that "he has no advantage at all."[160]

The Christian is no closer to the divine center of world history than any other creature. The difference is that the Christian *sees* that center in Jesus Christ—and even is united to that center through union with Christ: "He sees the constitutive and organizing center of the process. What makes him a Christian is that he sees Jesus Christ, the Son of God, in the humiliation but also in the exaltation of His humanity, and himself united with Him, belonging to Him, his life delivered by Him, but also placed at His disposal."[161] The Christian has no inherent claim or ability to participate in divine providence, and doing so brings no merit to the creature: "He is going through an open door, but one which he himself has not opened."[162] Locating Christian knowledge of divine providence as an extension of the *participatio Christi* enables Barth to continue to steadfastly reject the doctrine of providence's tendency to theorize the divinization of the creature, while still affirming a genuine knowledge of providence on the part of the

[160] Ibid., 240, 240, 240.
[161] Ibid., 241.
[162] Ibid., 242.

creature. It is not as if participation in Christ—which Barth embraces—and the divinization of the creature—which Barth condemns—are simply two different doors to the same room of divine knowledge. The nature and character of the knowledge that the creature receives through participation in Christ is decisively shaped by this very particular way in which it is received.

The "true knowledge" of the "providence and universal lordship of God" that the creature very genuinely receives through participation in Christ is not *divine* providential knowledge, but *human* knowledge of divine providence.[163] Thus, in practice, Barth asserts, the Christian with knowledge of providence still encounters reality as the limited and finite creature that she or he is. Creaturely knowledge of divine providence offers no escape from the conditions of creaturely existence. In fact, it is quite the opposite. Creaturely knowledge of divine providence enables the creature to truly embrace its creatureliness: "He has no master-key to all the mysteries of the great process of existence as they crowd in upon him every moment in a new form, to all the mysteries of his own existence as a constituent existence in the historical process of all created reality. On the contrary, he will be the one man who knows that there is no value in any of the master-keys which man has thought to discover and possess."[164] Creaturely knowledge of divine providence does not provide the creature with a master key to world history, but rather frees the creature from the need for one.[165]

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[163] Ibid., 242.
[164] Ibid., 242.
[165] From this perspective, participation in divine providence gives the Christian no cause for arrogance or a feeling of superiority over his or her fellow creatures *pace* Caroline Schröder's critique of Barth's doctrine in "'I See Something You Don't See': Karl Barth's Doctrine of Providence," in *For the Sake of the World*, 115-135. See also Kennedy, *Providence and Personalism*, 254.

Neither does participation in Christ offer the Christian the type of knowledge that would enable mastery and control over his or her place in world history. Rather, the Christian will be the one who is "the most surprised, the most affected, the most apprehensive, and the most joyful in the face of events."[166] The Christian life that is lived in light of the knowledge of God's providence will therefore be "an adventure for which he for his part has ultimately and basically no qualifications of his own." All of this is true, Barth argues, "not because he does not know what it is all about, but just because he does know."[167] Knowledge of divine providence is not a body of divine knowledge miraculously implanted in the Christian. Rather it is a particular attitude towards dynamic participation in Christ's rule.[168] This attitude is marked by faith, obedience, and prayer. In faith, the Christian is led by the Holy Spirit from Jesus Christ to the world—from the place where God is revealed to the place where God is still hidden—seeing God's activity in the latter by the light cast by the former.[169] In obedience, the Christian depends upon the Holy Spirit to empower her to cooperate with the divine work in creation. In prayer the Christian participates in the "*material* reality" of Christ's rule through intercession and petition.[170]

In this attitude of faith, obedience, and prayer, the Christian receives a "genuine and actual share in the universal lordship of God" as the servant, child, and friend of God.[171] While the creature has no claim upon that share in God's lordship, God in Jesus

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[166] *CD* III/3, 242-3.
[167] Ibid., 243, 243.
[168] Ibid., 244.
[169] Ibid., 246-253.
[170] Green, *Doxological Theology*, 140. Emphasis in original.
[171] *CD* III/3, 285-86.

Christ has freely and lovingly given that share to the creature: "His sovereignty is so great that it embraces both the possibility, and, as it is exercised, the actuality that the creature can actively be present and cooperate in His overruling."[172] In Christ, through faith, obedience, and prayer, the Christian finds herself "at the very seat of government, at the very heart of the mystery and purpose of all occurrence."[173] By identifying Jesus Christ as the content and purpose of divine sovereignty, Barth is able to offer an account of human participation in divine providence that does not encourage or tempt the creature to seek to be like God, but rather enables it to fully embrace being a creature. The "radical correction" of the doctrine of providence that Barth carries out in §48 and §49 of *Church Dogmatics* III/3 is simply a reconstruction of the doctrine with Jesus Christ at its center as the divine Subject of providence and the revelation of the character and purpose of God's providential rule over the *kosmos*. For Barth, the intersection of world history and divine history is not a possibility to be theorized or a potentiality to be actualized. It has a name: Jesus Christ.

3.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that in *Church Dogmatics* III/3 Karl Barth engages the doctrine of providence as a means to reflect on important socio-political and cultural questions about divine activity, world history, and European humanity that were circulating in Europe as he composed his doctrine of providence at the end of the nineteen-forties. As I have argued, this is made clear by an intertextual interpretation of

[172] Ibid., 285.
[173] Ibid., 288.

Church Dogmatics III/3 in dialogue with the occasional writings which Barth composed while he was writing the former text. Barth's dogmatic texts and his explicitly political writings function as corresponding puzzle pieces, which, when taken together, offer a more complete picture of his political and theological aims.

In *Church Dogmatics* III/3, Barth outlines the general form of a problem inherent in the traditional Christian doctrine of providence, the consequences of which are simultaneously theological and political. This is the danger that the doctrine of providence, when understood as a formal framework for divine world-governance without a carefully delimited divine Subject as its basis and center, can acquire a new referent besides the God revealed in Jesus Christ and, in so doing, aid in the discursive construction of a vision of the human as the subject who gives world history its meaning and purpose.

However, when placed in the context of Barth's occasional writings from the latter half of the nineteen-forties, the general form of this problem takes on a specific material content. In these explicitly political writings, Barth elaborates a particular concern about the way in which this problematic construction of the doctrine of providence had enabled European humanity to fashion *itself* as the quasi-divine subject of world history in an attempt to "play the part of world-ruler."[174] Barth suggests that this ideological colonization and subversion of the doctrine of providence enabled the church in Germany to be so easily coopted by National Socialism. While the allure of this vision of European man may have met its end in the horrors of the Second World War, Barth

[174] Ibid., 160.

saw in the emerging East-West conflict a danger that the Christian church might fail to learn from its mistake and repeat its error by crowning *Western* man in the place only just vacated by European man.

Therefore, Barth—like Hegel before him—uses the doctrine of providence as a way to theorize the position of the European subject in time and space in relationship to God and fellow humanity. However, Barth's particular configuration of this providential positionality could hardly be more opposed to Hegel's conception. Where for Hegel divine providence is an abstract, teleological process of the progressive incarnation of the divine in world history that sacralizes European humanity, for Barth providence is the concrete and particular rule of the incarnate one, Jesus Christ, beside whom there can be no other divine Subject of history. Where Hegel can say, "Because the essential being of God is revealed through the Christian religion, the key to world history is also given to us," Barth counters with the assertion that the creature "has no master-key to all the mysteries of the great process of existence ... On the contrary, he will be the one man who knows that there is no value in any of the master-keys which man has thought to discover and possess."[175] By grounding his conception of the incarnation exclusively in the humanity of Jesus Christ, Barth is able to draw conclusions about the relationship between divine providence, world history, and European humanity that are radically opposed to Hegel's vision of European man as incarnation and eschaton.

Where for Hegel providence becomes a way of superseding limited, finite creaturely existence, for Barth providence enables the creature to affirm and embrace this

[175] *LPWH*, 145; *CD* III/3, 242.

this condition. Where Hegel's understanding of providence collapses the history of salvation into the history of creation, Barth rejects any general correlation of the two which would confuse the distinction between them, arguing that the incarnation of Jesus Christ is the one and only point at which the two histories converge. Third, where Hegel's concept of providence sublates the incarnation of Jesus Christ within a general theory of world history as the progressive incarnation of the divine, for Barth the incarnation of Jesus Christ is the paradigmatic instance of God's action in world history, providing the basis and norm for God's providential activity in world history in general. These two different political-theological doctrines of providence yield drastically different understandings of the position of European humanity within God's world-historical action. While Hegel utilizes the doctrine of providence as a lens through which to envision European humanity as the paradigmatic site of the incarnation of the divine within world history, Barth's Christocentric conception of providence attempts to foreclose upon the possibility that the doctrine may be used by Western humanity as a discursive technology of self-sacralization.

Despite its ability to powerfully unmask and critique the colonization of Christian theological discourse by providential ideologies of European supremacy, Barth's doctrine of providence is not without its shortcomings. It must be said that while Barth sees the way in which the doctrine of providence has been ideologically colonized by quasi-divine visions of the European, he fails to identify sufficiently the patriarchal dimensions of the problem that he attempts to address. Indeed, at the very assembly of the World Council of Churches where Barth delivered his scathing indictment of a "Christian Marshall plan,"

he also served as chairman of a committee on "The Life and Work of Women in the Church" at which he combatted appeals to Galatians 3:28 by the female members of the committee with the reminder that, "Paul also said several other things on the relation between men and women which were important and right."[176] If one wishes to praise Barth for formulating a doctrine of providence that gave him the critical leverage he needed to see through Western anti-communist hysteria and avoid the temptation to rally to the banners of the "Christian West," then one must also say, just as forcefully, that Barth's doctrine of providence did not give him the critical leverage that he needed to be able to unmask and critique the patriarchal distortions of Christian proclamation and practice which he himself continued to embrace and defend. Any constructive theological reflection on these issues must proceed not only in light of Barth's successes, but also in light of his failures. This problematic masculinity of the doctrine of providence will therefore be explored at greater length in the final chapter of this study as one of the key issues to which contemporary reflection on the doctrine must address itself. However, it is not a problem that is unique to Barth. It also displays itself in the work of James Cone, to which this study now turns.

[176] Busch, *Karl Barth*, 358.

Chapter 4

James Cone:
Divine Providence as the Cities Burned

On Wednesday, July 12, 1967, John Smith, an amateur jazz musician and longtime resident of Newark, New Jersey, drove his cab around a parked Newark Police Department squad car.[1] In response, the two white officers inside the car pulled Smith over, severely beat the black taxicab driver, and placed him under arrest. Word of Smith's beating and arrest began circulating among cab drivers and local residents, and a crowd quickly assembled outside the headquarters of the 4th police precinct where Smith was being held.

Several local civil rights leaders arrived on the scene and—after demanding that the badly beaten Smith be taken to a hospital—attempted to organize those assembled into a protest march. While some members of the crowd prepared to march, others began hurling bottles, bricks, and Molotov cocktails at the police station. When the officers inside the 4th precinct emerged from the station swinging their nightsticks, the assembly fractured into small groups, and rapidly intensifying cycles of police violence, looting,

[1] Kevin Mumford, *Newark: A History of Race, Rights, and Riots in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 128. For other historical analyses upon which the present account of the 1967 Newark and Detroit rebellions draws, see Sidney Fine, *Violence in the Model City: The Cavanagh Administration, Race Relations, and the Detroit Riots of 1967* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 1989); Max Arthur Herman, *Fighting in the Streets: Ethnic Succession and Urban Unrest in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005); Max Arthur Herman, *Summer of Rage: An Oral History of the 1967 Newark and Detroit Riots* (New York: Peter Lang, 2013); Peniel E. Joseph, *Waiting 'Til the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2006); Malcolm McLaughlin, *The Long, Hot Summer of 1967: Urban Rebellion in America* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

and arson quickly consumed Newark's Central Ward.[2] Over the next five days, the city and state deployed over six thousand local and state police officers and National Guardsmen throughout the city. During the worst of the violence, state troopers and National Guardsmen fired indiscriminately into crowds of black civilians, killing young and old alike.[3] By the time Governor Richard Hughes declared that the city had been "returned to control" on Monday, July 17, the officers and soldiers had expended 13,326 rounds of ammunition, approximately 1,400 people had been arrested, 1,100 had been injured, and twenty-six had been killed—twenty-four of whom were black.[4]

Less than a week later, in the early hours of Sunday, July 23, police officers raided an illegal after-hours saloon in one of Detroit's largest black neighborhoods, arresting eighty-five people.[5] It was the ninth time police had attempted a raid at this location that year. In response, members of the community began looting a nearby store. By noon, a crowd of more than 8,000 people had gathered in the area.[6] As the police attempted to intervene, the conflict spread, eventually affecting more than seven square miles of the city.[7] George Romney, the Republican governor of Michigan, ordered the

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[2] Herman, *Summer of Rage*, 9-13.
[3] Ibid., 143. Out of 6,000 law enforcement personnel deployed in the city, the only one to die was shot by three men who had witnessed the police open fire on a crowd, killing a seventy-year-old man and injuring a little girl. See also, Joseph, *Waiting 'Til the Midnight Hour*, 184.
[4] Mumford, *Newark*, 125, 147-48.
[5] Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis*, 257.
[6] Fine, *Violence in the Model City*, 156, 166.
[7] In her essay "The (Black) Jesus of Detroit: Reflections on black power and the (white) American Christ," in *Christology and Whiteness: What Would Jesus Do?*, ed. George Yancy (New York: Routledge, 2012), M. Shawn Copeland relates a fascinating episode that occurred in the midst of the violence: "A little-known, yet highly symbolic, incident during those days involved a statue of the Sacred Heart of Jesus on the grounds of the major seminary of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese. … On the second day of the disturbance, an African American housepainter reportedly applied black paint to the hands, feet, and face of the statue of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. At least twice, the color was removed, but black paint prevailed and, over the past four decades, the seminary has kept it fresh" (180).

National Guard to deploy with support from armored tanks.[8] By the end of the day on Monday, July 24, Romney was forced to request federal intervention, and 5,000 soldiers from the 82nd Airborne division of the U.S. Army—some of whom had been previously deployed to Vietnam—were ordered to occupy a city on U.S. soil, joining 2,000 state and local police and 8,000 National Guardsmen who were already on the ground. The violence lasted until Thursday, July 27 by which point forty-three people were dead, 1,189 were injured, and more than 7,000 had been arrested.[9]

As in Newark, police and military forces responded to looting and arson with brute, indiscriminate force. In the five days of unrest, National Guardsmen fired an estimated 155,576 rounds of ammunition.[10] Nearly one hundred of those rounds were fired into a building from a 50-caliber machine gun, killing a four-year-old girl, Tonya Blanding, because National Guardsmen saw her father strike a match to light a cigarette and mistook it for the muzzle flash of a rifle.[11] Among the forty-three dead were thirty-three black civilians, one police officer, and one National Guardsmen.[12] With smoke still hanging heavy in the air, Detroit's liberal, white mayor Jerome P. Cavanaugh—who had previously been lauded for establishing the city as "the nation's model in race relations"—offered a frank reassessment of the racial situation in the Motor City: "We stand amidst the ashes of our hopes."[13]

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[8] Joseph, *Waiting 'Til the Midnight Hour*, 185.
[9] Herman, *Summer of Rage*, 18, 200.
[10] Ibid., 203. To be fair, the soldiers of the 82nd Airborne division arrived late in the conflict, did not engage citizens with the same degree of force as the police and National Guard had, and were received generally favorably by many of Detroit's residents.
[11] McLaughlin, *The Long, Hot Summer of 1967*, 115.
[12] Fine, *Violence in the Model City*, 299.
[13] Ibid., 453, 301.

Seventy miles southeast of Detroit, a young professor at Adrian College watched the cities burn. James Cone had left Philander Smith College in Arkansas to join the faculty at Adrian the previous year and had been struggling to find meaning in his work as a theologian. As Cone recalls, the "apparent irrelevance of theology" had led him to the verge of a "vocational crisis": "I began to develop an intense dislike for theology because it avoided the really hard problems of life with its talk about revelation, God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit."[14] It was at this very moment, when a frustrated Cone had begun considering a return to graduate school to complete a second Ph.D. in literature, that the events in Newark and Detroit confronted him as genuine acts of theological revelation in their own right. The black bodies lying in the city streets constituted an *apokalypsis* of Cone's theological world, shaking him out of his "theological complacency" and demanding an immediate response: "With black people dying in the streets of America, I just could not keep silent."[15] Cone immediately reevaluated his vocational plans: "There was no time for me to return to graduate school. I had to say something now about God and black people's struggle for freedom."[16] Yet almost before Cone had the chance to say anything, his theological *krisis* moment was violently

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[14] James Cone, *My Soul Looks Back* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982), 43.
[15] James Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2012), xvi; James Cone, *Risks of Faith: The Emergence of a Black Theology of Liberation, 1968-1998* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999), xxii. See also Cornel West, "Black Theology and Human Identity," in *Black Faith and Public Talk: Critical Essays on James H. Cone's* Black Theology and Black Power, ed. Dwight N. Hopkins (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 12: "We can imagine the young James Hal Cone saying, 'I'm overwhelmed by this. What do I have to say? I either write this book or I'll go crazy.' That is the kind of theology I like. Outcry."
[16] Cone, *My Soul Looks Back*, 43.

exacerbated by the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. in April 1968.[17] Finally, two months after King's death, Cone sat down and began to write.

Working for fourteen to fifteen hours a day in June 1968, Cone composed the entirety of his first book in less than a month.[18] Upon its publication in March 1969, *Black Theology and Black Power* exploded like a bomb on the playground of theology in the United States.[19] As Dwight N. Hopkins suggests, "It was as if Cone had entered a dark bell tower, stumbled, accidentally pulled a bell rope, and awakened the entire village population."[20] Framed as a theological analysis of Black Power, the book was Cone's first attempt to fundamentally reconceive the nature and task of Christian theology in light of the "struggle of people to be free in an extreme situation of oppression."[21] Rather than identifying Black Power with a specific figure or movement, Cone utilized a conceptual definition of the term: "[Black Power] *means complete emancipation of black people from white oppression by whatever means black people deem necessary*. … Black

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[17] Ibid., 44. Cone did compose one essay, entitled "Christianity and Black Power," in between the events of Newark and Detroit in July 1967 and the assassination of King in April 1968. See James Cone, "Christianity and Black Power," in *Risks of Faith: The Emergence of a Black Theology of Liberation, 1968-1998* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999), 3-12.
[18] Cone, *My Soul Looks Back*, 52.
[19] This phrase was, of course, first used to describe Karl Barth's *Epistle to the Romans*. See Dorrien, *Barthian Revolt in Modern Theology*, 45. Cone himself has noted the similarities between the two works in *Risks of Faith*: "In writing *Black Theology and Black Power*, I suddenly understood what Karl Barth must have felt when he first rejected the liberal theology of his professors in Germany. … Although separated by nearly fifty years and dealing with completely different theological situations and issues, I felt a spiritual kinship with Barth" (xxiii). See also Dwight N. Hopkins, "Black Theology on Theological Education, in *Black Faith and Public Talk: Critical Essays on James H. Cone's* Black Theology and Black Power, ed. Dwight N. Hopkins (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 41: "Cone's *Black Theology and Black Power* dropped a bombshell that shook the intellectual stools of the academy then; even today we still feel the reverberations."
[20] Dwight N. Hopkins, "Introduction," in *Black Faith and Public Talk: Critical Essays on James H. Cone's* Black Theology and Black Power, ed. Dwight N. Hopkins (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 4.
[21] James Cone, *Speaking the Truth: Ecumenism, Liberation, and Black Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986), 39.

Power means black freedom, black self-determination, wherein black people no longer view themselves as without human dignity but as men, human beings with the ability to carve out their own destiny."[22] Cone's conclusion in *Black Theology and Black Power* was decisive: "Black Power, even in its most radical expression, is not the antithesis of Christianity, nor is it a heretical idea to be tolerated with painful forbearance. It is, rather, Christ's central message to twentieth-century America."[23]

In *Black Theology and Black Power*, Cone develops his thesis about the relationship between Black Power and Christianity through two distinct arguments. First, he defends the conceptual compatibility of Black Power and *Christianity* understood as two sets of ideas. In this regard, Cone asserts that Black Power's message of liberation "by whatever means necessary" can be reconciled with a Christian conception of love.[24] Second, alongside this argument for conceptual compatibility, Cone articulates an argument about the empirical and historical relationship between Black Power and *God* which leads him to an even stronger conclusion: Black Power is more than just theoretically compatible with Christianity; it is in fact a manifestation of divine activity in history.

Cone develops both lines of argumentation simultaneously in *Black Theology and Black Power*, sometimes presenting them as a single claim: "My concern is, rather, to show that the goal and message of Black Power … is consistent with the gospel of Jesus

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[22] *BTBP*, 6. Emphasis in original. While not limiting the term to any one figure's conception of it, Cone does repeatedly turn to Stokely Carmichael as a key progenitor of the concept. See Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* (New York: Random House, 1967).
[23] *BTBP*, 1.
[24] Ibid., 47-56.

Christ. Indeed, I have even suggested that if Christ is present among the oppressed, as he promised, he must be working through the activity of Black Power. This alone is my thesis."[25] On the one hand, Cone makes a claim about the *potential* compatibility of two *theoretical* systems: "The message of Black Power … is consistent with the gospel." On the other hand, he formulates a *practical* judgment about the *actual* movement of God in history: "[Christ] must be working through the activity of Black Power." The former argument about conceptual compatibility quickly became the center of a debate about Christianity, reconciliation, and violence between Cone, J. Deotis Roberts, and Major Jones.[26] Yet, to focus interpretation of *Black Theology and Black Power* exclusively on the question of whether or not one can reconcile the message of Black Power with the message of Christianity is to miss the fact that the book also contains an innovative theological interpretation of God's relationship to the events of the 1960s, from the urban rebellions in Watts, Newark, Detroit and beyond, to the rise of Black Power.[27]

The question of God's historical relationship to Black Power is no less central to Cone's early theological project than the question of the compatibility of the respective teachings of Black Power and Christianity. Indeed, while one could quite conceivably argue that Black Power is compatible with Christianity without arguing that Black Power is a manifestation of divine activity in history, Cone defends the latter claim as vigorously as the former. "Black Power, then," Cone writes, "is God's new way of acting

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[25] Ibid., 49.
[26] J. Deotis Roberts, *Liberation and Reconciliation: A Black Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971); Major Jones *Black Awareness: A Theology of Hope* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971).
[27] Between 1964 and 1969 there were more than 300 uprisings in 257 cities. See West, "Black Theology and Human Identity," 12.

in America."[28] While Cone's verdict is clear, the complex theological rationale that supports it requires careful explication. To this end, in what follows I offer an interpretation of the specific account of the nature and shape of God's relationship to history upon which Cone bases his particular judgment about divine action and Black Power. That is to say, I offer an interpretation of Cone's account of *divine providence*.[29]

When viewed from this perspective and placed within the context of the present study, Cone joins Hegel and Barth as a third Christian theologian who develops a hermeneutic of providence as an interpretive lens through which to come to specific judgments about the historical form and content of God's activity in a racialized world. As I have previously argued, in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* Hegel transforms the doctrine of providence into an abstract, teleological theory of historical, geographical, and anthropological progress, in which European man replaces Jesus Christ as the quasi-divine subject of the doctrine—the soteriological center and eschatological endpoint of world history. Hegel imagines European humanity as the final site of divine revelation, reconciliation, and eschatological consummation within world history, identifying the incarnation of the divine in the world with European man. This providential schema leads Hegel to concrete, theological judgments about historical events. He baptizes the global imperial projects of European civilization, rationalizes the

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[28] *BTBP*, 61.

[29] While Cone explicitly addresses the doctrine of providence only in a short passage in *A Black Theology of Liberation*, in which he largely treats it as a question of theodicy, the themes of divine action and God's movement in history are ubiquitous in his early writings. See James Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986), 83-86 (hereafter cited as *BTL*).

continued presence of human slavery in Africa, and justifies the genocide of the indigenes of the Americas.

In *Church Dogmatics* III/3 and the occasional writings composed contemporaneously with that part-volume in 1948 and 1949, Barth sets out to destroy the distorted hermeneutic of providence that made Hegel's vision possible. Barth argues that the National Socialist crisis was made possible by a powerful theological heresy with deep roots in European Christianity as a whole: a distortion of the doctrine of providence in which Western man substituted himself into the place of Israel and Jesus as the center and *telos* of God's action in history. Over and against this idolatrous configuration of providence, Barth undertakes a "radical correction" of the doctrine, locating the Jewish human being Jesus Christ at its center, in such a way that the nature and shape of God's providential activity cannot be conceived as an abstract framework of "divine world-governance" whose divine subject remains abstract and underspecified, and therefore vulnerable to ideological colonization. As I have explored above, at the end of the nineteen-forties, this theological analysis led Barth to the extremely unpopular political stance of resisting the widespread attempts to paint the emerging Cold War conflict as an apocalyptic battle between "godless" Communism and the "Christian West." Unlike almost all his contemporaries, Barth was able to see that the idea of a "Christian West" reproduced the very theological error that had enabled the National Socialist crisis during the previous decade. Barth's Christological reconfiguration of the doctrine of providence led him to the political judgment that God's activity in the world could not be aligned with the activities and interests of Western, "Christian" civilization.

This chapter interprets Cone's construal of the relationship between divine action, Jesus Christ, and racialized humanity as a third, unique formulation of a hermeneutic of providence, alongside Hegel's understanding of providence—which replaces Jesus Christ with European man as the center and *telos* of God's action in history—and Barth's account of the doctrine, which offers a determined rejection of that Hegelian gesture on Christological grounds. On the one hand, I contend that Cone should not be read as simply inverting Hegel's providential vision, producing an "equal and opposite" doctrine that merely provides ideological cover for Black liberation instead of European conquest.[30] On the other hand, while there are definite affinities between the theological proposals of Cone and Barth—inasmuch as both engage in Christological reflection in order to critique any attempt to link divine providence to the movement of white peoples and their civilizations—Cone foregrounds a constructive alternative that differentiates him from Barth. Where Barth's primary theme is that the project of Western civilization cannot be identified with the movement of God in history, Cone goes beyond this, identifying the struggle for black liberation as a positive manifestation of Christ's ongoing action in history.[31] The present chapter examines the conception of divine providence that underlies this constructive judgment about divine action.

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[30] Victor Anderson, *Beyond Ontological Blackness: An Essay on African American Religious and Cultural Criticism* (New York: Continuum Publishing Co., 1995), 86: "If white theology was viewed as an ideology of oppression, then black theology would become the ideology of liberation." I do not discount Anderson's important criticisms of Cone's work, but rather I seek to show that Cone could speak paradoxically and in multiple registers, which complicates efforts to make any cumulative judgment about the nature of his project. My interpretive approach to Cone is therefore formally similar to that developed by Vincent Lloyd in "Paradox and Tradition in Black Theology," *Black Theology* 9, no. 3 (2011): 265-286.

[31] The extent to which Barth would or would not approve of Cone's constructive conclusion lies beyond the scope of this work. However, I do not believe that Barth would completely recoil from Cone's identification of Black Power with the movement of God in history. The early Barth of the *Romans* commentary and the "infinite qualitative distinction between God and man" certainly would not have

In his early writings, Cone develops an account of divine providence as the liberating presence of Jesus Christ in history. For Cone, Christ is not trapped in the first century, but is at work in the present through the power of the Spirit. From this perspective, Cone reframes the abstract issue of divine action in terms of a concrete Christological question: "Who is Jesus Christ for us today?" Cone's judgment that Jesus is at work in Black Power rests on the particular content of his Christology. For Cone, Christ's presence in liberation struggles is a direct correlate of Christ's blackness. Indeed, as Cone's thought develops, his early questions about divine action increasingly resolve into questions about Christology in general and about the blackness of Jesus in particular.

This chapter charts the points of connection between Cone's Christology and his political theology of liberative divine action, arguing that the theological warrant for Cone's judgment about the present activity of God is nothing other than the blackness of Jesus Christ. In other words, the blackness of Christ—which emerges from a dialectical interpretation of the relationship between Christ's past, present, and future—functions as the hermeneutical lens through which Cone interprets divine action in relationship to contemporary events. I will argue that Cone's claim that Black Power is God's new way of acting in America does not represent an ideological baptism of a political movement as itself divine, but rather a contingent judgment about the particular way in which the Holy

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approved. However, as Christology moved increasingly to the center of Barth's thought, he was more and more able to speak constructively about the positive relationship between God and humanity. By the late nineteen-forties, while Barth continued to beat the drum against baptizing any political system or movement as divinely sanctioned, he was increasingly speaking positively of a Christological politics focused on the lives of the ordinary human beings for whom Christ died. This seems to be a significant step in the direction that Cone takes. It certainly is a long way from a one-sided commitment to the "infinite qualitative distinction." For a full exploration of these issues, see Beverly Eileen Mitchell, "Karl Barth and James Cone: The Question of Liberative Faith and Ideology" (PhD diss., Boston College, 1999), ProQuest (9930882).

Spirit was making Christ present in the United States during the second half of the nineteen-sixties and the first half of the nineteen-seventies. In short, I read Cone's work as a response to the imperative of 1 John 4. It is an attempt to "test the spirits" in order to "recognize the Spirit of God" who "acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh."[32]

My interpretation of Cone's thought will foreground the centrality of the Holy Spirit in his theology.[33] Careful attention to the crucial role played by the Spirit in making Christ present to humanity between the ascension and the second coming enables Cone to affirm the intimate connection between Christ and humanity without collapsing the former into the latter. In this way, Cone's pneumatology allows him to escape the deadlock between a neo-orthodox emphasis on the otherness of God and theological liberalism's problematic identification of God with humanity.[34] This suggests that even before Cone consciously turned away from European theology in response to critiques of his work from Cecil Cone and Gayraud Wilmore, his theology was always more than a recapitulation of European theological ideas in a new context.[35]

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[32] 1 John 4:1-3.

[33] Cone's pneumatology—and his understanding of the Trinity in general—have not received the attention they merit from interpreters of Cone's thought, who have generally focused their analyses on his Christology. Isolating Christology from the wider Trinitarian framework present in Cone's work leads to a variety of misinterpretations of the former. In particular, leaving out the work of the Spirit makes it difficult to explicate accurately Cone's claims about the relationship between Christ and black humanity. For a related account of these issues, see Timothy McGee, "God's Life In and As Opening: James Cone, Divine Self-Determination, and the Trinitarian Politics of Sovereignty," *Modern Theology* 32, no. 1 (2016): 100-117.

[34] J. Kameron Carter explores a similar problem when he examines Cone's reception of the theological legacy of Karl Barth in *Race: A Theological Account,* 174-191.

[35] Cone, *Speaking the Truth*, 107. "Because I and other radical black theologians accented liberation and did not mention the importance of the African heritage of black theology, the critics contended that the liberation theologians needed to recognize and correct their dependence upon the supposedly heretical European theologians. If black theology is to be truly black, it must derive its meaning from the history and culture of the people in whose name it claims to speak." For these early challenges to Cone's work, see

To substantiate this interpretation of Cone's thought, I will trace the development of his account of divine action in history across three of his early publications: *Black Theology and Black Power*, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, and *God of the Oppressed*. Before proceeding to this exposition, however, I will begin by briefly addressing a key methodological issue in Cone's treatment of divine action and Black Power.

4.1 God's New Way of Acting: Black Power as Concept and Movement

In each of the previous two chapters of this study, it has been necessary to undertake some substantial methodological ground clearing in order to demonstrate the plausibility of interpreting both Hegel and Barth's engagements with the doctrine of providence as being integrally related to practical judgments about the nature and shape of divine action in a racialized world. To locate Hegel and Barth's theology in relationship to their thinking about politics and race in the modern world is to swim against the stream of dominant interpretive approaches to their work within the field of Christian theology, which have tended to abstract their theological writings from these issues. While one can read piles of books on Hegel or Barth's theology without coming across any references to their views on race or contemporary political events, this is obviously not the case with the work of James Cone.

Where, in regards to Hegel and Barth's writings on providence, I found it necessary to defend the basic plausibility of my claim that they composed their theology with an eye toward race and politics, Cone could not be clearer that this is precisely his

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Cecil Cone, *The Identity Crisis in Black Theology* (Atlanta: Emory University Press, 1974); Gayraud Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1972).

intention. For Hegel and Barth, considerable effort was required to legitimize the attempt to draw connections between their theoretical doctrines of providence, on the one hand, and their practical judgments about the nature and shape of divine action in contemporary events, on the other, and then to demonstrate that all of this was deeply enmeshed with their thinking about the figure of European man.

In stark contrast, Cone's entire corpus reflects his belief that all theology is contextual, "written for particular times and places" and "defined by the human situation that gives birth to it."[36] Cone's theological writings are driven by this integral connection with practical judgment about God's relationship to contemporary events. Black theology, Cone argues, "tries to discern the activity of the Holy One in achieving the purpose of the liberation of humankind from the forces of oppression. We *must* make decisions about where God is at work so we can join in the fight against evil."[37] The close connection between the doctrine of providence and concrete judgments about divine action is transparent in Cone's work in a way that it is not in Hegel and Barth. Yet even so, interpreting Cone's configuration of the relationship between a theology of divine providence and judgments about contemporary divine action is not without its own methodological complications.

With Hegel and Barth, it can seem as if both approach the doctrine of providence in a highly abstract way, which makes it necessary to draw out the concrete connections between their theological conceptions of providence and their judgments about contemporary divine action. With Cone, the methodological issue is the opposite. Cone

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[36] *BTL*, xv.
[37] Ibid., 7.

claims to be making highly concrete and particular judgments about divine action in relationship to a particular historical movement—Black Power—when in fact his conclusions are more abstract than he advertises.[38]

On its surface, Cone's basic verdict in *Black Theology and Black Power* seems very specific: "Black Power, then, is God's new way of acting in America."[39] However, when one tries to identify Cone's specific definition of Black Power, this seemingly concrete conclusion becomes somewhat more complex. Cone's conclusion that Black Power is God's action in history remains underspecified to the extent that he adopts a broad, conceptual definition of Black Power. There is nothing wrong with Cone's decision to do so, but it must be taken into consideration in order to have an accurate understanding of the type of claim that Cone is making about divine action in *Black Theology and Black Power*. As previously noted, Cone identifies Black Power, not in terms of particular movements, groups, or figures, but in terms of an overarching concept or attitude:

> [Black Power] means black freedom, black self-determination, wherein black people no longer view themselves as without human dignity but as men, human beings with the ability to carve out their own destiny. In short, as Stokely Carmichael would say, Black Power means T.C.B., Take Care of Business—black folk taking care of black folks' business not on the terms of the oppressor, but on those of the oppressed.[40]

Summarizing this definition, Cone concludes, "Black Power, in short, is an *attitude*, an inward affirmation of the essential worth of blackness."[41] This assessment of Black

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[38] Ted Smith makes a similar point with regard to the work of Stanley Hauerwas and Delores Williams in *The New Measures*, 15-22.
[39] *BTBP*, 61.
[40] Ibid., 6.
[41] Ibid., 8. Emphasis in original.

Power alters the meaning of Cone's verdict that Black Power is God's action. Given this conceptual definition of Black Power, Cone is not actually identifying any specific event or movement as the activity of God in history when he says that Black Power is God's new way of acting in America because Black Power, for Cone, is not an historical movement, but an *attitude*.

The complication at this point in Cone's thought becomes even more pronounced in light of the underlying reason that Cone gives for discerning divine action in history: joining it.[42] Such a call for responsive human action to participate in God's activity requires concrete judgments about particular movements and events at particular times and places. Yet concrete engagements with the particular movements, figures, and events that made up Black Power as a cultural and political phenomenon in Cone's time is the one thing that is almost entirely absent from Cone's treatment of Black Power.[43] While Cone makes passing references to Malcolm X, Rap Brown, Amiri Baraka (then Leroi Jones), Maulana Karenga, and Stokely Carmichael, this is the closest he gets to engaging Black Power as a diverse cultural and political movement that was flourishing during the exact years in which Cone was writing, instead of as an abstract concept or attitude.

Paul Lehmann's *The Transfiguration of Politics* provides an important point of comparison and contrast on this methodological point. Lehmann not only composed *The Transfiguration of Politics* contemporaneously with Cone's early writings between 1968

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[42] Ibid., 49; *BTL*, 7.

[43] The one major exception to this claim is of course Cone's extensive engagement with Malcolm X in *Martin & Malcolm & America: A Dream or a Nightmare* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2012). However, it was written almost thirty years after Malcolm's assassination and well after the heyday of the Black Power movement.

and 1975, but he did so while he and Cone were both members of the faculty of Union Theological Seminary. Closely paralleling Cone's work, Lehmann's book explores questions about the relationship between the ongoing presence of Jesus Christ in history and political revolutions. However, unlike Cone, Lehmann offers a lengthy typology of contemporary revolutionary movements, which includes a significant engagement with the Black Panthers. Where Cone's analysis of Black Power often struggles to move beyond the formal and abstract, Lehmann pairs his theological reflections with careful attention to actual revolutionary figures and movements "in all their concreteness and ambiguity."[44] All this is certainly not to say that Cone's conclusion that Black Power is "God's new way of acting in America" is wrong. Rather, it is to suggest that more must be said in order to use this conclusion as the basis for making concrete judgments about human participation in contemporary divine action through particular events and movements.

Perhaps most problematically, Cone's use of a broad, conceptual definition of Black Power allows him to elide the historical complexities of Black Power in its concrete and diverse historical manifestations when he attempts to discern God's relationship to it. As Renée Leslie Hill notes, "The struggles and movements for liberation that were happening when *Black Theology and Black Power* was first published were not all uniformly rigid, nor were they based solely on finite, limited notions of identity. … Male-centered black nationalism and the essentializing of black identity were not always conflated. At times solidarity and cooperation resulted in

[44] Paul Lehmann, *The Transfiguration of Politics* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), 209-226.

powerful and creative alliances."[45] Contemporary historiography of the Black Power era underlines this point. In a revision of the popular declension narrative in which Black Power follows the Civil Rights era as a self-destructive movement characterized overwhelmingly by a militant embrace of violence, historians are increasingly coming to see Black Power as a complex movement that expressed itself in various political, cultural, and economic modes and contained diverse attitudes towards religion, gender, racial separatism, and violence.[46] Patriarchy is a particularly fitting issue on which to press Cone's identification of Black Power as divine activity, as Cone himself admitted his blindness to gender-based oppression throughout his early works.[47]

On closer inspection, Cone's definition of Black Power reflects the same entanglement with patriarchy with which Black Power groups like the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense were struggling at that very moment.[48] Cone's assertion that Black

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[45] Renée Leslie Hill, "Disrupted/Disruptive Movements: *Black Theology and Black Power 1969/1999*," in *Black Faith and Public Talk: Critical Essays on James H. Cone's* Black Theology and Black Power, ed. Dwight N. Hopkins (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 138-39.

[46] See, for example, Robert O. Self, "The Black Panther Party and the Long Civil Rights Era," in *The Search for the Black Panther Party: New Perspectives on a Revolutionary Movement*, ed. Jama Lazerow and Yohuru Williams (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 15-56; Peniel E. Joseph "The Black Power Movement: A State of the Field," *The Journal of American History* 96, no. 3 (2009): 751-776; Charles E. Jones, ed., *The Black Panther Party [Reconsidered]* (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1998); Kerry Pimblott, *Faith in Black Power: Religion, Race, and Resistance in Cairo, Illinois* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2017).

[47] *BTBP*, x: "An example of the weakness of the 1960s black freedom movement, as defined by *Black Theology and Black Power*, was its complete blindness to the problem of sexism. … When I read my book today, I am embarrassed by its sexist language and patriarchal perspective." See also, *BTL*, xx: "The most glaring limitation of *A Black Theology of Liberation* was my failure to be receptive to the problem of sexism in the black community and society as a whole."

[48] Numerous studies have analyzed the wide variety of gender ideologies within Black Power organizations, as well as the previously overlooked contributions made by women to the Black Power movement. See, for example, Rhonda Y. Williams, "Black Women, Urban Politics, and Engendering Black Power," in *The Black Power Movement*, ed. Peniel E. Joseph (New York: Routledge, 2006), 79-104; Kimberly Springer, "Black Feminists Respond to Black Power Masculinism," in *The Black Power Movement*, ed. Peniel E. Joseph (New York: Routledge, 2006), 105-118; Kathleen Cleaver, "Women, Power, and Revolution," in *Liberation, Imagination, and the Black Panther Party*, ed. Kathleen Cleaver and George Katsiaficas (New York: Routledge, 2001), 123-127; Tracye Matthews, "'No One Ever Asks,

Power enables "black people" to view themselves "as men," echoes early Black Panther ideology in which, as Tracye Matthews has argued, "the quest for liberation was directly linked to the 'regaining' of Black manhood."[49] On the one hand, this should make clear that Cone was not alone in his early, patriarchal conception of black liberation. On the other hand, it significantly complicates his identification of Black Power with divine action. Was God active in black liberation struggles in which women's voices and experiences were initially sidelined and liberation was conceived as a recovery of black masculinity? This was not a question that Cone was capable of formulating, let alone answering, in his early writings. At least part of the reason for this was that his choice of an abstract, conceptual definition of Black Power precluded him from having to make judgments about divine action in relationship to its concrete—and ambiguous—historical manifestations, making it easy for Cone to embrace an overtly masculine account of Black Power which overlooked the vital contributions made by women to the movement.

There is one clear exception to this conclusion about Cone's lack of engagement with particular historical manifestations of Black Power in his early writings. It also happens to be the events with which this chapter began. In *Black Theology and Black Power*, the urban rebellions in Newark, Detroit, and beyond, receive Cone's direct attention repeatedly. At these points, Cone no longer associates divine action with an

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What a Man's Place in the Revolution Is': Gender and the Politics of the Black Panther Party 1966-1971," in *The Black Panther Party [Reconsidered]*, ed. Charles E. Jones (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1998), 267-304; Bettye Collier-Thomas and V. P. Franklin, ed.'s, *Sisters in the Struggle: African American Women in the Civil Rights-Black Power Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2001); Christina Greene, *Our Separate Ways: Women and the Black Freedom Movement in Durham, North Carolina* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

[49] Matthews, "'No One Ever Asks, What a Man's Place in the Revolution Is,'" 278.

abstract and conceptual understanding of Black Power. Rather, he offers concrete judgments about what God is doing in relationship to a particular series of historical events. Therefore, after exploring Cone's hermeneutic of providence, which he develops in *Black Theology and Black Power*, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, and *God of the Oppressed*, I will return in the conclusion to address Cone's specific verdict about God's relationship to the urban rebellions in Detroit and Newark in 1967.

4.2 Black Theology and Black Power*: Divine Providence as the Liberating Presence of Jesus Christ*

In outlining the nature of his emerging theological project in *Black Theology and Black Power*, Cone acknowledges both the risks involved in making judgments about divine action and the inescapable necessity of making those judgments nonetheless:

> Jesus did not give us a blueprint for identifying God and his work or for relevant human involvement in the world. But this is the never-ending task of theology and the Church. The real temptation is to identify our own interests with God's and thus say that he is active in those activities which best serve our purposes. Karl Barth pointed out this danger in a convincing way in his *Romans* commentary. But we must speak of God and his work, if we intend to join him.[50]

Cone clearly agrees with Barth—over and against Hegel—that humanity has no "master key" with which to decipher God's action in history.[51] Yet he also believes that the fraught endeavor of discerning and faithfully responding to divine action is an integral part of the Christian life. *Black Theology and Black Power* represents Cone's attempt to navigate this theological and ethical paradox in the context of the specific historical phenomenon of Black Power at the end of the nineteen-sixties.[52] In this short work, Cone

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[50] *BTBP*, 49.
[51] *LPWH*, 145; *CD* III/3, 242.
[52] This is yet a further dimension of the paradoxical nature of Cone's thought explored in Lloyd, "Paradox and Tradition in Black Theology," 269-282.

develops an account of divine action as the liberating presence of Jesus Christ in history and he leverages this account to make a particular and contingent judgment about the relationship between Christ's activity and Black Power. In this way, *Black Theology and Black Power* functions as a preeminent example of Christologically informed, theological judgment making about divine action in history.

This is, of course, a contestable claim, and one that results from careful exposition of the structure of Cone's argument in the book. As has previously been noted, Cone himself anticipated—and admitted the potential legitimacy of—concerns that judgments about divine activity often function as thinly veiled attempts to lend divine sanction to one's own interests: "The real temptation is to identify our own interests with God's and thus say that he is active in those activities which best serve our purposes."[53] To address these concerns, it is necessary to examine the particular theological rationale that Cone offers for his judgment about divine activity and Black Power.

In *Black Theology and Black Power*, Cone develops a series of increasingly specific theological claims about divine providence. First, Cone claims that God is active in history. Second, he characterizes the nature and shape of this activity as liberating presence. Finally, he articulates this account of liberating presence Christologically, as a property of the continuing work of the resurrected Christ through the Holy Spirit. Like an optometrist who has her patient look through a series of lenses until their vision becomes clear, Cone applies this series of theological lenses to contemporary events until Black

[53] *BTBP*, 49.

Power comes into focus as one particular manifestation of Christ's liberating presence in history. The following analysis explores each of these levels of Cone's argument in turn.

4.2.1 Divine Action in History

Cone's first and most basic warrant for his claims about divine action is Scriptural. Quite simply, the Bible bears witness to a God who acts in history. Cone appeals to this basic principle repeatedly in *Black Theology and Black Power*. It first comes up in his discussion of the character of God's righteousness: "It is important to note that God's righteousness refers not so much to an abstract quality related to his Being in the realm of thought—as commonly found in Greek philosophy—but to his *activity in human history*, in the historical events of the time and effecting his purpose despite those who oppose it. This is the biblical tradition."[54] In the Old and New Testaments, divine righteousness appears first and foremost as a dynamic, intrahistorical activity, not as a static, metaphysical property. For Cone, the central paradigms of this activity are the liberation and election of Israel and the incarnation of Jesus Christ.[55]

This same line of argument drives Cone's analysis of eschatology. He delineates two different understandings of eschatology that have marked Black Christianity in the United States. The first of these embraces a strong dualism between God and history, manifesting in a belief in otherworldly, "pie in the sky" salvation: "It is easy for blacks to think that God has withdrawn from history and the 'devil' has taken over. … Instead of seeking to change the earthly state, they focus their hopes on the next life in heaven. In

[54] Ibid., 44. Emphasis added.
[55] Ibid., 44-45.

reality, this is not the perspective of *biblical faith*."[56] As Cone makes clear, this conception of eschatology is a distortion of Christian belief, not only because it rendered slaves passive and accepting of their oppression, but also because it does not comport with Scripture.

A second conception of eschatology stands in radical antithesis to the impulse to distance God from history. This latter perspective Cone claims as his own and as the stance of Black Theology: "Black Theology rejects the tendency of some to interpret eschatology in such a way that a cleavage is made between our world and God's. Black Theology insists that *genuine biblical faith* relates eschatology to history, that is, to what God has done, is doing, and will do for his people."[57] In no small part, the impetus to think about divine action in relationship to Black Power emerges from Cone's reading of the Bible.

In the Old and New Testaments, Cone argues, "God is revealed as a God who is involved in history."[58] Scripture provides a key premise for everything that follows. While such a claim is underdetermined and therefore only a starting point, it is important to note that Cone initially positions his judgments about divine action and Black Power as a commonsense response to the witness of the Bible. Most basically, God is active in history because God reveals Godself to be active in history through Israel and Jesus.

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[56] Ibid., 123. Emphasis added. In *Black Theology and Black Power*, Cone is particularly critical of the otherworldliness of the Spirituals: "Even a casual look at the black Spirituals shows their otherworldly character" (121). Over the next several years, Cone realized that his look at the Spirituals had been too casual indeed, and he reevaluated this criticism after a more careful investigation in *The Spirituals and the Blues* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1972).
[57] *BTBP*, 126. Emphasis added.
[58] Ibid., 134.

From this initial conviction, Cone develops his account of divine activity by further specifying its character and inner theological structure.

4.2.2 Divine Action in History as Liberating Presence

Taking Israel and Jesus as paradigmatic representations of God's action in history, Cone moves beyond a formal account of divine activity to a specification of the concrete character of that divine action as liberating presence.[59] God's revelation of the particular way that God acts is first displayed in the election of Israel: "Israel as a people initially came to know God through the exodus. It was Yahweh who emancipated her from Egyptian bondage and subsequently established a covenant with her at Sinai."[60] God does not act as an abstract, omnicausal force in the universe. Indeed, without being tied to revelation, divine action is an empty concept. Instead, Cone joins his account of divine action to God's revelation of Godself through the covenant with Israel, so that it acquires the specific material content of liberation.

This pattern of divine action as liberation, initially made visible in the exodus, is reaffirmed and extended in the incarnation: "Jesus' work is essentially one of liberation. … Through an encounter with Jesus, man now knows the full meaning of God's action in history and man's place within it. … In Christ, God enters human affairs and takes sides with the oppressed."[61] Alongside Israel, the incarnation provides the specific material

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[59] *BTL*, xvii. Cone's invocation of divine presence—and his emphasis on the Holy Spirit—suggests some interesting points of connection with more contemporary works on pneumatology and providence, such as Gordon Fee's *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009) and Wright's *Providence Made Flesh*. These connections will be explored in the final chapter of this study.
[60] *BTBP*, 44.
[61] Ibid., 36.

content for what would otherwise be a wholly formal account of divine action. In Jesus, God revealed Godself to be a God who works for the liberation of the oppressed. At this first level of Cone's Christological argument about the liberating character of divine action, his focus is decidedly historical. The incarnation provides a template for divine action. Jesus functions as an exemplar of divine activity, displaying the characteristic principle of God's action in history: liberation. However, Cone quickly moves to expand the scope of his Christology beyond mere exemplarity.

Up to this point, Cone's account is not decisively different from Hegel's understanding of the nature of divine providence. Indeed, Hegel was also strongly committed to an interpretation of divine action linked to the concept of freedom. If Israel and Jesus only reveal the characteristic *principle* of divine action, then that principle remains liable to replace Jesus as the criterion for judging divine action. If this were Cone's complete account, then his understanding of divine providence could be justly accused of simply inverting Hegel's Eurocentrism for his own purposes. However, it is not. Cone does not allow liberation to function as a formal principle of divine action independent of the humanity of Jesus Christ. Rather, as J. Kameron Carter has demonstrated, Cone's analysis reflects a deep commitment to "Being's concreteness which is revealed in Jesus of Nazareth."[62] Indeed, liberation—as Cone articulates it—is in the end not a principle, but a person.

4.2.3 Divine Action in History as the Liberating Presence of Jesus Christ

[62] Carter, *Race: A Theological Account*, 158. "A concrete conceptualization of Being stands over against abstract conceptualizations of Being, along with their attendant racial politics."

Within Cone's understanding of divine action, Jesus Christ cannot be confined to the role of historical exemplar. Christology is not simply an earlier chapter in a larger historical narrative of divine action, as it is for Hegel. It is quite the opposite. Ongoing divine action in history is, for Cone, a property of Christology itself. In short, Christology is not superseded by providence. Rather, providence is an extension of Christology. Specifically, divine providence is Christ's human agency operating in creation through the power of the Holy Spirit after the resurrection.

The Christological trajectory upon which Cone plots contemporary divine activity begins with the birth of Christ. The incarnation is "God himself coming into the very depths of human existence for the sole purpose of striking off the chains of slavery, thereby freeing man from ungodly principalities and powers that hinder his relationship with God."[63] The subsequent life and teachings of Jesus confirm this truth, which Jesus makes evident through his proclamation of the Jubilee year in Luke 4:

> The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
> because he has anointed me to preach the good news to the poor.
> He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
> and recovering of sight to the blind,
> To set at liberty those who are oppressed,
> To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.[64]

Jesus' ministry inaugurates "an age of liberation, in which 'the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have the good news preached to them' (Luke 7:22)."[65] In the New Testament, Cone finds a Jesus whose life is marked from start to finish by the struggle for liberation:

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[63] *BTBP*, 35.
[64] Ibid., 35.
[65] Ibid., 36.

> The message of the gospel is clear: Christ came into the world in order to destroy the works of Satan (1 John 3:8). His whole life was a deliberate offensive against those powers which held man captive. At the beginning of his ministry there was a conflict with Satan in the wilderness (Luke 4:1-13; Mark 1:12ff.; Matt. 4:1-11), and this conflict continued throughout his ministry. In fact, every exorcism was a binding and despoiling of the evil one (Mark 3:27).[66]

From this perspective, liberation is not a formal principle that Christ merely exemplifies. The humanity of Jesus Christ is the concrete embodiment and norm of liberation.

The crucifixion represents the climactic clash between the new way of being human revealed and made possible in Jesus Christ and the power of Satan. Cone writes, "It was not until Christ's death on the cross that the decisive battle was fought and won by the Son of man. In that event, the tyranny of Satan, in principle, came to an end. The Good News is that God in Christ has freed us; we need no longer be enslaved by alien forces."[67] This victory over Satan is proclaimed to humanity in Christ's resurrection: "The battle was fought and won on Good Friday and the triumph was revealed to men at Easter."[68] This narration of the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ provides the material content to Cone's concept of liberation.

Cone's narration of the incarnation does not end with the resurrection. Rather, Cone extends his analysis of God becoming flesh in Jesus into the remainder of history prior to Christ's return.[69] After the resurrection, Jesus does not leave human history, any more than Jesus could abandon his human nature. As Cone puts it, "If we can believe the

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[66] Ibid., 40.
[67] Ibid., 40.
[68] Ibid., 40.
[69] I find it somewhat remarkable that Cone does not explicitly address Christ's ascension in *Black Theology and Black Power* or, for that matter, anywhere else that I have been able to find. The ascension would seem to be the exact point at which Cone's account of Christ's continuing presence in history would fit into his narration of the incarnation.

New Testament witness which proclaims Jesus as resurrected and thus active even now, then he must be alive in those very men who are struggling in the midst of misery and humiliation. … Jesus is not safely confined in the first century. He is our contemporary, proclaiming release to the captives and rebelling against all who silently accept the structures of injustice."[70] Cone inserts an additional stage into the familiar narrative pattern of the incarnation—birth, life, death, resurrection, ascension, final return—by including the resurrected Christ's historical activity between the ascension and his final return as an important facet of Christological doctrine in its own right.

Cone's attention to pneumatology makes possible his assertion of the contemporaneity of Christ.[71] While Christ is ascended, his power and presence continue through the work of the Spirit: "With the death and resurrection of Christ, the gift of the Spirit to persons—rare in the Old Testament—becomes a possibility for all who respond to God's act in Christ in faithful obedience. The Spirit becomes the power of Christ himself at work in the life of the believer."[72] After the resurrection, the Holy Spirit "is the power of God at work in the world effecting in the life of his people his intended purposes."[73] Taking seriously the role of the Spirit allows Cone to speak of continuing divine action in history without discarding his Christocentric focus. Divine providence after Christ's ascension does not leave Christ behind. Rather, the Spirit of Christ makes

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[70] *BTBP*, 38.
[71] For an account that helpfully situates Cone's pneumatology within traditions of Black religious belief and practice in the United States, see Garth Baker-Fletcher, "Black theology and the Holy Spirit," in *The Cambridge Companion to Black Theology*, ed. Dwight N. Hopkins and Edward P. Antonio (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 111-125.
[72] *BTBP*, 57-58.
[73] Ibid., 57.

Christ present and continues Christ's work. There is no bifurcation between Cone's Christology and his theory of divine action in history after the ascension. Divine action post-ascension is itself a property of Christology when the Holy Spirit is taken seriously. In short, Cone's doctrine of providence is a doctrine of the *pneumatological contemporaneity of Christ*. Therefore, to understand how Cone comes to judgment about the relationship between God and Black Power, it is necessary to examine the specific content of his Christology rather than a general theory of divine action calibrated around a formal principle of liberation.

4.2.4 Black Power as the Liberating Presence of Jesus Christ

Cone's verdict that Black Power is synonymous with the action of God derives from a very particular judgment about the identity of Jesus Christ. Rejecting the possibility of articulating contemporary divine action as independent from—or a historical supersession of—the incarnation, Cone identifies Jesus Christ as the inner, material content of divine providence. For Cone, God's liberating presence is not a formal concept, abstract theory, or teleological scheme. God's liberating presence is Jesus Christ, crucified and resurrected, acting in creation through the power of the Holy Spirit. Given this Christological determination of divine providence, questions about divine activity become questions about Christology: one's understanding of Jesus Christ significantly shapes how and where one sees God active today.

In *Black Theology and Black Power*, Cone is anything but triumphalist about the consequences of this theological restructuring of divine providence. The Christological reframing of divine action only *changes* the question that needs to be asked about divine

action in the present. It does not answer it. As Cone learned from Malcolm X, it all depends on which Jesus you are talking about: "Brothers and sisters, the white man has brainwashed us black people to fasten our gaze upon a blond-haired, blue-eyed Jesus! We're worshipping a Jesus that doesn't even *look* like us! Oh, yes! … Now just think of this. The blond-haired, blue-eyed white man has taught you and me to worship a *white* Jesus, and to shout and sing and pray to this God that's *his* God, the white man's God."[74] It goes without saying that this blond-haired, blue-eyed Jesus is unlikely to be at work in Black Power. Therefore, given the logic of his position, Cone's account of divine providence—and therefore also his judgment that Black Power is a site of divine activity—rests upon the specific content of his Christology. In *Black Theology and Black Power*, Cone was only able to sketch the outline of his thought at this specific point. Yet even at this early point, the main contours of Cone's position are clear: if Jesus Christ is the inner, material content of God's liberating presence, then the blackness of Jesus Christ constitutes the specific mode of Christ's presence in Cone's historical moment.

Cone's initial exploration of the blackness of Christ in *Black Theology and Black Power* is brief and therefore ambiguous. Rejecting depictions of Jesus as either white or raceless, Cone asserts that, "*Christ is black baby*."[75] In this first attempt to articulate Jesus' blackness, the warrant that Cone presents for his claim deviates from the logic of the pneumatological thesis that he had been developing up until this point:

> If the Church is a continuation of the Incarnation, and if the Church and Christ are where the oppressed are, then Christ and his Church must identify totally with the oppressed to the extent that they too suffer for the same reasons persons are

[74] Malcolm X and Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (New York: Grove Press, 1965), 253. Quoted in Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, viii.
[75] *BTBP*, 68. Emphasis in original.

> enslaved. In America, blacks are oppressed because of their blackness. It would seem, then, that emancipation could only be realized by Christ and his Church becoming black. Thinking of Christ as nonblack in the twentieth century is as theologically impossible as thinking of him as non-Jewish in the first century. … Black is holy, that is, it is a symbol of God's presence in history on behalf of the oppressed man.[76]

On this account, it seems that the blackness of Christ is, as J. Kameron Carter has argued, rooted in "an analogy of existential situation and condition between Jesus and us," rather than embedded in a vision of Christ's concrete, continued presence to humanity after the ascension through the power of the Holy Spirit.[77] In his early treatment of these issues, Cone wavers between identifying the blackness of Christ as a symbolic and analogical postulation or as a concrete and pneumatological reality.

At this early stage, the relationship between Christ's Jewishness and Christ's blackness remains particularly underdeveloped: "God's word in Christ not only fulfills his purposes for man through his elected people, but also inaugurates a new age in which all oppressed people become his people."[78] The relationship between the elected people of Israel and the identification of the oppressed as God's people remains frustratingly vague. Is this a supersession of the particular covenant with Israel by a universal election of the oppressed? Or is it a "theology of the nations" in which Israel's election includes the engrafting of others into Israel's covenant promises?[79] Cone would delay the resolution of these interpretive ambiguities until his more thorough accounting of these

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[76] Ibid., 69.
[77] Carter, *Race: A Theological* Account, 171.
[78] *BTBP*, 69.
[79] Carter, *Race: A Theological Account*, 158. For a critical engagement with Carter on these issues, see Victor Anderson, "The Mimesis of Salvation and Dissimilitude in the Scandalous Gospel of Jesus," in *Christology and Whiteness: What Would Jesus Do?*, ed. George Yancy (New York: Routledge, 2012), 196-211.

matters in *A Black Theology of Liberation* and *God of the Oppressed*, which will be explored at greater length below.

While the material content of his Christology remains underdeveloped in *Black Theology and Black Power*, the basic theological framework through which Cone attempts to interpret God's relationship to Black Power is clear. The hermeneutic of providence that Cone develops in order to assess theologically the significance of Black Power rests upon his understanding of the contemporaneity of Christ with the present age. For Cone, judgments about divine action should not unfold from the application of an abstract theory. Rather, they are particular, contingent attempts to discern the activity of Jesus Christ in the present through the Holy Spirit, which are themselves made possible by that Spirit.

Cone does not seek to ontologically bind the movement of God in history to Black Power. Jesus Christ remains the criterion for judging divine action in such a way that Cone's verdict about Black Power can only ever be provisional. Thus it is, as Cone writes, only "*to the extent* that [Black Power] is genuinely concerned and seeks to meet the needs of the oppressed" that it is "the work of God's Spirit."[80] Indeed, Cone goes so far as to use the language of needing to "wait and see" with Black Power.[81] In *Black Theology and Black Power*, Black Power does not take over the mantle of divinity from Jesus Christ. Rather, it is only as Black Power aligns with Jesus Christ that it can be called the work of God. But it really can be so called: "Black Power, then, is God's new

[80] *BTBP*, 60. Emphasis added.
[81] Ibid., 80.

way of acting in America. It is his way of saying to blacks that they are human beings; he is saying to whites: 'Get used to it!'"[82]

4.3 A Black Theology of Liberation*: The Past and Present of Christ's Liberating Presence*

Continuing on the trajectory set by *Black Theology and Black Power*, Cone published *A Black Theology of Liberation* only a year after the former work. While maintaining his conviction that all theology is contextual—"written for particular times and places … defined by the human situation that gives birth to it"—Cone felt the need to extend and deepen the analysis of Christian doctrine that he had sketched out in his first book. As Gayraud Wilmore argues, the two books "are actually companion pieces. In the language of the boxing ring, they belong together like the old 'one-two,' a left hook followed by a quick right cross."[83] *A Black Theology of Liberation* engaged in a more sustained and systematic exploration of Christian belief in response to the same question that drove Cone's analysis in *Black Theology and Black Power*: "What has the gospel of Jesus Christ to do with the black struggle for justice in the United States?"[84]

While not engaging contemporary events as directly as he had in *Black Theology and Black Power*, Cone continued to make questions about God's action in history integral to his understanding of the nature and task of theology. From the outset, Cone again underlines the necessity of undertaking the risky work of coming to judgment about God's relationship to contemporary events:

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[82] Ibid., 60.
[83] Gayraud S. Wilmore, "Black Theology at the Turn of the Century: Some Unmet Needs and Challenges," in *Black Faith and Public Talk: Critical Essays on James H. Cone's* Black Theology and Black Power, ed. Dwight N. Hopkins (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 232.
[84] *BTL*, ix.

> Black theology merely tries to discern the activity of the Holy One in achieving the purpose of the liberation of humankind from the forces of oppression. We *must* make decisions about where God is at work so we can join in the fight against evil. But there is no perfect guide for discerning God's movement in the world. … We are thus placed in an existential situation of freedom in which the burden is on us to make decisions without a guaranteed ethical guide. This is the risk of faith.[85]

As Cone understands the task, discerning the present work of God is a highly contingent and provisional—but nevertheless necessary—activity. In *A Black Theology of Liberation*, Cone further develops the Christological and pneumatological core of his claim that the struggle for black liberation is God's action in history, expanding his account of the liberating presence of Jesus Christ in history. In a clarification of the ambiguities of his position in *Black Theology and Black Power*, Cone offers a more detailed account of the blackness of Jesus as the defining character of Jesus Christ in the present, and therefore as a key criterion for judging Christ's ongoing work in contemporary events. His account of the blackness of Jesus, which he would revise and restate for a third time in *God of the Oppressed*, rests upon a concrete, pneumatological connection between the first century Jewishness and twentieth century blackness of Jesus Christ.

4.3.1 Jesus Christ as the Center of God's Liberating Activity in History

In the first several chapters of the book, Cone reconceives the nature of Christian theology in such a way to bring the question of divine action to the center: "Christian theology is a theology of liberation. … Its sole reason for existence is to put into ordered speech the meaning of *God's activity in the world*."[86] The primary work of theology is to

[85] Ibid., 7. Emphasis in original.
[86] Ibid., 1. Emphasis added.

reflect on what God is doing in the world. As Cone suggests, "The task of theology, then, is to explicate the meaning of God's liberating activity so that those who labor under enslaving powers will see that the forces of liberation are the very activity of God." The paradigms of God's activity in history—which theology reflects upon in order to shed light on God's activity in the present—remain Israel and Jesus. In the resurrection, God's liberating work is revealed to be "not only for the house of Israel but for all who are enslaved by principalities and powers." Judgments about liberating divine action in the present are therefore specifically Christological. Indeed, Cone uses the language of "Jesus-event" to name instances of divine action after the resurrection.[87]

In *A Black Theology of Liberation*, Cone continues to connect this Christocentric understanding of divine action with his pneumatology. The Holy Spirit plays an integral role in Cone's conception of the nature of Christ's ongoing historical work: "The God who was revealed in the life of oppressed Israel and who came to us in the incarnate Christ and is present today as the Holy Spirit has made a decision about the black condition. God has chosen to make the black condition *God's* condition!"[88] While Cone does not overly belabor this point, it is in fact the Spirit who stands at the center of his understanding of Christ's action in history. The central conceptuality through which Cone understands God's action in history is liberating presence, and it is the Spirit who is, for Cone, God *present* to humanity after Christ's resurrection.[89] The union between Jesus

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[87] Ibid., 3, 3-4, 5.
[88] Ibid., 12-13. Emphasis in original.
[89] Cone makes several programmatic statements in which he identifies divine presence as a key conceptuality through which he conceives of God's action in history. See *BTBP*, vii; *BTL*, xvii; Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, 2.

Christ and black humanity is therefore not a symbolic, analogical union based upon similarity of existential situation, but quite literally a *Spiritual* one, based upon the actual, concrete presence of Jesus Christ in history through the Holy Spirit.

It is this pneumatological construal of divine action that allows Cone to hold together his Christocentrism with his commitment to making judgments about divine action in the present. The Spirit makes possible a non-competitive account of the divine agency of Christ and the human agency of the black community engaged in the struggle for liberation:

> Black theology is Christian theology because it centers on Jesus Christ. There can be no Christian theology which does not have Jesus Christ as its point of departure. Though black theology affirms the black condition as the primary datum of reality to be reckoned with, this does not mean that it denies the absolute revelation of God in Jesus Christ. Rather it affirms it. Unlike white theology, which tends to make the Jesus-event an abstract, unembodied idea, black theology believes that the black community itself is precisely where Jesus Christ is at work.[90]

Cone is at pains to make clear that the struggle for liberation from oppression does not displace Israel and Jesus Christ as the center of God's action in history. Rather, it is an extension of the concrete, particular work of God revealed and determined paradigmatically in Israel and Jesus. Cone's Black theology does not employ procedures of abstraction, sublation, or displacement in order to align God's providential action in history with black humanity. Rather, it asks how Jesus Christ, the crucified and resurrected Jewish human being, continues to be present in history through the activity of the Spirit.

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[90] *BTL*, 5.

In short, Cone articulates a non-supersessionist and Christocentric conception of divine providence that is still able to support constructive judgments about God's continuing activity in history through the Holy Spirit. As Cone asserts, identifying the black struggle for freedom as a manifestation of divine activity "is not pantheism; it is the conviction that the transcendent God who became immanent in Israelite history and incarnate in the man Jesus is also involved in black history, bringing about liberation from white oppressors."[91] For Cone, the central criterion for judging God's action in history remains Jesus Christ. Yet this assertion does not close down the possibility of discerning continuing divine action after Christ's resurrection because—as Cone is fond of repeating—Jesus Christ is not confined to the first century, but continues to be present through the Holy Spirit. Given this framework, judgments about divine providence are a function of the relationship between Jesus' past and Jesus' present, which—as Cone articulates it—centers on the question of Jesus' blackness.

4.3.2 The Blackness of Jesus Christ

Discerning God's action in history is risky business, and Cone is not afraid to name it as such. Consequently, *A Black Theology of Liberation* gives a careful accounting of how such a fraught task is to be undertaken: "If we are going to speak about God and God's movement in this world, it will be necessary to analyze the methodological procedure which enables us to recognize God's activity. … How do we know that our claims about God are valid?"[92] For Cone, this is ultimately a question about revelation and, more specifically, a question about the "contemporary significance" of God's

[91] Ibid., 15.
[92] Ibid., 42.

revelation of Godself in Jesus.[93] Cone writes, "God has been fully revealed in the man Jesus so that the norm of all existence is determined exclusively by him. He is *the* revelation of God."[94] The validity of claims about God's activity in the present, then, must be evaluated in light of God's revelation of Godself in Jesus.

Having seen the way in which white Christians have ideologically constructed a white Jesus who simply mirrors their own values and experiences, Cone is keen to avoid a repetition of their "chief error." In contrast to "white American religious thought, which allows the white condition to determine the meaning of Jesus," Cone believes that, "The historical Jesus must be taken seriously if we intend to avoid making Jesus into our own image."[95] While Cone articulates this point using the idiom of historical Jesus scholarship, it is not clear that his conclusion is integrally tied to that particular methodology. Rather, Cone is chiefly concerned to prevent the ideological construction of a Jesus that simply reflects one's own interests and perspectives back to oneself. Whether historical-critical reconstructions of the life of Jesus of Nazareth in fact prevent such constructions is certainly open to debate. Cone himself notes Albert Schweitzer's famous conclusion that, at least empirically speaking, quests for the historical Jesus have regularly resulted in precisely the kind of ideological construction that Cone wishes to avoid.[96] In short, the particular methodological commitment to finding Jesus behind the

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[93] Ibid., 47.
[94] Ibid., 54.
[95] Ibid., 119.
[96] Ibid., 117. "Schweitzer demonstrated conclusively that the liberal search for the historical Jesus was a failure and only represented creations of the human mind. The nineteenth-century 'lives' of Jesus told us more about the investigators than about Jesus himself."

text of Scripture, as opposed to in the text itself, does not seem to correlate with a distinction between the "real" Jesus and an ideologically constructed one.

In point of fact, Cone quickly leaves behind the language of the historical Jesus and speaks alternatively of an "encounter with the biblical revelation" as preventing visions of a Jesus made in one's own image:

> How do we know that black theology is not forcing an alien contemporary black situation on the biblical sources? … Unless we can clearly articulate an image of Jesus that is consistent with the essence of the biblical message and at the same time relate it to the struggle for black liberation, black theology loses its reason for being. It is thus incumbent upon us to demonstrate the relationship between the historical Jesus and the oppressed, showing that the equation of the contemporary Christ with black power arises out of a serious encounter with the biblical revelation.[97]

Black theology's black Jesus is not simply the inverse of the white Jesus of white theology, as if these were two ideological articulations of Jesus reflecting their particular communities' existential situations.[98] "We are not free," Cone writes, "to make Jesus what we wish him to be at certain moments of existence."[99] Instead, Cone's judgment about where and how Christ is present today flows from the incarnation of the Word of God as a Jewish human being in first century Palestine: "We want to know who Jesus *was* because we believe that that is the only way to assess who he *is*."[100]

The same Jesus who was born, who was baptized and tempted in the wilderness, who conducted a public ministry for three years, and who was crucified, and resurrected,

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[97] Ibid., 120.
[98] For a thoughtful critique of the limitations of deploying Christology as a resource for resisting white supremacy that attends precisely to this issue, see Anthony B. Pinn, "Looking Like Me? Jesus images, Christology, and the limitations of theological blackness," in *Christology and Whiteness: What Would Jesus Do?*, ed. George Yancy (New York: Routledge, 2012), 169-179.
[99] *BTL*, 126. Emphasis in original.
[100] Ibid., 118. Emphasis in original.

all in the first century, is now present in the twentieth century through the Holy Spirit. This provides the basis for Cone's claim that Jesus is black. Jesus' birth reflects God's concern to align Godself with the "lonely and downtrodden." The baptism and temptation reveal "Jesus' identification with the oppressed." In his ministry, Jesus taught and enacted the coming of the Kingdom of God, which is "the rule of God breaking in like a ray of light, usurping the powers that enslave human lives." His death is "the revelation of the freedom of God, taking upon himself the totality of human oppression." His resurrection discloses that "God is not defeated by oppression but transforms it into the possibility of freedom."[101] Finally, in His continued presence to creation through the Holy Spirit, this same Jesus is at work in the world *in this same way* in between His ascension and second coming.

For Cone, this warrants the claim that Jesus is black: "The definition of Jesus as black is crucial for christology if we truly believe in his continued presence today. … The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus reveal that he is the man for others, disclosing to them what is necessary for their liberation from oppression. If this is true, then Jesus Christ must be black so that blacks can know that their liberation is his liberation."[102] To say that Jesus is black is not to trade in abstract, racial essentialisms; it is a particular, contingent judgment about the concrete way in which Jesus Christ is present in the United States in the twentieth century.

Moving beyond the ambiguities of *Black Theology and Black Power*, Cone makes clear that his assertion of the blackness of Christ is an attempt to make a judgment about

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[101] Ibid., 121, 121, 124, 124-25, 125.
[102] Ibid., 127.

the concrete character of Christ's presence in a "specific time and place."[103] Such a judgment ought not to be interpreted as an effort to say "the final word about the gospel," but as a contingent and provisional act of discerning the Spirit who makes Christ present in creation and enables creation to participate in the already accomplished work of Christ.[104] Cone's verdict about the blackness of Christ does not empty Christ of His particularity, turning Jesus into a cipher for reading an abstract concept of liberation back into God's relationship to creation. Rather, it is an extension of Christ's particularity, given the fact of creaturely participation in Christ through the Holy Spirit. While this claim is already well under way to being fully developed in *A Black Theology of Liberation*, Cone would offer the definitive articulation of the pneumatological contemporaneity of Christ five years later in *God of the Oppressed*.

4.4 God of the Oppressed*: Who is Jesus Christ for Us Today?*

In *God of the Oppressed*, Cone formulated his "most developed theological position," deepening and building on the work of his first two books.[105] Having had time to consider the responses of both black and white theologians to *Black Theology and Black Power* and *A Black Theology of Liberation*, Cone gave special attention to the questions and critiques generated by these earlier publications, honing and expanding his previous arguments about the relationship between Christology, revelation, ideology, and contemporary divine presence. Cone noted that this relationship had been the site of a shared criticism by both black and white theologians. White theologians accused Cone of

[103] Ibid., 153.
[104] Ibid., 154.
[105] James Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1975), ix (hereafter cited as *GO*).

subordinating revelation to "black experience" and creating a Jesus in his own image, while black theologians like Gayraud Wilmore had argued that Cone was merely "Blackenizing" white Christian theology with his continued emphasis on the centrality of Jesus Christ.[106] Thus, from both ends of the theological spectrum, Cone was being pressed to restate and expand his Christology in light of questions about the relationship between revelation and ideology. In particular, Cone's commitment to affirming and discerning the ongoing presence of Christ in history required further explication.

Jesus, according to Cone, "is not a theological concept but a liberating presence in the lives of the poor in their fight for dignity and worth."[107] Because Jesus is not trapped in the first century, but is—through the Spirit—doing the work of liberation in the present, Cone argues, one cannot know Jesus "independent of the history and culture of the oppressed."[108] Given this close relationship between finite and fallen human experience and God's revelation of Godself in Jesus Christ, concerns about ideological distortion are warranted:

> How do we distinguish our words about God from God's Word, our wishes from God's will, our dreams and aspirations from the work of the Spirit? This is a crucial problem for Christian theology. … Unless we black theologians can make an adequate distinction between divine revelation and human aspirations, there is nothing to keep Black Theology from identifying God's will with anything black people should decide to do at any given historical moment.[109]

To address this "crucial problem," Cone turns to revelation. Black Theology is not simply "the function of the subjective interest of an individual or group."[110] Rather, as Christian

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[106] *GO*, 92, 33 n. 38. See Gayraud Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism*, 296.
[107] *GO*, xiii.
[108] Ibid., 33.
[109] Ibid., 77.
[110] Ibid., 83.

theology, Black Theology "begins and ends with divine revelation."[111] It is the task of the theologian to embrace the "burden and risk" of speaking meaningfully about God's presence in history in a way that is faithful to the reality of God's revelation of Godself in Jesus Christ.[112] For Cone, this entails locating the present as a moment within the reality that is Jesus Christ by asking "Who is Jesus Christ for Us Today?" Cone maps this Christological framework as a dialectical encounter between Jesus' past, present, and future, out of which the blackness of Jesus emerges as a contingent judgment about the way in which the Spirit is making Christ present in Cone's contemporary context.

4.4.1 Jesus Is Who He Was

God's paradigmatic action in history—the incarnation of Jesus Christ—provides the criterion by which all further attempts to discern God's historical work must be evaluated: "There is no knowledge of Jesus Christ today that contradicts who he was yesterday, i.e., his historical appearance in first-century Palestine. Jesus' past is the clue to his present activity."[113] Jesus' past constitutes a check against ideological subjectivism. Christ's identity has already been revealed and determined in the incarnation. It therefore is not open to being reconstrued according to one's personal interests or "momentary political persuasion."[114]

More specifically, Cone concretely links Jesus' past to Jesus' humanity. "Christology," Cone asserts, "must begin with an affirmation of who Jesus was in his true

[111] Ibid., 87.
[112] Ibid., 89.
[113] Ibid., 106.
[114] Ibid., 106.

humanity in history, using that point as the clue to who Jesus is for us today."[115] Docetic Christologies that downplay the significance of Jesus' human nature turn Christ into "an idea-principle in a theological system." Cone contends that this error opened the door to ideological subjectivism in American theology, as white pastors and theologians were then able to redefine Jesus according to "white people's political and economic interests, and not by the biblical witness."[116] The referent of Christology is the particular human being Jesus of Nazareth. By drawing this connection, Cone seeks to prevent Christology from functioning as a Feuerbachian projection of one's own experience and social context.

Within this emphasis on the human nature of Jesus of Nazareth, Cone foregrounds Jesus' Jewish identity as the paradigmatic characteristic of Christ's humanity. While Jesus' Jewishness had not been a point of great significance in *Black Theology and Black Power* or *A Black Theology of Liberation*, in *God of the Oppressed* it moves to the center of Cone's account of the incarnation: "*Jesus was a Jew!* The particularity of Jesus' person as disclosed in his Jewishness is indispensable for Christological analysis."[117] Cone sees Jesus' Jewishness as having two functions. First, it "pinpoints the importance of his humanity for faith," reaffirming the concreteness of Christ's incarnation in one particular human being, rather than a "universal man." Second, it "connects God's salvation drama in Jesus with the Exodus-Sinai event," providing the point of continuity between God's two great acts of revelation: the covenant with Israel and the

[115] Ibid., 108.
[116] Ibid., 109, 108.
[117] Ibid., 109.

incarnation.[118] In both of these dimensions, Jesus' Jewishness indelibly imprints divine action in history with the specific character of God's liberating, covenantal presence. In the Jewish human being Jesus of Nazareth, God made Godself humanly present "with the poor and the wretched in the struggle for freedom."[119] This provides the basis for all future judgments about divine action.

4.4.2 Jesus Is Who He Is

Because Scripture speaks of Christ's continued presence in history after the resurrection through the Holy Spirit, Cone argues that it is not just *permissible*—but in fact *necessary*—for Christian theologians to speak of Christ's activity in the present: "Jesus is not merely a historical person who once identified with the poor people of his land and subsequently was executed by the Roman authorities for disturbing the social and political status quo. The Crucified One is also the Risen Lord." Therefore, Cone concludes, "While the *wasness* of Jesus is Christology's point of departure … the *isness* of Jesus relates his past history to his present involvement in our struggle."[120] To move from Jesus' past to Jesus' present is not to transition from a historical and theological Christology to a subjective and existential one because Jesus' presence in creation did not terminate at the ascension.

Cone rejects the agnosticism of Pannenberg on this issue, which defers the experience of Christ's presence to the eschaton and identifies the *saeculum* as marked by Christ's absence. Here Cone explicitly draws out the pneumatological framework that

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[118] Ibid., 109, 109.
[119] Ibid., 110.
[120] Ibid., 110, 110.

underlies his entire position, appealing to "the promise and presence of Christ's Holy Spirit" in Acts 1-2 and to the witness of black church traditions.[121] Through the Spirit, the resurrected Christ continues to be present in history. Given this fact, a full account of Jesus' identity will include an interpretation of Christ's "presence with us in our present existence" through the Spirit.[122]

The Spirit provides the continuity between who Jesus was and who Jesus is. For Cone, Jesus' past activity and Jesus' present activity stand in a dialectical relationship. On the one hand, Jesus' past activity is determinative of Jesus' present activity. Jesus does not act differently today than He did in the incarnation. On the other hand, Jesus' past activity alone does not capture the fullness of who Jesus is after the resurrection and ascension through the Holy Spirit: "Black people's faith that Jesus was raised from the dead meant that his historicity and humanity are not the only relevant factors about his person. He is also the divine One who transcends the limitations of history by making himself present in our contemporary existence."[123] Rather than framing divine action in the present as a supersession or sublimation of Christ's incarnation within a general theory of divine providence, Cone identifies it as an integral aspect of Christology itself by underlining the role of the Holy Spirit in making Christ present to humanity between the ascension and the second coming.

4.4.3 Jesus Is Who He Will Be

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[121] Ibid., 111. See Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus, God and Man*, trans. Lewis L. Wilkins and Duane A. Priebe (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1968), 28.
[122] *GO*, 112.
[123] Ibid., 115.

Jesus is more than just his past and his present. The dialectical encounter between Jesus' *wasness* and Jesus' *isness* must be further expanded to include a relationship to who Jesus will be: "He is not only the crucified and risen One but also the Lord of the future who is coming again to fully consummate the liberation already happening in our present."[124] Cone notes that there are obvious parallels between this emphasis on the eschatological dimension of Christology and the theology of hope being developed contemporaneously by Jürgen Moltmann and others. However, where the Euro-American theology of hope emerged relatively recently through a dialogue with Marxism, Cone contends, Black Theology draws on a much older source: "Black people's encounter with the crucified and risen Lord in the context of American slavery."[125] This second tradition of hope theology was generated by a collision between Jesus' present and Jesus' future under the conditions of slavery. Cone writes, "Their hope sprang from the *actual presence* of Jesus breaking into their broken existence, and bestowing upon them a foretaste of God's promised freedom."[126] The presence of Jesus Christ in contemporary events is shot through with the future that Christ is bringing at the end of time.

Jesus' present, therefore, stands in a two-way dialectical relationship with Jesus' past and Jesus' future. Only by locating it in relation to these two other Christological temporalities can one accurately calibrate one's judgment about where and how Christ is present in contemporary events. Such an understanding reveals the superficiality of the distinctions between Christologies articulated "from above," "from below," or "from

[124] Ibid., 116.
[125] Ibid., 117.
[126] Ibid., 117.

before": "These three aspects of his history and person must be approached dialectically, recognizing that each is a valid experience of Jesus Christ when viewed in relation to the others. We can truly know Jesus' past and its soteriological significance only if his past is seen in dialectical relation to his present presence and his future coming."[127] Jesus' past and present are incomplete without Jesus' future. Discerning Christ's presence in the contemporary moment means looking both backward and forward. Christ's present action cannot be different than Christ's past action, but it must also be in conformity with Christ's future action in which He will bring an end to the suffering of the oppressed.

Concretely, Cone's emphasis on the relationship between Jesus' present and Jesus' future further focuses Christ's present action around struggles against oppression: "Who Jesus Christ is for us today is connected with the divine future as disclosed in the liberation fight of the poor." Therefore, Cone argues, "There can be no talk about hope in the Christian sense unless it is talk about the freedom of black, red, and brown people."[128] Jesus' presence through the Holy Spirit stands between the resurrection and ascension, on the one hand, and the second coming, on the other, and it receives its character from both. In the Spirit, Jesus Christ is present today as crucified Jew, resurrected and ascended Lord, and coming Liberator. This is the Christological framework within which Christ's present action must be discerned.

4.4.4 Jesus Is Black

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[127] Ibid., 120. It is, therefore, not the case—as Harry H. Singleton III argues—that Cone endorses a Christology "from below" in opposition to a Christology "from above." Rather, Cone challenges the fundamental logic of these distinctions. See Harry H. Singleton III, *Black Theology and Ideology: Deideological Dimensions in the Theology of James H. Cone* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2002), 78.
[128] *GO*, 118, 117.

In light of this dialectical relationship between Jesus' past, present, and future, Cone arrives at a final judgment about the nature and shape of Christ's presence in the first half of the nineteen-seventies: Jesus is black. Jesus' blackness functions as the hermeneutical lens through which to make concrete judgments about Jesus' ongoing activity in history. Within the hermeneutical framework that Cone develops for discerning divine action in history, the contemporary blackness of Jesus sits at the center, as the point of convergence between Jesus' past, present, and future.[129]

Cone is at pains to make clear that his verdict about the blackness of Jesus represents a complex, theological judgment, rather than an ideological reconstruction of Jesus to support the subjective interests of a certain group: "Unless black theologians can demonstrate that Jesus' blackness is not simply the psychological disposition of black people but arises from a faithful examination of Christology's sources (Scripture, tradition, and social existence) as these sources illuminate Jesus' past, present, and future, then we lay ourselves open to the white charge that the Black Christ is an ideological distortion of the New Testament for political purposes."[130] Cone develops an account of the blackness of Jesus as a specific, contingent judgment about the way in which Jesus' past and future imbue Jesus' present with a certain content and character in the United State in the twentieth century.

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[129] For a related defense of Cone's use of blackness as an anti-ideological hermeneutic, see Singleton, *Black Theology and Ideology*, 68-91.

[130] *GO*, 122-123. Rufus Burrow, Jr. makes an important argument that though Cone addressed certain criticisms of his work by white theologians, this did not imply that his chief concern was to win over his white audience. See Rufus Burrow, Jr., *James H. Cone and Black Liberation Theology* (London: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1994), 57-77.

Cone's refusal to ground Christ's blackness in an ideological reconstruction of Jesus in black humanity's own image becomes even more apparent when one compares Cone's account to other accounts of the blackness of Christ that emerged from traditions of Black Nationalism, such as Albert Cleage's account of Jesus as the black messiah. Cone self-consciously formulated his own Christology as a corrective to Cleage, arguing that Cleage's theology "illustrates what happens when black theologians reduce the Christian gospel to a *literal* identification with the ideology of black power."[131] While Cone concludes that, in general, "Our similarities were and still are much more significant," he differs from Cleage precisely in his rejection of the understanding of Christ's blackness that Cleage embraced.[132]

The central issue that Cone explores in order to formulate his alternative conception of the blackness of Jesus "on theological grounds" is the relationship between Jesus' Jewishness and Jesus' blackness. Jesus' blackness is anchored in the concrete particularity of Jesus' Jewish flesh. It is not a result of a supersession of, or abstraction from, that flesh: "I begin by asserting once more that *Jesus was a Jew.* It is on the basis of the soteriological meaning of the particularity of his Jewishness that theology must affirm the Christological significance of Jesus' present blackness. He *is* black because he *was* a Jew."[133] Jesus' blackness does not supersede Jesus' Jewishness. Rather, Cone conceptualizes Jesus' blackness with the framework of a theology of the nations, which

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[131] James Cone, *For My People: Black Theology and the Black Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984), 36. Emphasis in original.
[132] Ibid., 225 n. 6. For an extended account of Cleage's theology, see Cardinal Aswad Walker, "Princes Shall Come Out of Egypt: A Theological Comparison of Marcus Garvey and Reverend Albert B. Cleage Jr.," *Journal of Black Studies* 39, no. 2 (2008): 194-251.
[133] *GO*, 123. Emphasis in original.

envisions non-Jewish humanity's union with Christ as a gracious opening of Israel's covenant.

The cross and resurrection open up Jesus' Jewishness to include Jesus' blackness. Cone explicitly invokes the theology of the nations rooted in Isaiah 42 to conceptualize this relation: "Without negating the divine election of Israel, the cross and resurrection are Yahweh's fulfillment of his original intention for Israel to be 'a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.'"[134] The cross and resurrection for Cone do not invalidate the particularity of Jesus' Jewishness—nor the election of Israel which that flesh embodies. Rather, they show that Jesus' Jewishness and Israel's election are not self-referential and self-limiting, but includes those "who once were far off," as Paul writes in Ephesians 2. The resurrection reveals that "the divine freedom revealed in Israel's history is now available to all."[135] As Timothy McGee suggests, "The resurrection of Christ does not offer a universal or generic mode of ungrounded creaturely life but a particular one, one arising within and as the movement between two particularities, the joining or setting side-by-side the divine life in Jesus Christ and black movements for survival and freedom."[136] It is within this covenantal understanding of Jesus' Jewish flesh, with its concomitant theology of the nations, that Cone locates Jesus' blackness.

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[134] Ibid., 124. This passage provides a paradigmatic example of J. Kameron Carter's claim that "black theology, understood from this vantage, gestures towards a theology of the nations, one that emanates from and is consonant with a Christian theology of Israel." See Carter, *Race: A Theological Account*, 158.
[135] *GO*, 124.
[136] Timothy McGee, "Against (White) Redemption: James Cone and the Christological Disruption of Racial Discourse and White Solidarity," *Political Theology* (2017): 1-18.

Just as Israel's election cannot be superseded by, but ultimately includes the Gentiles, so Jesus Jewishness' cannot be superseded by, but ultimately includes Jesus' blackness. Cone writes, "It is in the light of the cross and the resurrection of Jesus in relation to his Jewishness that Black Theology asserts that 'Jesus is black.'"[137] To call Jesus black is to make a contingent judgment about how Jesus' Jewish flesh is active in creation today through the power of the Holy Spirit: "Christ is black, therefore, not because of some cultural or psychological need of black people, but because and only because Christ *really* enters into our world where the poor, the despised, and the black are, disclosing that he is with them, enduring their humiliation and pain and transforming oppressed slaves into liberated servants."[138] The Jewishness of Jesus provides the fundamental warrant for the claim that Christ is black in the United States in the twentieth century: "God liberated a *particular* people from Egypt, came in a particular man called Jesus, and for the particular purpose of liberating the oppressed."[139] The *particularity* of Jesus' Jewish humanity—which is determinative of the character of Jesus' bodily presence in history both prior to the ascension and after the second coming—necessitates contextual judgments about the *particular* ways that Jesus continues to be present through the Spirit in the time between those two events.[140]

Given this analysis, the blackness of Christ functions in Cone's thought as the hermeneutical lens through which Christ's present action through the Holy Spirit can be

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[137] *GO*, 124.
[138] Ibid., 124. Emphasis in original.
[139] Ibid., 126. Emphasis in original.
[140] Carter, *Race: A Theological Account*, 166: "For Cone, the Jewishness of Jesus is tacitly invoked as a means of moving away from imaging others in abstract terms and toward viewing and engaging them concretely."

faithfully discerned. Emerging from the dialectical relationship between Jesus' past, present, and future, Jesus' blackness is not an ideological reconstruction of Christ in light of Cone's subjective interests. It is rather a statement about how and where the Holy Spirit is making Christ concretely present in history at one particular moment between the ascension and the second coming. When Cone claims that Jesus *was* a Jew, but that Jesus *is* black, this does not necessarily reflect a latent supersessionism in Cone's thought, in which blackness replaces Jewishness as the fundamental characteristic of Christ's humanity. Rather, it is a statement about the way in which the Holy Spirit continues to unite humanity with Jesus Christ after the ascension. For Cone, through the Holy Spirit Jesus' present blackness participates in, rather than supersedes, Jesus' Jewishness.

4.5 Conclusion

In *Black Theology and Black Power*, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, and *God of the Oppressed*, the same basic premise underlies Cone's efforts to conceptualize the nature and shape of contemporary divine action. This is his conviction that, though he sees the inherent danger involved in trying to speak meaningfully about God's action in the present, he is compelled to do so by the fact of Christ's resurrection and continued presence in history through the Holy Spirit. Cone's perspective is not triumphalistic. As Vincent Lloyd suggests, he never fails to emphasize "the precarious nature of this analysis and action."[141] But while speaking of God's activity is a risk and a burden, it is

[141] Lloyd, "Paradox and Tradition in Black Theology," 277. Lloyd rightly draws out the importance of the messiness, contingency, finitude, and humility which mark Cone's discussion of divine action through Cone's embrace of paradox in his early theological writings.

nevertheless a necessity. Given the seriousness with which Cone takes his task, as well as his recognition that it is fraught with the dangers of idolatry and self-deception, it is little wonder that he returns to refine his account of divine action again and again in his early writings. Having explored each of them in turn, it is now possible to offer an assessment of the overall shape and trajectory of Cone's doctrine of providence as he developed it in the midst of Black Power's heyday between 1968 and 1975.

Cone's doctrine of providence is a doctrine of the pneumatological contemporaneity of Christ with the present age. He inscribes providence within the narrative arc of the liberation and election of Israel and Christ's incarnation. Importantly, Cone argues that the story of Jesus' birth, life, death, resurrection, ascension, and second coming *includes* Jesus' presence in the present time prior to His final return. In this way, providence becomes an aspect of Christology. For Cone, the crucial actor who makes this possible is the Holy Spirit. The Spirit continues to make Christ present in history after the ascension. In this way, providence, for Cone, is not a general theory of divine action, but a very specific commitment to Jesus Christ's ongoing agency in creation. Jesus is not trapped in the first century, but is present through the Holy Spirit. This understanding of providence necessarily leads to the question of discernment: where and how is Christ present through the Spirit today?

Because divine providence is a function of Christology, as Jesus remains the central criterion for judging God's ongoing action in history, Jesus' identity operates as the lens through which to conceptualize contemporary divine action. The shape of God's ongoing action in history emerges from the dialectical relationship between Christ's past,

present, and future. The Spirit plays a crucial role once again, providing the continuity between who Jesus was, who Jesus is, and who Jesus will be. Through the Spirit, Christ continues to be present as the crucified, resurrected, and ascended Jewish human being. Indeed, Jesus' particular identity as a Jewish human being in first century Palestine definitively shapes the particular ways that Christ continues to be present through the Spirit. For Cone, the particularity of Christ's Jewish human flesh does not close down the possibility that other flesh might participate in it. It is in this regard, in terms of the concrete, pneumatological participation of humanity in Christ's ongoing presence in history between ascension and second coming, that Cone argues that Jesus is black.

The blackness of Jesus represents the point at which the dialectical relations of Jesus' past, present, and future converge in Cone's historical moment in the United States. Christ's blackness names the specific content of Christ's present as it is determined by its dialectical relationships with Christ's past and Christ's future. The particularity of Christ's incarnation in Jewish flesh determines the particular mode of Christ's presence through the Holy Spirit in the present. This Jesus, in whose flesh God's liberating covenant with Israel was opened up to include the nations, in whose birth God identified Godself with the downtrodden, whose ministry proclaimed the coming of the Kingdom of God, who in his death and resurrection defeated the demonic powers of oppression, slavery, and death, and whose second coming will bring final and complete liberation for the oppressed—this same Jesus is doing this same work in the present through the Holy Spirit. In Cone's particular context, blackness represents humanity at its most attuned to this work, at its most receptive to the Spirit, and therefore participating

most fully in Jesus' presence. Thus, far from an ideological distortion of Christology, the blackness of Christ names the lens through which one can most truthfully see Jesus Christ's presence in history.

Yet having such a lens is not the same as looking through it. To say that, in the United States in the twentieth century, Jesus is black is not a judgment about concrete movements, events, or figures through whom Jesus is at work in the present. Rather, it is the hermeneutical lens through which to make such judgments. When Cone does offer more specific judgments, they remain somewhat formal. In *Black Theology and Black Power*, Cone judges that Christ is at work in Black Power. Yet, as I have previously argued, he identifies Black Power as a concept and an attitude, rather than any specific instantiations of Black Power in particular movements or groups. In *A Black Theology of Liberation* and *God of the Oppressed*, Cone moves further away from making concrete judgments, as he increasingly suggests that Christ is at work in the struggle for black liberation in general. Both of these judgments—that Christ is at work in Black Power and that Christ is at work in the struggle for black liberation—are undoubtedly warranted by Cone's hermeneutic of providence. However, there is a final level of discernment that is required for such judgments to be fully concrete. To make it possible to join Christ in his work—which Cone repeatedly claims is the purpose of theology—one must make particular decisions about particular events and movements through which one can participate in that work. Christ is present, not just in formal concepts of "the struggle" or Black Power, but ultimately in the concrete embodiment of these concepts in the lives of particular human beings who take particular actions. On this point, Cone is relatively

silent. There is, however, at least one case of a more concrete manifestation of Christ's presence in history that Cone examines in his early works: the urban rebellions which swept through American cities throughout the nineteen-sixties.

In *Black Theology and Black Power*, Cone offers a decisive theological interpretation of the urban rebellions in Watts, Newark, Detroit, and beyond. Cone concludes, "There are secular interpretations which attempt to account for the present black rebellion, as there have been secular interpretations of the exodus or of the life and death of Jesus. But for the Christian, there is only one interpretation: Black rebellion is a manifestation of God himself actively involved in the present-day affairs of men for the purpose of liberating a people."[142] Here Cone makes a concrete judgment. Christ is not just active in an abstract "struggle." Christ is present in black humanity in Newark and Detroit in the affirmation of their own humanity, in their expressions of love to their oppressors, and their suffering and death at the hands of the American police and military apparatus:

> The violence in the cities, which appears to contradict Christian love, is nothing but the black man's attempt to say Yes to his being as defined by God in a world that would make his being into nonbeing. If the riots are the black man's courage to say Yes to himself as a creature of God, and if in affirming self he affirms Yes to the neighbor, then violence may be the black man's expression, sometimes the only possible expression, of Christian love to the white oppressor.[143]

Yet, as Cone is quick to point out, the violence generated by the urban rebellions has more to do with white society's response to black self-affirmation than anything else. The urban rebellions are an attempt by black people simply to say "Yes to truth and No to

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[142] *BTBP*, 38.
[143] Ibid., 55.

untruth even in death. The question, then, is not whether black people are prepared to die—the riots testify to that—but whether whites are prepared to kill them. Unfortunately, it seems that that answer has been given through the riots as well."[144] These are very specific judgments: Christ was in Newark on July 12, 1967. Christ was in Detroit on July 23, 1967.

Cone charges black and white Christians with specific actions that they must take if they wish to respond faithfully to Christ's presence through the Holy Spirit in the urban rebellions. "The white church," Cone argues, "is placed in question because of its contribution to a structure which produces riots." It is an institution whose "existence depends on the evils which produce the riots in the cities." To join with Christ, the white church is called to "fight against the conditions which cause [the riots]." This is not a matter of strongly worded resolutions, but of "relevant involvement in the affairs of people who suffer."[145] Similarly, Cone warns the black church not to "admonish its people to be 'nice'" or "condemn the rioters." Rather, he charges the black church to "make an unqualified identification with the 'looters' and 'rioters,' recognizing that this stance leads to condemnation by the state as law-breakers."[146] When Christ is present in history, Christians are called to respond.

Ultimately, then, Cone's theological interpretation of urban rebellions points towards a transfiguration of ecclesiology in the light of the doctrine of providence. Neither the white nor the black church embodies the presence of Christ by default.

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[144] Ibid., 30.
[145] Ibid., 79-80.
[146] Ibid., 113.

Rather, the church only embodies the presence of Christ as it moves into action to be where Christ is and do what Christ is doing through the Spirit. For Cone, "The existence of *the* Church is grounded exclusively in Christ."[147] For the church to be the church, it must be converted to Christ by radically reorienting itself and joining Christ in his work: "'Where Christ is, there is the Church.' Christ is to be found, as always, where men are enslaved and trampled underfoot; Christ is found suffering with the suffering; Christ is in the ghetto—there also is his Church."[148]

[147] Ibid., 112.
[148] Ibid., 66.

Chapter 5

Discerning the Spirit of Jesus Christ: A Constructive Hermeneutic of Providence for a Racialized World

This study has engaged the fraught theological issue of how Christians read the world in relationship to God's activity in it. More specifically, it has sought to identify and examine the particular way in which modern Christian attempts at such theological readings of the world have been deeply distorted by the racial subjectivity of whiteness, exploring a paradigmatic case study of one of the most influential figures in modern philosophy and theology. It has also examined two attempts to respond to such a distortion of Christian vision through the articulation of critical and constructive theological alternatives.

This analysis has unearthed a host of pressing questions. How was Hegel able to resource the Christian doctrine of providence so that it could serve as a means for articulating whiteness? What was deformed or distorted about Hegel's theological imagination that rendered the doctrine amenable to such a use? Alternatively, how were Karl Barth and James Cone able to deploy Christian theology to critique this distorted theological imagination and to articulate constructive alternatives for how Christians might read the world in relationship to God's ongoing activity in it? What differed in their understandings of divine providence that in the 1820s led Hegel to identify European man as the center and *telos* of God's activity in history, but led Cone to identify Black Power as God's "new way of acting" in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s? Does Cone's theological vision emerge from this comparison as completely sufficient for

addressing the problem under consideration or are there enduring issues that even Cone fails to address adequately? Finally, what can Christians living in the twenty-first century learn from Hegel, Barth, and Cone as they undertake the same risky and precarious work of discerning and responding to what God is doing in a world in which whiteness continues to exert a powerful distorting influence on Christian vision?

The three previous chapters of this study have each explicated a highly influential theological hermeneutic of providence developed for the purpose of guiding this discernment of and response to the activity of God in the modern world. Residing at the intersection of doctrine and ethics, the accounts of divine providence developed by Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Karl Barth, and James Cone all have a decidedly interpretive purpose, functioning as conceptual frameworks that facilitate the attempt to answer the practical question, what is God doing, right now, in history? If—as John Calvin asserted—the Bible serves as a set of eyeglasses enabling humanity to see *God*, then similarly, for Hegel, Barth, and Cone, the doctrine of providence operates as a theological lens through which one reads *the world* in relationship to God.[1]

All three of these hermeneutical visions focus their readings of divine providence in the world specifically on the activities of modern, racialized humanity. For Hegel, it is the question of Spirit's relationship to the culmination of European modernity and the global imperial conquests of European humanity in the first half of the nineteenth

[1] Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 70: "Just as old or bleary-eyed men and those with weak vision, if you thrust before them a most beautiful volume, even if they recognize it to be some sort of writing, yet can scarcely construe two words, but with the aid of spectacles will begin to read distinctly; so Scripture, gathering up the otherwise confused knowledge of God in our minds, having dispersed our dullness, clearly shows us the true God."

century. Alternatively, Barth investigates the triune God's preservation, accompaniment, and government of creation in relationship to the emerging East-West conflict in the years immediately preceding 1950. Lastly, an exposition of Christ's work in the urban rebellions and the black liberation struggles of the 1960s and 1970s drives Cone's account of divine action throughout his early writings. In each case, a different conception of the doctrine of divine providence shapes its author's theological interpretation of contemporary events, particularly as these events connect to fundamental questions about modernity, Western civilization, and racial humanity.

Given the consistency of this pattern, it is possible—and, indeed, necessary—to read these accounts in relationship to one another. Up until this point in the present study, I have largely considered each of these cases in isolation from each other in order to avoid the temptation to shoehorn three diverse case studies into an overly tidy genealogy. Yet respect for the integrity and individuality of these three portraits need not be antithetical to the desire to make connections between them. Indeed, the authors themselves explicitly make these connections: Barth identifies Hegel as a key interlocutor at several points in *Church Dogmatics* III/3, while Cone has a running engagement with Barth throughout his early works. In this specific case, then, respect for the individual texts necessitates an analysis of the broader narrative that results from placing them in conversation with one another. The present chapter identifies the narrative trajectories that emerge organically from a critical comparison of these three accounts and extends those trajectories to formulate a constructive hermeneutic of providence in response to

the way that race continues to shape Christian attempts to discern what God is doing in the world today.

In the first part of the present chapter, I conduct a comparative analysis of the accounts of divine providence developed by Hegel, Barth, and Cone, identifying both the positive conclusions and the unresolved problems that emerge from reading the three figures as part of a single developing trajectory of thought. I focus my comparison on three particularly salient theological issues in each account: the relationship between providence and Christology, the question of divine and human action, and the role of the Holy Spirit in divine providence.

On the basis of this comparison, I argue that the developing trajectory of thought in Hegel, Barth, and Cone proves instructive for present day reflection on divine providence, both in terms of that trajectory's positive achievements and its unresolved problems. Positively, I suggest three themes that emerge from this comparative analysis which should guide contemporary accounts of divine providence: the *centrality of the incarnation* of Jesus Christ for conceptualizing God's providential action, the *creatureliness* of human beings, and *the work of the Holy Spirit* in making Jesus Christ present to creation between ascension and eschaton. Negatively, I identify two issues that remain unresolved by the line of thought developed from Hegel, through Barth, to Cone: the *persistent masculinity* of divine providence and the struggle against *a reductive pneumatology* in which the work of the Spirit is either problematically independent from or simply reducible to the work of the Son.

In the second half of the chapter I formulate a constructive hermeneutic of providence which builds on the positive conclusions drawn from the analysis of Hegel, Barth, and Cone, while addressing the problems that they leave unresolved. I develop an account of divine providence as the work of the Holy Spirit in making Jesus Christ present to creation between ascension and eschaton and enabling human creaturely participation in Christ's presence in this time between the times. More succinctly, I argue for a pneumatological conception of providence in terms of Christological *presence* and anthropological *participation*.

By understanding providence in terms of presence and participation, I am able to make sense of a number of traditional aspects of the doctrine of providence while also weaving together the three central themes identified as key lessons in the analysis of Hegel, Barth, and Cone: Christocentricity, creatureliness, and pneumatology. Extending Cone's argument, I suggest that understanding divine providence in terms of the theological trope of *presence* holds Christ and the Spirit together in a non-competitive relationship that does justice to the particularity of each without problematically separating them from one another. Furthermore, providence as presence comports with and clarifies the traditional distinction between God's general and special providence. Similarly, I argue that conceptualizing providence in terms of *participation* makes it possible to speak of humanity's genuine relationship to Christ's presence in a way that fully embraces human creatureliness, neither denigrating the human subject in the face of God's providence nor exalting the human subject as itself divine. Providence as

participation therefore helps to resolve a traditional point of difficulty in the doctrine of providence: the relationship between divine action and human agency.

In addition to extending the Christological, creaturely, and pneumatological trajectories elaborated in my analysis of Hegel, Barth, and Cone, providence as presence and participation also addresses the two problems left unresolved by the developing conversation about providence that I have traced across the work of these three figures. Following the lead of womanist theologians Delores Williams and M. Shawn Copeland and drawing on conversations in contemporary pneumatology, I demonstrate that a pneumatological account of providence centered on the themes of Christ's presence and human participation through the Spirit is able to avoid two problems which the accounts of Hegel, Barth, and Cone all problematically fail to resolve: first, consistently masculine characterizations of God's providential action in the world and, second, a tendency to locate the Spirit and Christ in a competitive relation in which the Spirit's activity in creation is either problematically independent of or wholly reducible to the activity of Christ.

To this end, I examine the Spirit's relationship to *bodies*, *community*, and *time*, filling out the formal framework of providence as presence and participation with a specific material content. I argue that paying attention to the Spirit's particular relationship to bodies, community, and time provides an alternative to persistently masculine characterizations of God's providential activity that simultaneously does justice to the uniqueness of the Holy Spirit's activity in creation in a way that does not

render that activity problematically independent of God's revelation of Godself in Jesus Christ.

Most basically, the hermeneutic of providence developed in this chapter builds upon Barth's account of creaturely participation in providence and Cone's account of Christ's presence through the Spirit to articulate a vision of divine providence that can identify Jesus Christ at work through the Spirit in ordinary, overlooked, and oppressed women and men who are daily engaged in quotidian struggles to survive and carve out a flourishing life for themselves, their families, their neighborhoods, and their world.

5.1 Hermeneutics of Providence: A Comparative Analysis of Hegel, Barth, and Cone

In the three central chapters of the present study, I have made a point to examine the doctrines of providence articulated by Hegel, Barth, and Cone with reference to the particular contexts in which they were composed. I have argued in each case that the author in question explicitly addressed their explorations of the doctrine of providence to these contemporary circumstances, as a way to make sense theologically of what was going on in their world. Methodologically, I have defended an interpretive approach that identifies the *primary* referent of their writings on providence as the events and issues of their contemporary worlds and not as a scholastic, transhistorical conversation.

However, this emphasis on locating theological texts in their historical and socio-political contexts ought not to be misconstrued as an outright rejection of the possibility of a fruitful comparative analysis of the three cases. Indeed, for all three authors, engagement with alternative conceptions of the doctrine of providence was one of the primary modes in which they formulated their own understandings of the doctrine: Hegel

differentiates himself from prior Christian accounts of providence that maintain the conviction that the specifics of God's providential plans are "hidden from our eyes"; Barth argues that his account rules out the possibility of believing "as Hegel did, in a self-development of the absolute spirit to be realized in history and more or less attained in 1830"; Cone maintains that Jesus Christ is not confined in the first century in response to "Barth's early emphasis on 'the infinite qualitative distinction between God and man.'"[2] All three authors provide ample precedent for reading their accounts as part of a developing trajectory of thought about how the doctrine of providence ought to shape Christian attempts to discern God's relationship to particular historical moments and events.

In what follows, I trace this trajectory as it runs from Hegel, through Barth, to Cone. I begin by assessing three particular points of comparison where the similarities and differences between the three accounts are particularly stark. I first assess how each author negotiates the relationship between the doctrine of providence and Christology, or God's action in history in general and God's action in history in the paradigmatic case of the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Second, I examine how each author construes the relationship between divine and human action in the economy of divine providence, focusing in particular on the human subject identified by each author as the paradigmatic manifestation of God's providential action in history. Third, I evaluate the role played by the Holy Spirit in each account of divine providence. Having mapped this trajectory, I

[2] *LPWH*, 85; *CD* III/3, 22; *BTBP*, 37.

discuss its ramifications for a contemporary hermeneutic of divine providence, identifying three positive lessons and two lingering problems warranted by this analysis.

5.1.1 Narrative Trajectories in the Accounts of Hegel, Barth, and Cone

Let us begin by briefly reviewing the basic findings of the three previous chapters. G.W.F. Hegel, Karl Barth, and James Cone offer their readers three different formulations of the doctrine of divine providence, each of which is linked to a corresponding judgment about God's relationship to racial humanity in the historical events of their respective times.

In Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, we find providence constructed as an abstract teleology of divine incarnation, articulated in terms of historical, geographical, and anthropological progress and calibrated to a vision of Western European humanity as the paradigmatic site of the revelation, incarnation, and eschatological consummation of divine life in history. Hegel deploys this providential framework to rationalize the global imperial and colonial endeavors of European civilization, the genocide of the indigenes of the Americas, and the continued practice of human slavery in Africa.

In *Church Dogmatics* III/3, Karl Barth elaborates a Christological delimitation of the doctrine of providence in which God's relationship to world history in general can only be understood in terms of God's special relationship to world history in the covenant with Israel and the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Providence names the concrete and particular rule of the God revealed in Jesus Christ. Barth adopts this understanding of providence as the basis for a critique of any providential ideology that would seek to

identify God's historical action with a human subject other than Jesus Christ. In the context of the emerging East-West conflict, this understanding of providence led to Barth's strident critiques of the ideological colonization of Christian proclamation and witness by the Western capitalist order in its global struggle against Soviet communism. Barth was unrelenting on this point: Western humanity could not claim that God was on their side in the Cold War.

Across his early writings, James Cone refines an account of divine providence as the liberating presence of Jesus Christ in history through the Holy Spirit. Arguing that the blackness of Christ represents a contextual judgment about the specific shape of divine providence in his particular moment in the United States in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Cone argued that Jesus Christ was active in and identified with black people's struggle for liberation in the Black Power movement in general and urban rebellions in particular. For Cone, it is not only the case that Christians should resist any efforts to align divine providence with European humanity or Western civilization (Barth's contention), but also that God's providence is manifested in black liberation struggles *against* the oppression that has grown out of these providential visions of white supremacy.

Having reviewed these three visions of divine providence and the judgments about racialized humanity that they legitimize, it is now possible to explore the points of continuity and discontinuity between them in more detail. In what follows, I analyze these three hermeneutics of providence by examining three points of comparison: the

relationship between providence and Christology, the relationship between providence and humanity, and the relationship between providence and pneumatology.

5.1.1.1 Christology and Providence

When it comes to the relationship between Christology and providence, there is a decisive difference between Hegel on the one hand and Barth and Cone on the other. For Hegel, the doctrine of providence *replaces* Christology as the locus of the doctrine of the incarnation: the person and work of Jesus Christ are subsumed as a single moment within a process of divine incarnation that extends across the entire arc of human history.[3] Within Hegel's construal of providence, the culmination of the incarnation of the divine in history is not Jesus Christ, but modern European humanity. Not only does Hegel's doctrine of providence float free of any Christological moorings, it in fact represents a profound subversion of Christology itself, all but severing the doctrine of the incarnation from Jesus Christ.

In stark contrast, Barth founds his doctrine of providence upon a complete and total rejection of any relativization of the significance of Jesus Christ. For Barth, it is only in God's action in Jesus Christ that one can learn anything about God's action more generally. The form and content of the doctrine of providence is exhaustively determined by the fact that the divine Subject of the doctrine is the triune God revealed in Jesus Christ. The place at which God's action intersects with history is first and foremost in the person of Jesus. Any attempt to speak of God's action in history outside of this one

[3] McCarney, *Hegel on History*, 48. "A shift of perspective on the traditional Christian doctrine of incarnation may be said to have taken place, one that subverts it utterly. Instead of being a doctrine of God taking on human form, it becomes the revelation of humanity as the highest form of expression of the divine, thus turning the central drama of Christian theism against its origins."

particular event—and the covenant with Israel which it recapitulates—must be judged by its conformity to that one event: "The doctrine of providence presupposes that this special history is exalted above all other history. It can and will understand all other occurrence only in its relation to this special occurrence."[4] In short, God never acts differently than God has acted in Jesus Christ.

Cone proceeds even farther than Barth in subordinating providence to Christology. He does not even treat providence as an independent doctrine, but rather locates God's action in the *saeculum* as a concrete aspect of the incarnation of Jesus Christ itself. For Cone, the incarnation of Jesus includes not only Jesus' birth, life, death, resurrection, ascension, and second coming, but also Jesus' activity in history through the Spirit between ascension and second coming. There can be no general questions about an abstract divine agent who is involved in history. Rather, the only way to approach the issue of divine action is to ask, "Who is Jesus Christ for us today?"[5] Over and against Hegel, Barth and Cone insist that God's action in Jesus Christ provides the only trustworthy point of theological reference for discerning divine providence. For both, it is clear that a major reason for this insistence is because of the potential for a doctrine of providence that does not find its center and endpoint in the human being Jesus of Nazareth to idolatrously designate a different human subject for that position.

5.1.1.2 Divine and Human Action: The Human Subject of Divine Providence

Each of our three authors offers a different account of the relationship between divine providence and humanity. While Hegel once again differs more noticeably from

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[4] *CD* III/3, 37.
[5] *GO*, 99.

Barth and Cone by relativizing the significance of the human being Jesus of Nazareth, the latter two have differing opinions about how Jesus' humanity relates to humanity in general. For Hegel, the paradigmatic human subject of divine providence is not Jesus Christ, but European man. Hegel resources the doctrine of providence in order to position European humanity as the final site of divine revelation, reconciliation, and eschatological consummation within history. The figure of European man *replaces* Jesus Christ as the human subject in relationship to which God's action in history receives its meaning and purpose.

Barth and Cone are insistent that no other human subject can replace Jesus Christ at the center of the doctrine of providence as the primary locus of God's action in history. Both agree that humanity can only *participate* in divine providence through Jesus himself, yet they configure the relationship between Christ's humanity and general humanity differently, such that they come to different conclusions about the specific human subject that participates most fully. Barth emphasizes humanity's participation in Christ's *rule* over the cosmos, which involves an intellectual *seeing* and *knowing* of providence. Cone emphasizes humanity's participation in Christ's liberating *work* in the world, which involves practical *action* in response to providence.

While most of Barth's energy is dedicated toward critiquing humanity's idolatrous pretension to make itself the divine Subject of the doctrine of providence—to "play the part of world-ruler"—he also affirms that humanity has a positive role in his understanding of the doctrine. Through the Spirit, human creatures, precisely as

creatures, have a "genuine and actual share in the universal lordship of God."[6] However, not just any human subject can participate in Christ's lordship. Only the Christian, "the living member of the Christian community," can participate in the "divine world-governance."[7] This participation predominately takes the form of a seeing and knowing of God's providence, even as Barth also affirms the place for action in response to providence as what he calls the creature's "obedience" in cooperating in the work of providence.[8] For Barth, Jesus' reign is transcendent: Christ rules over creation from his throne. Christian participation in providence is therefore first and foremost about the Holy Spirit enabling the Christian to see and know this transcendent rule, and secondarily about obedient action in response to this rule as it works itself out in history. Because of Barth's emphasis on sight and knowledge, it is the Christian, the member of Christ's body, who emerges as the quintessential human subject who is able to participate in providence, with that participation understood with an emphasis on its intellectual dimensions.

Cone follows Barth in asserting that Jesus Christ is the one true human subject of divine providence and that it is only by participating in Christ through the Spirit that any other human subject has a share in divine providence. However, for Cone, human participation in divine providence involves, first and foremost, participating in Christ's

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[6] *CD* III/3, 160, 285.
[7] Ibid., 239.
[8] Ibid., 254. Barth does not want to be misinterpreted as advocating exclusively for an intellectual creaturely participation in providence: "What we have particularly to emphasize in this connexion is that the Christian attitude to the divine work does not consist merely in looking at it, but in co-operating with it." Nevertheless, on the balance of Barth's analysis, the intellectual dimension of participation receives the lion's share of the treatment and is consistently foregrounded over the practical.

work through action, as opposed to Barth's emphasis on participating in Christ's rule through knowledge and vision. Action takes precedence over knowledge: participation in providence means working where Christ is at work, more than it means knowing, seeing, and affirming Christ's rule over the cosmos. This alternative construal of participation leads Cone to a slightly different conclusion about the quintessential human subject who participates in divine providence. The human subject who participates in providence is not first and foremost the member of the Christian community, but the one who is at work where Christ is at work. In Cone's context, it is black humanity engaged in the struggle for liberation who participate most fully in Christ's active presence.

Hegel replaces Jesus Christ with European man as the quintessential human subject of divine providence. Over and against Hegel, both Cone and Barth identify Jesus Christ as the one and only true human subject of the doctrine of divine providence. For both of them, it is only through participation in Christ that any other human being has an active role in divine providence. Because Barth focuses on Christ's *transcendent reign* over the cosmos, he emphasizes the concept of participation—which is first and foremost about sight and knowledge of providence—and identifies the member of the Christian community as the quintessential human subject of that participation. Because Cone focuses on Christ's *immanent work* in history, he emphasizes the concept of presence—in relationship to which human participation primarily takes the form of action—and identifies the person engaged in the struggle for black liberation as the quintessential subject of that participation.

5.1.1.3 The Role of the Holy Spirit

Pneumatology is a deeply ambiguous aspect of all three authors' accounts of divine providence. While the Spirit plays a critical role in all of their formulations of the doctrine, She does not receive attention from all of them equally. Indeed, the Spirit tends to either improperly dominate, floating free of Jesus Christ, or be problematically neglected, overshadowed by Her relationship to Christ. For Hegel, spirit is the divine Subject of the doctrine of providence. Spirit does not refer to the third person of the Trinity, but to the dynamic and absolute essence of the divine itself as it becomes incarnate in history. For Hegel, spirit floats free of a determinative connection to Jesus Christ. It simply names the progressive unfolding of the life of the divine in history.

Barth and Cone both hold the Spirit in determinative relationship to Jesus Christ. The subject of their pneumatologies is not abstract "spirit," but the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus Christ. For Barth, the Holy Spirit makes possible human participation in divine providence. Through the Spirit, Christians are elevated to the throne upon which Christ rules over history: "We are set at God's side and lifted up to Him and therefore to the place where decisions are made in the affairs of His government. … We then find ourselves at the very seat of government, at the very heart of the mystery and purpose of all occurrence."[9] The Spirit's role is therefore absolutely crucial to Barth's account because it enables him to affirm fully a Christocentric conception of divine providence while still affirming humanity's positive connection to Christ's providential rule over the cosmos. Without the Spirit, humanity's relationship to divine providence could only stand in a competitive relationship with Barth's Christological exclusivism. Either

[9] Ibid., 287-88.

Christ's rule would leave general humanity wholly cut off from divine providence, or humanity would have to seek another path to divine providence other than the one that runs through Jesus Christ. It has to be noted, however, that despite the Spirit's important conceptual role in Barth's understanding of providence, the Spirit does not receive prolonged attention in *Church Dogmatics* III/3. She tends, rather, to hover just off stage, assumed but not addressed.

Like Barth, Cone prescribes a small yet crucial role for the Holy Spirit in his understanding of divine providence. Once again, the Spirit is tasked with closing the gap between Jesus Christ and general humanity, such that humanity can have a meaningful role in the doctrine of providence without relating to God's action independently of the revelation of the true identity of that God in Jesus. However, where Barth predominately identifies the work of the Spirit in terms of an epistemological elevation of humanity to the ascended Jesus Christ who rules the cosmos from on high, Cone emphasizes the Spirit's gap-closing work as enabling an ontological presence of Jesus Christ in history. The Spirit still makes possible human participation in divine providence, but that participation is first and foremost a participation in Christ's present *action* in history, as opposed to *knowledge* of Christ's rule. Both Barth and Cone rely on the categories of presence and participation to explain the Spirit's work in relationship to a Christocentric account of divine providence, but each emphasizes one to a greater extent than the other. For Barth, humanity *participates* in divine providence as the Spirit makes humanity epistemologically *present* at the throne of Jesus Christ. For Cone, humanity *participates* in divine providence as the Spirit makes Jesus Christ actively *present* in human history.

5.1.2 Hegel, Barth, and Cone: Constructive Conclusions

The prior comparative analysis suggests some consistent themes that run through the accounts of Hegel, Barth, and Cone. In what follows, I identify three such trajectories and explore their ramifications for a contemporary account of divine providence. I then discuss two problems which the developing line of thought in Hegel, Barth, and Cone does not satisfactorily resolve, and which will therefore require special attention in my own attempt to formulate a constructive hermeneutic of providence.

5.1.2.1 Christocentrism and the Doctrine of Providence

The first normative conclusion warranted by the foregoing analysis concerns the centrality of Christology for the doctrine of providence. In short, Christ is the key to the doctrine of providence.[10] Hegel's white supremacist and Eurocentric vision of God's action in history displays how a doctrine of providence that is not Christologically-determined easily functions as an abstract framework of divine world-governance through which to theorize the divinization of European humanity. Hegel's providential conception of whiteness is made possible by an operation of Christological displacement, wherein the figure of European man replaces Jesus Christ as the human subject in relationship to whose flesh all of time, space, and humanity finds meaning and receives its ordered place within the cosmos.

Both Barth and Cone construct their doctrines of providence in response to exactly this problematic, particularly as it was instantiated in political programs and social practices in Nazism in Germany and white supremacism in the United States.

[10] Kathryn Tanner, *Christ the Key* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

When its content is not specifically defined in relationship to the incarnation of Jesus Christ, the doctrine of providence becomes vulnerable to ideological colonization. Faithful reflection on providence, therefore, must proceed in light of the fact that there is only ever one divine Subject of the doctrine: the particular God revealed in Jesus Christ. Providence is not primarily about abstract concepts like omnipotence, sovereignty, or causality, but about how the God who brought Israel out of slavery in Egypt, became a Jewish human being, and was crucified and resurrected continues to be in an active relationship to creation. Contemporary reflection on the doctrine of providence begins by affirming that God never acts otherwise than God has acted in Israel and Jesus. A constructive hermeneutic of providence must therefore fix its vision on the concrete particularity of Jesus Christ.

5.1.2.2 Creatureliness and the Doctrine of Providence

If, given the Christological thesis previously expounded, humanity ought not to relate to the doctrine of providence as its divine Subject, then what is the proper place of humanity in relationship to the doctrine? Instead of serving as a means of flight from creatureliness towards divinity, the doctrine of providence ought instead to affirm the goodness of finite, limited creaturely existence, by giving an account of how God in Jesus Christ has hallowed creatureliness itself.

Because providence addresses the relationship between God and creation, it is always at risk of becoming a ladder by which the creature seeks to become like God. Improperly construed, the doctrine of providence seems to offer the creature the possibility of escape from the conditions of creaturely existence. Hegel exemplifies this

temptation: "Christians are initiated into the *mysteries* of God. Because the essential being of God is revealed in the Christian religion, the *key* to world history is also given to us."[11] Through divine providence, Hegel believes, the creature can obtain a literal 'God's eye view' of history. Barth's analysis of these matters differs drastically from Hegel. He argues that the creature who participates in divine providence through Christ "has no *master-key* to all the *mysteries* of the great process of existence. … On the contrary, he will be the one man who knows that there is no value in any of the master-keys which man has thought to discover and possess."[12] Similarly, Cone asserts that, "Jesus did not give us a blueprint for identifying God and his work or for relevant human involvement in the world."[13] Human creatures have no "guaranteed ethical guide" when it comes to discerning and responding to God's activity in the world. Thus it is always as a "risk" and a "burden" that finite and fallen human creatures attempt to make judgments about where Christ is present in history and how to participate in that presence.[14]

For Cone and Barth, providence does not name a line of flight from creaturely existence and its attendant characteristics of finitude and limitation. Rather, providence addresses precisely how the creature can embrace creatureliness and navigate finite and limited existence faithfully. The doctrine of providence does not provide humanity with a master key, but rather it represents the point at which humanity learns to relinquish the desire for master keys itself. A constructive hermeneutic of providence must therefore

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[11] *LPWH*, 145. Emphasis added.
[12] *CD* III/3, 242. Emphasis added.
[13] *BTBP*, 49.
[14] *BTL*, 7.

address and embrace the conditions of creaturely existence which properly mark human beings in relationship to providence.

5.1.2.3 Pneumatology and the Doctrine of Providence

The first two constructive conclusions lead into a third. If a constructive hermeneutic of providence must identify the God revealed in Jesus Christ as the only true Subject of the doctrine, and if it must embrace humanity in all its finitude and creatureliness, then it must also have a robust account of the Spirit as the one who enables a connection between those finite human creatures and the God revealed in Jesus. The previous comparative analysis of Hegel, Barth, and Cone suggests a trajectory of development away from an understanding of the Spirit as a divine abstraction towards a vision of the particular Spirit of Jesus Christ as God who enables human participation in divine providence.

A Christocentric understanding of divine providence requires an account of the Holy Spirit as the one who enables human participation through Christ. For Barth, this participation looks like the Spirit elevating Christians to Christ's throne. For Cone, this participation looks like the Spirit making Christ present in the struggle for black liberation. For both, the Spirit mediates between Jesus Christ and humanity. Without Her, any talk of a hermeneutic of providence would be impossible. The Spirit's presence in creation between ascension and eschaton is a necessary precondition for any attempt to speak of a relationship between human judgment and action and divine providence, so long as providence is conceived Christocentrically. In short, the Holy Spirit is the condition of possibility for a Christocentric hermeneutic of providence.

5.1.3 Hegel, Barth, and Cone: Unresolved Problems

Analyzing the positive developments in the theological trajectory that runs from Hegel through Barth to Cone suggests that Christology, creatureliness, and pneumatology represent three critical themes for a contemporary hermeneutic of providence. Yet a contemporary hermeneutic of providence ought also to be shaped in response to key issues that *fail* to be meaningfully addressed within this trajectory. A constructive hermeneutic of providence must not only incorporate the best insights of Barth and Cone in response to the problem that Hegel represents. It must also address those problematic aspects of Hegel's account that Barth and Cone leave unresolved. In this latter regard, two issues in particular require further attention: first, the persistent masculinity of the language used, the theological paradigms invoked, and the creaturely subjects associated with divine providence by all three authors, and second, the reductively competitive relationship between the Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ which manifests in different ways in each account.

5.1.3.1 The Persistent Masculinity of Divine Providence

The problematic masculinity that underlies all three accounts of divine providence explored in this study manifests itself in at least three ways: in the gender-exclusive language used by the authors, in the theological paradigms deployed to conceptualize divine providence, and in the types of human subjects that each author identifies as participating in divine providence in their respective historical moments.

The first manifestation of masculinity in these accounts of divine providence is the most obvious: all three of the authors employ gender-exclusive language throughout

their accounts.[15] These linguistic conventions participate in a long history of excluding women from public and academic discourse by centering male experience and presuming an exclusively male audience. The implicit premise of all three accounts is that they are written by men, for men. Through these subtle linguistic practices, all three authors tacitly render the human subject who stands in relationship to divine providence as normatively male.

The problematic masculinism that underlies all three accounts of divine providence extends beyond the rather familiar—if no less excusable—issue of gendered language. On a second level, the accounts of divine providence variously wrestle with a tendency to project masculine conceptions of human agency back into their characterizations of God's providential agency in history. While all three authors avoid a stereotypically patriarchal understanding of divine providence, in which God's rule over the cosmos is more or less conceived as a father's rule over his household writ large, the extent to which each author is able to separate his account from the patriarchal model varies.[16]

While Hegel's significant renovation of Christian theological language means that he entirely avoids the problems associated with language of God's fatherhood in traditional Trinitarian accounts, his own account of spirit coming to self-consciousness in

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[15] James Cone revised the gender-exclusive language in later editions of *A Black Theology of Liberation* and *God of the Oppressed*. However, he chose to retain his original, gender-exclusive language in *Black Theology & Black Power* so that it could serve "as a reminder of how sexist I once was and also that I might be encouraged never to forget it." See *BTBP*, x.

[16] For a feminist critique of the patriarchal model of providence, see Kalbryn A. McLean, "Calvin and the Personal Politics of Providence," in *Feminist and Womanist Essays in Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. Amy Plantinga Pauw and Serene Jones (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 107-24.

history has its own problematic connection to hierarchical gender relationships. Specifically, Hegel believes that the development of spirit's self-consciousness occurs most fully in the masculine domain of the State, and only through transcending the earlier, limited realizations of consciousness in the Family. For Hegel, the full emergence of spirit's self-consciousness in distinction from nature proceeds along a gendered trajectory in which "female consciousness" must be suppressed and transcended by the universal.[17] Women lack the self-differentiation that is pre-requisite for spirit's reconciliation with itself, leaving them "outside history and the dialectical movement of the spirit."[18]

To his credit, Karl Barth is openly critical of a doctrine of God based upon patriarchal projection. While he retains the language of "fatherly" to describe God's providential lordship, he deploys it in a strictly relational sense. "Fatherly," as Barth uses it, is not an abstract characteristic describing an "omniscient, omnipotent, and omnioperative being," or even a more benevolent divine patriarch who is "kind," "friendly," or "loving."[19] Rather, it names the relationship between the first person of the Trinity and Jesus Christ. There is no place for an abstract "father" in Barth's understanding of God, only the very specific "Father of Jesus Christ," in which "father" identifies the first person of the Trinity in relationship to Jesus.[20]

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[17] Lloyd, *Man of Reason*, 82.
[18] Laura Werner, "The Gender of Spirit: Hegel's Moves and Strategies," in *Hegel's Philosophy and Feminist Thought: Beyond Antigone?*, ed. Kimberly Hutchings and Tuija Pulkkinen (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 206.
[19] *CD* III/3, 31, 28.
[20] Ibid., 29. "We have to remember that the truth of this relationship is not to be found in what might take place between a human father and his children, but in what has taken place from all eternity, and then in time, between God the Father and the Son. He is our heavenly Father, in a way which surpasses all that we

Barth makes a concerted effort to avoid projecting masculine characteristics onto God in his understanding of divine providence—the divine subject of the doctrine of providence is Jesus Christ, not some abstract divine patriarch who sits upon a throne high above the cosmos. However, even at this point questions arise. Barth continues to conceptualize Jesus Christ's relationship to creation in terms of Christ's sovereign reign over it. This is particularly evident when Barth discusses human participation in divine providence in terms of the Spirit elevating humanity to Christ's throne. While there are good Scriptural warrants for this language, it nevertheless raises questions about Barth's consistency with his own method: has Barth wholly avoided a configuration of the doctrine of providence in which the divine patriarch is removed from his throne and Jesus Christ is simply put there in his place? Has Barth sufficiently shaped the meaning of terms like reign, rule, throne, and sovereignty in response to the revelation of Jesus Christ or does he occasionally slip into allowing these terms to shape his understanding of the providential lordship of Jesus Christ? Combined with Barth's continued use of the language of "fatherhood" and "fatherly" as central concepts in his doctrine of providence, these questions certainly raise concerns about the extent to which Barth followed through on his own stated intention not to project patriarchal concepts back onto God in his formulation of the doctrine of providence.

Cone's more radical inscription of providence within Christology—in which God's action in history is simply a part of the incarnation rather than an independent doctrine called "providence"—avoids some of the questions about patriarchal imagery

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can see or think. We are thus warned in advance that we cannot make what we think we know as fatherly or any other kindness, friendliness and love the measure and criterion of His."

raised by Barth's account. Like Barth, Cone identifies Jesus Christ as the central agent of divine providence. However, for Cone, it is not Christ's sovereign reign over creation from a transcendent throne, but Christ's liberating presence to creation through the Spirit that most basically characterizes the nature and shape of divine providence. Cone holds onto Barth's Christocentrism, but jettisons even further any residual imagery associated with a sovereign divine patriarch who rules the universe.

Nevertheless, Cone's account is not without potential problems of its own when it comes to the issue of projecting masculinist conceptions of human agency back onto God's providential agency. As Delores Williams has pointed out, the language of liberation through struggle "assumes an androcentric black history." Indeed, Williams argues, "Masculine indication of person and masculine models of victimization dominate the language and thought of black liberation theology."[21] As Williams makes clear, the struggle for liberation has too often been understood as a struggle undertaken by men and conceptualized in masculine terms.[22] When Cone describes Christ's providential agency in history in terms of liberation and struggle, he is himself engaged in projecting masculine characteristics back onto God's providential agency. Like Hegel and Barth, Cone's doctrine of providence avoids a stereotypically patriarchal vision of God as *paterfamilias* of the universe. Nevertheless, his characterization of divine providence has

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[21] Delores Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 158.
[22] For a programmatic formulation of this argument, see Jacquelyn Grant, "Black Theology and the Black Woman," in *Black Theology: A Documentary History, 1966-1979*, ed. James Cone and Gayraud Wilmore (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979), 418-33.

its own masculinist complications, as he shapes his account of Christ's liberative agency around categories drawn from black male experiences of racial oppression.

Finally, in addition to gender-exclusive language and masculine theological concepts, the accounts of divine providence developed by Hegel, Barth, and Cone wrestle with a persistent masculinity which characterizes their practical judgments about how God was active in history in their particular historical moments. For Hegel, it was European *man* in whom the divine life became most fully incarnate in history. Likewise, even as Karl Barth identified the human subject who participates in divine providence through the Spirit as the member of the Christian community, he advocated for a hierarchical understanding of gender relations within that community in his work as the chair of a committee on "The Life and Work of Women in the Church" at the World Council of Churches in 1948. Furthermore, the Christian is always a "he" in *Church Dogmatics* III/3. Similarly, James Cone identifies urban rebellions and an early, patriarchal vision of the Black Power movement as the specific sites of Christ's activity in history, locating God's providential activity in events and movements dominated by black men and characterized in terms of the reclamation of black masculinity.[23] For all three authors, the institutions, movements, and events in which they see the contemporary manifestations of divine providence are almost exclusively male-dominated.

In sum, while Barth and Cone engage in a sustained critique of the problem on display in Hegel, in which the doctrine of providence is ideologically colonized by a racial imagination exalting the European subject as the subject of the incarnation of the

[23] Matthews, "'No One Ever Asks, What a Man's Place in the Revolution Is,'" 278.

divine in history, neither sufficiently attends to the gendered dimensions of that problem. For Hegel, Barth, and Cone alike, there is little recognition of the heavily masculine characterization of divine providence on display in their gender-exclusive language, their gendered theological conceptions of the divine subject of the doctrine of providence, and their judgments about which human subjects participate most fully in divine providence. The persistent masculinity of the doctrine of providence across all three of the accounts is an unresolved problem in the trajectory charted in this study. A constructive hermeneutic of providence must take this into account by building upon its best insights, while also learning from womanist and feminist thinkers who have attempted to address the problematic masculinity of the doctrine.

5.1.3.2 The Work of the Holy Spirit in the Doctrine of Providence

A second key problem that the trajectory of thought running through Hegel, Barth, and Cone fails to resolve concerns the specific role of the Holy Spirit in the doctrine of providence. In all three accounts, there is a tendency to rely on a reductive pneumatology that places the Spirit and Jesus Christ in a competitive relationship in which the Spirit floats free of any determinate relationship to Christ or loses Her own character and agency by being overshadowed by Christ. Unlike the first problem, in which all three accounts shared the same basic shortcoming, this second problem has two manifestations that are opposites of each other. For Hegel, spirit floats free of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. For Barth and Cone, the Spirit is held in close relationship to Jesus Christ, but threatens to lose any distinctive characteristics and become simply reducible to Christ.

The problem with Hegel's decision to sever the connection between spirit and Jesus Christ in his account of providence is that it opens up precisely the sort of abstraction at the heart of the doctrine that makes it vulnerable to ideological colonization. If the agent of divine providence in history is not the particular Spirit of Jesus Christ, then it could just as easily be some other spirit, such as the spirit of Western European humanity. Thus, it is vital to hold the Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ closely together in relationship to divine providence. This is precisely what Barth and Cone propose to do. Yet if there is an attendant weakness to their formulations, it is that, in holding the Spirit and Christ closely together, the Spirit's work can seem reducible to the work of the Son. For both Cone and Barth, it is worth asking Eugene Rogers' question: "Is there nothing the Spirit can do that the Son can't do better?"[24]

Barth identifies the Holy Spirit as the One who enables creaturely participation in divine providence in the form of obedient action. Yet in his treatment of this topic he hedges towards resolving the Spirit's role into Christ's role. He affirms that it is the power of the Spirit that enables the creature to act: "It is only the Holy Spirit who can command him, giving orders and prohibitions which he must and can obey. It is only the Holy Spirit who can really guide him."[25] Yet, he goes on to qualify that claim: "It is only the Holy Spirit: but that is to say, it is only the pure and unbroken Word of God accompanying him where God Himself is hidden."[26] For Barth, "following the guidance of the Spirit means obedience to the Word of God." The benefit of this position is that it

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[24] Eugene F. Rogers Jr., *After the Spirit: A Constructive Pneumatology from Resources outside the Modern West* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005), 19.
[25] *CD* III/3, 258.
[26] Ibid., 258.

prevents precisely the error on display in Hegel's account, in which a spirit other than the Spirit of Christ leads "the Christian into enterprises which have really nothing to do with obedience and in which he will fulfill anything but the purposes of the Kingdom of God."[27] However, Barth's treatment of the role of the Spirit in the doctrine of providence raises questions as to whether there is any particularity to the Spirit's work other than serving as a conduit to Christ.[28]

A similar tension resides within Cone's account. In one sense, the Holy Spirit has an absolutely crucial role: the Spirit makes Christ present in history between the ascension and the eschaton. Christ's liberating presence in history would not be possible without the Spirit. However, beyond serving as a conduit for Christ's presence, it is not clear what the Spirit actually contributes. When it comes to making judgments about how God is acting in history, the Spirit—having ushered Christ onto the stage—recedes into the background. This is exemplified by the fact that human participation in Christ's presence is not predicated upon a discerning of the Spirit, but rather upon answering the question "Who is Jesus Christ for us today?" It is unclear whether the Spirit contributes anything distinctive to this work. While the advantages of holding the Spirit and Christ

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[27] Ibid., 264, 263-64.

[28] Rogers, *After the Spirit*, 20. This ambiguity in Barth's account of the role of the Spirit in the doctrine of providence reflects a wider issue in Barth's theology that has been the topic of much conversation within contemporary theology. Eugene Rogers has argued that Barth "provokes some consensus that his doctrine of the Spirit subsides into his christology."As examples of this consensus position, Rogers cites Robert W. Jenson, "You Wonder Where the Spirit Went," *Pro Ecclesia* 2 (1993): 296-304; Rowan Williams, "Word and Spirit," in *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 107-27; Rowan Williams, "Barth on the Triune God," in *Karl Barth: Studies of His Theological Method*, ed. Stephen Sykes (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979), 147-93; Eugene F. Rogers, Jr., "Supplementing Barth on Jews and Gender: Identifying God by Anagogy and the Spirit," *Modern Theology* 14 (1998): 43-81; Eugene F. Rogers, Jr., "The Eclipse of the Spirit in Karl Barth," in *Conversing with Barth*, ed. John McDowell and Michael Higton (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2002), 173-90. For a prominent defense of Barth against this charge, see George Hunsinger, "The Mediator of Communion: Karl Barth's Doctrine of the Holy Spirit," in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. John Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 177-94.

closely together are clear, the danger is that the Spirit can simply be assimilated to Christ, such that She loses any particularity of Her own. It remains to be seen whether this is the necessary price of avoiding a dangerously abstract and independent pneumatology or if it is possible to affirm a determinative connection between the Spirit and Christ that leaves room for the Spirit's distinctiveness as a divine agent.

Given the tendency in all three authors to articulate the relationship between the Spirit and Jesus Christ in competitive terms by either freeing the Spirit from relationship to Christ or assimilating the Spirit to Christ, a constructive hermeneutic of providence must find a way to hold the Spirit and Christ together without simply emptying out the former of any particularity. Fortunately, important contributions have been made in contemporary pneumatology in regard to this matter. A constructive hermeneutic of providence must therefore build upon Barth and Cone's pneumatology, which accords the Spirit a central place in the doctrine and holds the Spirit close to Christ, while also incorporating the best insights of contemporary theologians about the Spirit's non-reducible particularity as a divine agent. In what follows, I identify the Spirit's non-reducible particularity in terms of Her relationship to bodies, community, and time.

In summary, in this first part of the present chapter I have analyzed the trajectory of reflection on the doctrine of divine providence that develops from Hegel through Barth to Cone in order to develop a framework that can inform contemporary efforts to articulate a constructive hermeneutic of providence. In the course of this analysis, I have identified three positive themes that emerge from this trajectory of reflection, as well as two key problems that the trajectory leaves unresolved. Positively, the analysis of Hegel,

Barth, and Cone suggests that contemporary Christian reflection on divine providence ought to (1) be centered on the incarnation of Jesus Christ as both the paradigmatic instance and revelation of God's activity in history, (2) affirm human creatureliness as a gift to be embraced and not a limiting condition to be overcome, and (3) accord the Holy Spirit a central role in the doctrine as the one who unites Jesus Christ with human creatures. Negatively, the foregoing analysis reveals that contemporary Christian reflection on divine providence must avoid (1) both projecting masculine conceptions of human agency onto God's providential agency and over-identifying God's activity in the world with male human agents, and (2) collapsing the work of the Holy Spirit into the work of Jesus Christ. In what follows I develop a constructive account of divine providence that builds upon these positive themes while addressing the unresolved problems by drawing on the perspectives of Delores Williams and M. Shawn Copeland on divine action, as well as contemporary scholarship on the work of the Holy Spirit.

To restore our vision of what God is doing in the world when that vision has been systematically distorted by the modern idol of white masculinity, we must fix it doggedly upon God's paradigmatic action in the world, the incarnation of Jesus Christ. To go beyond sight to action, however, we must ask how God continues to act in our world as the Holy Spirit makes Christ present to us and how that same Spirit calls and enables us to participate in that action.

5.2 A Constructive Hermeneutic of Providence: The Spirit, Christ's Presence, and Human Participation

A hermeneutic of providence for a racialized world will always necessarily exist in a precarious position, delicately poised between irrelevance and idolatry. On the one

hand, it must make possible meaningful judgments about the positive relationship between divine providence and the human subject. On the other hand, it faces the reality that modern humanity inhabits a world in which such judgments have been systematically distorted by a racial imagination that has articulated itself precisely in terms of that relationship. Given these realities, to engage in reflection on providence is to place oneself on unstable, perilous ground. However, to think from the site of precarity and instability is to think from the site of creatureliness—the only site at which human reflection on divine providence can hope to be faithful.

From the perspective developed in this study, divine providence names a two-fold work of the Holy Spirit. Objectively speaking, the Spirit makes Christ present to creation in between Christ's ascension and *parousia*. Subjectively speaking, the Spirit relates to bodies, communities, and time to enable human creatures whose existence is marked by precarity and instability to participate in Christ's contemporary presence through discernment, judgment, and action.

Three features of this understanding of providence are particularly of note. First, it follows James Cone by invoking the trope of presence to name the close connection between the Spirit and Christ in history. Second, it draws upon Karl Barth's account of human participation in Christ through the Spirit to name the positive relationship between divine providence and human creatures. With Barth I affirm a strong notion of human participation in divine providence, but with Cone I argue that this participation is first and foremost a participation in Christ's immanent presence to creation as opposed to Christ's transcendent reign over it. Third, this understanding of providence follows important

strands of womanist and feminist theology and contemporary pneumatology by privileging the Spirit's unique relationships with material bodies, communities, and time in its conception of how, where, and in whom the Spirit is at work. Taking up each of these three aspects in turn, I argue that this understanding of providence builds on the best insights of Barth and Cone about Christology, creatureliness, and pneumatology, while addressing the unresolved problems in their accounts regarding the masculinity of providence and the uniqueness of the Spirit's work.

5.2.1 Providence as Christ's Presence

God never acts differently in history than God acted in God's covenant relationship with Israel and the incarnation of Jesus Christ. *Nevertheless*, God's action is not limited to its paradigmatic manifestations in Israel and Jesus, but continues in the present. A constructive account of providence attempts to describe this "nevertheless," which connects God's general providential activities with God's particular actions in relationship to Israel and Jesus. Specifying providence as the work of the Spirit in making Christ present to creation enables an account of God's ongoing action in history that remains faithful to its paradigmatic instantiations in Israel and Jesus, while also doing justice to the universality of God's providential agency in creation.[29] Importantly, articulating providence as Christ's presence to creation through the Spirit enables a characterization of God's relationship to creation as *universal*, without thereby rendering it *abstract*.

[29] For an account of providence that is conceptually similar to my own, albeit written with very different governing concerns, see Wright, *Providence Made Flesh*.

Any account of the Spirit's ongoing work in history which makes God's activity in the covenant with Israel and the incarnation of Jesus the normative pattern for the Spirit's wider activities must reconcile these discrete and particular divine initiatives with God's universal and general activities of preserving creation at all times and all places. In short, God's actions in the covenant with Israel and the incarnation of Jesus Christ are individual and particular, while God's providential agency ought at least in part to be universal and continuous. As Kathryn Tanner has argued, theological language ought to "avoid in talk about God's creative agency all suggestions of limitation in scope or manner." Rather, God's agency is "immediate and universally extensive."[30] Providence as Christ's presence holds together a necessary commitment to the particular character of God's providential agency as revealed in Israel and Jesus with the no less necessary commitment to that agency's universal manner and scope.

Through the Spirit, Christ is present to the whole of creation universally, immediately, and simultaneously. Creation *does not* preserve and sustain itself in the normal run of things, apart from perhaps a few particular moments of divine intervention, such as when God makes a covenant with the people of Israel or becomes incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth. As Barth argues, if God does not uphold and sustain every individual aspect of creation at every moment, it will return to nothingness.[31] God's providential

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[30] Kathryn Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology: Tyranny or Empowerment?* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 47.

[31] *CD* III/3, 73ff. Without God's preservation, Barth suggest, creation returns to chaos for two reasons. First, created being is participatory being and therefore ceases to be when cut off from that in which it participates. Second, that which constitutes nothingness (the devil and demons) has mounted an open offensive against creation and would actively destroy it barring God's ongoing preservation.

agency is not punctiliar. God is present to all of creation at all times in the Son through the Spirit.

However, at this point a problem arises. If God is equally present everywhere and in everything at all times, then it becomes impossible for Christians to make distinctions and judgments about what God is doing in history. A crudely universal model of God's providential agency would only seem to be able to answer the central question of this study—"what is God doing in history?"—by saying "everything." Yet such an answer is clearly insufficient when compared to the Scriptural accounts in which God is almost continuously identified as acting in discrete and particular ways in creation. Indeed, in light of the interests of this study, it is vital to be able to say that God was not active in the African slave trade in the same way that God was active in the Black freedom movement. The ability to make such distinctions rests upon a Christological specification of God's providential agency. As both Barth and Cone argue, providence cannot be equated with an abstract omnicausality, even if such an omnicausality helpfully names God's agency as universal and immediate.

Understanding providence specifically in terms of Christ's presence through the Spirit holds together the necessarily universal and immediate scope of divine providence with the concrete particularity of God's paradigmatic activities in the covenant with Israel and the incarnation of Jesus Christ, providing an alternative to both abstractly universal and narrowly punctiliar accounts of the doctrine. On the one hand, in the Son through the Spirit God relates to the entirety of creation in a universal and immediate manner. On the other hand, Christ's presence in creation is not abstract or uniform, but particular and

variegated—even as it remains universal and immediate in scope and manner. Indeed, on this Christological and pneumatological account of divine presence, it becomes possible to speak of varying intensities of Christ's presence in creation. Just as radio waves transmitted from a station both permeate the entire coverage area and are weaker or stronger at different points within the coverage area depending on the distance between that point and the source, so also Christ's presence through the Spirit is coextensive with the entirety of creation, even as that presence is weaker or stronger based upon creation's relative participation in its source. The analogy is of course limited. The Spirit is not like a field of radio waves. The Spirit's presence is not uniform, predictable, and therefore controllable. Nevertheless, this particular analogy is helpful within certain limits simply as a way to conceptualize the variegated intensities of the Spirit's universal presence to creation.

On this model, judgments such as James Cone's—that the urban rebellions represent a special manifestation of divine action in history—need not compete with affirmations of God's universal and immediate activity throughout creation. Christ's presence through the Spirit permeates creation, but the intensity of that presence manifests in creation in a greater or lesser degree depending on the extent to which creation participates in its true identity in Jesus. By extension, sin and evil are those things that cause creation to fail to reflect the presence of Christ through the Spirit.[32] On this account, human creatures relate to Christ's presence through the Spirit as the Spirit

[32] From this perspective, sin and evil are unintelligible realities, impossible possibilities. As Kathryn Tanner suggests, identifying sin and evil in this way does not trivialize them, but rather stresses their horror as things "with no right to exist, no place within a divinely instituted order." See Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology*, 174 n. 12.

enables them to attune themselves to that presence in the work of discernment, judgment, and action.

5.2.2 Providence and Human Participation: Creaturely Attunement through the Spirit

Objectively—independent of creaturely recognition or response—Christ is universally and immediately present to creation through the Spirit. Yet subjectively, creation responds to and reflects Christ's presence to greater and lesser degrees. With regard to human creatures, this responsive relation to Christ's presence takes the form of *participation*. Through the Holy Spirit, human beings are able to participate subjectively in Christ's presence. Furthermore, the process by which human creatures come, through the Spirit, to participate in Christ's providential presence in this way is one of *attunement*, a reorienting of the self through the Spirit toward Jesus Christ.[33] The Spirit provides both the objective means by which Jesus Christ is present to creation and the subjective means by which finite and limited human creatures are able to participate in that presence.

Once again an analogy from the field of radio transmission technology proves instructive for elucidating the inner structure of this understanding of providence. When I get in my car, there are radio waves from my favorite station—WNCU 90.7—all around me, whether I have my car radio turned on or not. Those radio frequencies have an objective presence in my car independent of any perception or action on my part.

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[33] For this concept of attunement, I am indebted to Cristina L. H. Traina's *Erotic Attunement: Parenthood and the Ethics of Sensuality between Unequals* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011). Traina develops an account of attunement as a virtue-based alternative to traditional approaches to evaluating intimate conduct between unequals. Attunement, she suggests, "combines perception, imagination, and experimentation in an endless, partnered dance" (217). While it lies beyond the bounds of the present study, a similar account could be developed of the dance between the Holy Spirit and human subjects that leads to the possibility of human participation in divine providence.

However, if I adjust my car radio to the right frequency, the tuner in my radio will begin to actively resonate with the radio waves that are present in my car and, if it is Saturday night, I'll get to listen to my favorite blues program as I drive around town. Similarly, Christ's presence in history is, as previously discussed, universal and immediate. This is the objective reality of the Spirit's mediation of Christ to creation. Yet the Holy Spirit also works to attune humanity to Christ's presence subjectively, such that they resonate with Christ's presence in a way that they come to participate actively in it.

Within this framework it is possible to make discrete judgments about particular ways in which humanity is able to participate in divine providence, while still affirming the universality and immediacy of God's providential agency in relationship to creation. Given this model, it is possible to understand Cone's identification of Christ's presence in the urban rebellions not as a claim that this is the *only* place where Christ is present to creation, but that at this one particular site we see humanity attuned to and resonating with the frequency of the Spirit such that they are actively participating in Christ's presence in history.

This framework also makes it possible to imagine human participation in divine providence as functioning on a dynamic, "sliding scale" model rather than a binary, "all or nothing" model. It allows us to see Christ's presence in human creatures even as conditions of finitude, sin, and evil prevent it from being fully embodied in them. Thus, hearkening back to the issues raised in chapter four about the patriarchal nature of early Black Power ideology, it is possible to say that Christ was indeed at work in Black Power, even as the patriarchal dimensions of that movement hampered some of its

participants from fully resonating with the presence of Jesus Christ. Conversely, it renders intelligible Karl Barth's assertion that even the "demonic" state participates in God's work, just to the extent that anything that exists does so because it is related to God.[34] This understanding of human participation frees humanity from the quixotic search for ideological purity and opens the door to the creaturely work of discerning when and where the Spirit might be enabling glimpses of Christ's presence to emerge from human activities even in spite of the inescapable conditions of finitude and sin.

Fundamentally, this understanding of providence reconfigures the relationship between divine action and human agency non-competitively, while still making it possible for human beings to engage in the work of discernment, judgment, and action in the attempt to attune themselves more fully to Christ's presence in history. The Holy Spirit is the condition of possibility for this: objectively mediating Christ's presence to creation, and subjectively enabling human creatures to attune themselves to that presence and in so doing come to actively participate in it. In all of this, Christ remains the sole criterion for discerning God's providence in history. In all of this, human beings are able to participate in God's providence without chaffing against their creaturely finitude and limitation. In all of this, the Spirit occupies a central role in God's providential involvement in creation. Divine providence understood as the Spirit's two-fold work of making Christ present to creation and enabling human beings to participate in that presence is, therefore, an account of the doctrine that emphasizes Christocentricity,

[34] Karl Barth, "Church and State," in *Community, State, and Church: Three Essays*, ed. David Haddorff (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1960), 111.

creatureliness, and pneumatology, the three key aspects of the doctrine on display in the trajectory of thought developed in the writings of Hegel, Barth, and Cone.

5.2.3 The Work of the Spirit: Bodies, Community, and Time

The Spirit has Her own particular character as a divine agent that is not simply reducible to that of Jesus Christ. Careful attention to the specific character and content of the Spirit's work provides a constructive alternative to the two persistent problems shared by the Christocentric accounts of providence developed by Barth and Cone: the masculine character of divine providence and a reductive pneumatology. The specific, non-reducible character of the Spirit's activity in creation becomes visible in Her particular relationship to bodies, communities, and time: the Spirit gives life to material bodies, the Spirit creates surprising communities of intimacy, and the Spirit anticipates the end of time. In these three activities, the Spirit is more than just a hollowed-out conduit for Jesus Christ's presence. Moreover, as will becomes evident from an engagement with Delores Williams and M. Shawn Copeland, in these three activities the Spirit undermines traditionally masculinist paradigms of divine action. Therefore, the turn towards the distinctive work of the Spirit, which addresses the first unresolved problem in the accounts of Barth and Cone, is simultaneously a turning away from the patriarchal language, concepts, and judgments that have plagued Christian reflection on the doctrine of providence—the second problem left unresolved by those two authors. The specific character of the Spirit's relationship to bodies, communities, and time provides the material content for a pneumatological account of divine providence as Christological presence and anthropological participation.

5.2.3.1 Providence and Bodies: The Spirit Gives Life

In *After the Spirit: A Constructive Pneumatology from Resources outside the Modern West*, Eugene Rogers offers a corrective to a tendency in modern theology to collapse the Holy Spirit's role in the triune God's economic activity in creation into that of Jesus Christ. Over and against this tendency, Rogers attempts to rehabilitate the Spirit's role in God's interactions with creation by arguing that the Spirit's integrity and particularity as a divine agent is most fully displayed in Her interactions with material, embodied humanity—first, in relationship to Christ's body, but therefore necessarily also in relationship to the bodies of other human beings.

In the incarnation, Rogers argues, the Spirit characteristically befriends material bodies, resting first on Mary's body in the annunciation, and then on Christ in the baptism of his body, the transfiguration of his body, and the resurrection of his body.[35] After the ascension, the Spirit continues to befriend flesh, resting on the material bodies of human beings and incorporating both human bodies and cosmic bodies into Christ's body.[36] The Spirit's non-reducible particularity in Her activity in creation lies in the way She characteristically relates to material bodies: sanctifying, transfiguring, and giving them life.

If divine providence is the two-fold work of this same Spirit in making Christ present to creation and enabling human participation in that presence, then that work must also display the Spirit's characteristic befriending of flesh. Therefore, to answer questions about what God is doing in history, it is necessary to pay attention to what is

[35] Rogers, *After the Spirit*, 210.
[36] Ibid., 209.

happening to the material bodies of the human beings on whom the Spirit rests. The Spirit's providential work expresses itself as the Spirit brings life to those bodies who have been overlooked and oppressed by distorted providential visions of imperial and colonial politics, revolutionary ideologies and movements, and even the church.

Such an understanding of the Spirit's work shares much with and is indebted to the work of womanist theologians and ethicists, who have long been developing accounts of God's life-giving presence to ordinary, overlooked, and oppressed human bodies, bodies which in the contexts of the Americas have frequently belonged to women of color. In *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*, Delores Williams explores these issues through the consideration of "God's historic relation to black female life."[37] Where James Cone saw Christ at work in black men's heroic reclamation of their masculinity, Williams argues that God is present and active in the lives of "ordinary black women doing what they always do: holding the family and church together; working for the white folks or teaching school; enduring whatever they must so their children can reach for the stars; keeping hope alive in the family and community when money is scarce and white folks get mean and ugly."[38] In her reading of the story of Hagar in the wilderness, Williams draws out God's characteristic concern for ordinary, overlooked, and oppressed material bodies. Hagar, a slave woman with no control over her body, encounters God's presence in the wilderness and experiences that presence in terms of God's care for Hagar's basic material needs: "The Genesis 21 narrative reveals that when their resources for survival (water and bread) had run out,

[37] Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 3.
[38] Ibid., x.

Ishmael was near death and Hagar was a short distance away crying."[39] But God cares for Hagar and Ishmael's material bodies, providing a well from which she and Ishmael could drink. For Williams, the characteristic activity of God in relationship to black women is to provide for the material survival and quality of life for those struggling to make a way out of no way in the face of incredible adversity.

In a similar vein, in *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being*, M. Shawn Copeland reframes Christian thought about divine action around material bodies. Copeland characterizes black women's struggle to reclaim their bodies from slavery as a "liturgy of Spirit descending and renewing once despised, used, abused flesh."[40] Copeland sees Jesus Christ at work in the present literally re-membering the bodies of "poor, dark, and despised bodies" that are being "consumed by totalizing dynamics of domination" on a global scale.[41] As "freedom enfleshed," Jesus Christ is at work in the world enfleshing freedom in material bodies through the Holy Spirit. Because of "the body broken and resurrected for us," Christian theology "can never cease speaking of bodies."[42] For Copeland, this attention to bodies necessarily coincides with a criticism of the patriarchal structure of traditional Christian theology and early liberation theology, both of which obscured the importance of the bodies of poor women of color as sites where God is at work in the world enfleshing freedom. To take Jesus' body seriously, Copeland argues, one must change "the anthropological subject of Christian theological

[39] Ibid., 31.
[40] Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 52.
[41] Ibid., 53.
[42] Ibid., 57.

reflection" to focus on the bodies of "exploited, despised, poor women of color."[43] If Jesus, as freedom literally enfleshed, reveals the character and content of God's action in history, then accounts of such action must pay attention to the way that God continues to act to enflesh freedom in material bodies through the Spirit.

Divine providence names the Holy Spirit's work in making Christ present to creation and enabling human participation in that presence. Because this work is the work of the Spirit in particular, it must reflect the Spirit's characteristic relationship to material bodies. Therefore, Christ's presence to creation—and human participation in that presence—manifests when ordinary, exploited, and despised human bodies find healing, survival, support, self-esteem, and quality of life. The Spirit gives life to material bodies.

5.2.3.2 Providence and Community: The Spirit Joins

The Spirit not only characteristically gives life to material bodies, but it unites those bodies with other bodies in surprising acts of joining, creating unexpected expressions of intimate communion among those who would otherwise be strangers or enemies. The paradigmatic expression of the way that the Spirit enables human participation in Christ's presence by creating surprising forms of intimacy and communion is of course Her dramatic reconfiguration of the social life of Israel to include the Gentiles in the books of Acts. The Spirit, as Willie Jennings has suggested, brings with her new possibilities for intimacy: "On the day of Pentecost the Spirit descended on the disciples and drove them into the languages of the world to enact the joining desired by the Father of Jesus for all people. This is the coming of the one new

[43] Ibid., 89.

reality of kinship. … In Jesus, Israel's election does a stunning work by opening the possibilities of boundary-shattering love between strangers and enemies."[44] In Acts, the Spirit works to introduce "a new reality of belonging that drew together different peoples into a way of life that intercepted ancient bonds and redrew them around the body of Jesus."[45] The Spirit's presence in Acts creates new and surprising forms of intimacy, drawing together those who ought not otherwise be together—and all this, not as an interruption of or departure from the fulfillment of God's covenant fellowship with Israel in Jesus, but rather as a radical and surprising extension of that covenant fellowship.

Because the Spirit who introduced a "new reality of belonging" to both Jew and Gentile in Acts is the same Spirit who today makes Christ present to creation and enables human participation in that presence, the Spirit's contemporary activity will continue to be marked by the creation of unexpected, boundary-breaking communities. Such communities will not be marked by a bland multiculturalism, but rather a genuine freedom amidst difference that runs—often dangerously—against the grain of the dominant social order. Against an easy misunderstanding of this point, it is important to say that the black church—though racially homogeneous—would represent one such community, growing as it did out of the illegal gatherings of slaves in the hush harbor. Conversely, a contemporary "multicultural" congregation in which diverse peoples are heavily disciplined into a homogeneous performance of faith and worship would not bear the characteristic marks of the Spirit's work of joining. The Spirit's joining is not a safe

[44] Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 267.
[45] Ibid., 269.

"diversity initiative" on God's part, but rather a dangerous and uncontrollable coming together of those whom the world says should be kept apart.

This second characteristic of the Spirit's non-reducible particularity as the agent of divine providence once again features centrally in the work of Delores Williams and M. Shawn Copeland. In Williams' interpretation of the story of Hagar, God's providential presence to Hagar and Ishmael in the wilderness manifests not only in the provision of survival and quality of life for their material bodies, but also in the creation and preservation of an unexpected community. When God responds to Hagar's cries in Genesis 21, God provides both water and a promise: "Come, lift up the boy and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make a great nation of him."[46] Williams sees this same God at work today in the lives of African-American women engaged in the similar struggle of "building a peoplehood and a community" while working through issues of "survival, surrogacy, motherhood, rape, homelessness, and economic and sexual oppression."[47] When the Spirit acts, She calls into being surprising and unexpected relationships and communities.

The specific marks of Spirit-birthed communities in the present must match the marks of the Spirit-birthed community in Acts. M. Shawn Copeland identifies the gift of the Holy Spirit in Acts as the "new basis" for a particular type of community: "The *ekklesia*, the church that emerged in the first century, was polyglot, culturally diverse, multiracial, flexible, economically and socially complex, experimental in its service and liturgy, daring in love of neighbor, and unafraid of the martyr's crown. This community

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[46] Genesis 21:18.
[47] Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 161, 33.

lived out the compelling and dangerous memory of the crucified Jesus of Nazareth, whom they confessed as Lord and God."[48] Because it is this same Spirit who remains "the source and principle of the life of the church" in the present, the Spirit's contemporary work can be discerned by the similar fruit which it continues to bear. The Spirit's work disrupts cultural imperialisms and racism because "through the work of the Spirit, peoples of diverse races, ethnicities, and cultures hear and respond to Christ's message and experience this gift as being-in-love with God. The power of the Holy Spirit knits together people of diverse races, ethnicities, and cultures, dissolving every barrier, while regarding difference with dignity. The work of the Holy Spirit brings about unity in diversity and sustains diversity in unity."[49] This is the non-reducible particularity of the Spirit's agency as the one who makes Jesus Christ present to creation and enables human participation in that presence. To see Jesus Christ present through the Holy Spirit, Christians must look for the Spirit's characteristic fruit: the surprising emergence of communities marked by border-crossing, boundary-defying intimacy between those whom the dominant logics of sin and death would keep apart. The Spirit joins.

5.2.3.3 Providence and Time: The Spirit Anticipates the End

The final aspect of the Holy Spirit's non-reducible particularity as the agent of divine providence is the Spirit's characteristic *temporality*. The Spirit anticipates the end of time in the midst of the present time. This creates a paradoxical temporality for the Spirit's works: the "already/not yet" of the kingdom of God. On the one hand, the

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[48] M. Shawn Copeland, "Knit Together by the Spirit as Church," in *Prophetic Witness: Catholic Women's Strategies for Reform*, ed. Colleen M. Griffith (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2009), 17.
[49] Ibid., 21.

outpouring of the Spirit signals the arrival of the messianic age. On the other hand, the presence of the Spirit is only a down payment on the age to come—not its full realization.[50] The Spirit *anticipates* the end, but only Christ in His final return can realize it.

Because the Spirit's two-fold providential activity takes place in this time between the times—a time helpfully described by Charles Mathewes as "during the world"—Christ's *full* presence in creation, as well as humanity's *full* participation in Christ's presence, awaits the *parousia*.[51] From the perspective of the present, the Spirit's work is necessarily paradoxical, incomplete, obscure, ambiguous, and surprising. This is the final qualification for the specific content of a pneumatological doctrine of providence understood in terms of Christological presence and human participation—it is always both an "already" and a "not yet." Christ is present to creation through the Spirit, but that presence is never straightforward, unambiguous, or controllable.

This final point stands as a qualification of all that has preceded it. Yes, the Spirit makes Christ present to creation. Yes, the Spirit enables human participation in that presence. Yes, the Spirit gives life to material bodies. Yes, the Spirit creates surprising communities. But the Spirit does all this only and ever in a paradoxical relationship to the history of creation that can never be assumed, systematized, or controlled. This is what Karl Barth describes as the "nevertheless" of belief in providence: "What man sees is simply the multiplicity and confusion of the lines of creaturely occurrence … There can be no question of a transparency proper to this occurrence as such, or of an inherent

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[50] Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, 806ff..
[51] Charles Mathewes, *A Theology of Public Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 15-18.

ability of man to see through it. What man sees is simply creation in all the regularity and contingency of its own movement and development."[52] Thus, Barth argues, the Christian who truly participates in divine providence "will always be the most surprised, the most affected, the most apprehensive and the most joyful in the face of events. He will not be like an ant which has foreseen everything in advance, but like a child in a forest, or on Christmas Eve; one who is always rightly astonished by events … [life in the world] will be an adventure for which he for his part has ultimately and basically no qualifications of his own."[53] Because it is the eschatological Spirit who mediates human participation in Christ's presence to creation, those who attempt to respond to the Spirit's work through discernment, judgment, and action must do so prayerfully and humbly, knowing that their best judgments about how and where the Spirit is at work must be continually open to revision. The Spirit blows where She chooses, working in surprising, uncontrollable, unpredictable ways.[54]

Delores Williams captures this paradoxical character of the Spirit's providential activity in her suggestion that divine action manifests in "making a way out of no way." In Hagar's first sojourn in the wilderness, the angel of the Lord appears and makes a promise that rivals God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 15: "I will so greatly multiply your offspring that they cannot be counted for multitude." Yet this promise for survival and quality of life coincides with a return to slavery and submission to Sarai's abuse.[55] God's presence with Hagar and Ishmael does not lead to a dramatic, unambiguous event

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[52] *CD* III/3, 44.
[53] Ibid., 242-43.
[54] John 3:8.
[55] Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 21-22.

of total liberation, but rather enables their survival and quality of life. Hagar does not experience God's action in history as a liberation "by any means necessary" but rather as survival through the provision of "necessary means."[56] Similarly, over and against masculinist and androcentric paradigms for black liberation, Williams sees the Spirit working in the lives of black women to bring and sustain "whatever is positive in their lives."[57] The Spirit is present to them, enabling them to make a way out of no way, empowering them in their struggle "to resist and rise above the forces seeking to destroy their lives and spirits."[58]

As an anticipation—but not realization—of the end of all things, the Spirit makes Christ present to human beings in the midst of precarity, oppression, and adversity. The Spirit's providential activity is rarely unambiguous. Therefore, as Allen Verhey suggests, "Our talk of God's providence then will often have an 'in spite of' attached to it. 'In spite of' the evil of the Chaldeans, God is at work to fulfill his purpose."[59] God's activity in between Christ's ascension and *parousia* can only be seen clearly from its eschatological end. Yet through the Spirit this end has erupted into our present, and, in the Spirit, human beings are empowered to respond to this eruption through discernment, judgment, and action. Yet this responsive action must always proceed in light of the paradoxical, ambiguous, and even ironic character of the Spirit's relationship to history "during the world." The Spirit anticipates the end.

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[56] Ibid., 177.
[57] Ibid., xiii.
[58] Ibid., xi.
[59] Allen Verhey, "Calvin's Treatise 'Against the Libertines,'" *Calvin Theological Journal* 15 no. 2 (1980): 202.

In summary, the pneumatological account of divine providence which has emerged in the present section provides a constructive hermeneutic of providence that is responsive to both the insights and the deficiencies of the trajectory of thought developed in the writings of Hegel, Barth, and Cone. First, understanding divine providence in terms of Christ's *presence* through the Spirit enables a Christological specification of divine action which prevents dangerous abstractions from taking hold of the doctrine and rendering it vulnerable to ideological colonization by providential visions of European humanity, Western civilization, and white racial supremacy: the particularity of the covenant with Israel and the incarnation of the Word of God as a Jewish human being provides the normative pattern for God's wider activity in history. Moreover, identifying providence as Christ's presence through the Spirit helpfully clarifies the relationship between God's general and special providence, reconciling providence's universal scope with God's discrete and particular action in history.

Second, affirming human *participation* in Christ's presence through attunement to that presence through the Spirit enables an account of the positive relationship between divine providence and human creatures that embraces creaturely existence instead of chaffing against it. The Spirit is not only the objective means by which Christ is present to creation, but also the subjective means by which humanity participates in that presence. This dynamic model of human participation in providence relates divine action and human agency non-competitively, enabling humans to exercise creaturely faculties of discernment and judgment regarding where the Spirit might be at work and how they might be called to participate.

Finally, this pneumatological account of providence reflects the Spirit's non-reducible particularity as a divine agent, suggesting that the formal framework of divine providence as the Spirit's two-fold work of presence and participation finds its true inner content in the way the Spirit relates to *bodies*, *community*, and *time*. Discernment of the Spirit's two-fold work in making Christ present to creation and enabling human participation in that presence must proceed in light of the Spirit's characteristic activities: the Spirit gives life to ordinary, overlooked, and oppressed material bodies; the Spirit engages in surprising acts of joining, creating intimacy and community between those who should be strangers and enemies; the Spirit anticipates—but does not inaugurate—the end. This formulation of the Spirit's particularity as a divine actor both prevents the Spirit from being reduced to an empty cipher for Jesus Christ and resonates deeply with womanist accounts of divine action that seek to deconstruct masculinist and androcentric projections of human agency onto divine agency.

5.3 Conclusion

This chapter has engaged in constructive reflection about God's ongoing relationship to humanity within the racial conditions of the modern world. This engagement has unfolded in three stages. First, comparison and analysis of the providential hermeneutics developed by Hegel, Barth, and Cone led to the formulation of a set of five conditions to govern contemporary reflections on providence. Reading the writings of Hegel, Barth, and Cone as a synthetic trajectory of debate and reflection led to the conclusion that a constructive hermeneutic of providence ought to foreground (1) Christology, (2) human creatureliness, and (3) pneumatology, while addressing the

unresolved problems of (4) the doctrine's problematic masculinity and (5) a competitive understanding of the relationship between Christ and the Spirit.

In the second part of the chapter, I developed a constructive account of the doctrine of providence in light of these five conditions. Providence names the Holy Spirit's two-fold work of making Christ present to creation between his ascension and *parousia* and enabling human participation in that presence. I then elaborated this account of the doctrine in terms of the formal conceptualities of presence and participation and the material content of the Spirit's unique relationship to bodies, "the Spirit gives life to ordinary, overlooked, and oppressed bodies," communities, "the Spirit creates surprising communion between those who would otherwise be strangers or enemies," and time, "the Spirit anticipates the end." In short, the present account of providence as presence and participation provides a hermeneutic of providence that is Christocentric, embraces creatureliness, and foregrounds the work of the Holy Spirit, while undercutting the persistent masculinity of the doctrine of providence and avoiding a competitive understanding of the relationship between Christ and the Spirit.

Conclusion

This study has explored the way in which different theological conceptions of God's relationship to history help to shape different visions of where and how God is at work in the midst of contemporary events in a racialized world. It has done this through three case studies, examining the relationships between (1) Hegel's conception of providence as a progressive teleology of divine incarnation *and* his theological justifications of European colonialism, African slavery, and the genocide of indigenous peoples in the Americas, (2) Barth's understanding of providence as the lordship of the God revealed in the covenant with Israel and the incarnation of Jesus Christ *and* his theological critique of the global pretensions of the emerging Western capitalist order, and finally (3) Cone's theology of Christ's liberating presence *and* his theological judgment that movements for black liberation represented direct manifestations of God's action in history.

Having—at times painstakingly—reconstructed these connections between theological doctrine and ethical judgment, the study has, in the previous chapter, outlined a constructive formulation of the doctrine of providence in response to an analysis of both the exemplary and problematic aspects of the accounts of Hegel, Barth, and Cone. My final task in this study is to trace the connections between theological doctrine and ethical judgment for a final time, suggesting how the constructive hermeneutic of providence articulated in the previous chapter might help to shape judgments about where, how, and in whom the Spirit is making Christ present in the historical and political moment in which we find ourselves.

However, such an endeavor must be heavily qualified in light of at least two possible misunderstandings of the nature of that task. First, it must be emphasized that different theologies of providence only *help to shape* different judgments about contemporary divine action. They do not *determine* such judgments. The latter, idealist misunderstanding wrongly construes Christian doctrine as a theoretical blueprint that can produce right judgment and action if only it can be perfectly formulated. On this account, all we need to do is to place the correct doctrine of providence at the heart of our ethical deliberations and right judgments will necessarily ensue. Such a picture of the relationship between doctrine and ethics could only ever be the thinnest caricature of the complex nature of moral agency, judgment, and action.

Second, it also needs to be said that the proper venue for discerning Christ's presence through the Spirit is not first and foremost in an academic dissertation composed by an individual, but rather in diverse communities of faith that have been shaped by certain types of practices, such as prayer, preaching, and protest—or, even more appropriately, groups of such communities gathered with those of different faiths and no faith. To attempt to discern the Spirit as an individual, apart from participation in wider communities and social practices, is an extremely risky enterprise at best, and a fool's errand at worst, as the limitations of structural location, experience, and a host of other factors—limitations that are exposed and addressed through relationships with others—will almost necessarily distort any one individual's perspective.[1]

[1] On this point see Luke Bretherton's accounts of listening as a political act and the mutual disciplining of church and *demos* in *Christianity and Contemporary Politics* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 71-125, 220 and *Resurrecting Democracy*, 76-110.

The following experimental reflections are, therefore, necessarily incomplete and inadequate. Against the idealist misunderstanding, they are not presented as the only possible judgments that can result from the particular doctrinal formulation that I have articulated in this study, as though doctrine necessarily and mechanistically determines judgment. This dissertation is not a "how-to" manual for discerning Christ's presence. Against the individualist misunderstanding, they are not intended as authoritative or universal judgments offered by a properly qualified and objective academician. While on the one hand, they are always and already made possible only by my participation in wider communities and practices, they are, on the other hand, certain to reflect my own limitations of structural location and experience in ways that I am sure I am not yet capable of identifying. The following reflections are offered as the necessarily limited and inadequate judgments of one particular person at one particular time and place, in the knowledge that both the insights and the shortcomings of such judgments will prove instructive to others. My purpose is broadly to demonstrate how the account of divine providence developed in the previous chapter might contribute to certain types of judgments about how and where God is active in one particular time and place within the ongoing racial drama that is the modern world: Durham, NC in the second decade of the twenty-first century.

6.1 A City in the "Post-Racial South"? Contemporary Racial Politics in Durham, NC

On October 4, 1971, seventy politicians, business leaders, and academics from across the South gathered in Durham, NC for a summit convened by Duke University and the Research Triangle Institute to prepare for the emergence of a new era of economic

and political life in the region: the "Post-Racial South."[2] This characterization of the South as "post-racial," a term coined—apparently for the first time—by Duke University president and former North Carolina Governor Terry Sanford, reflected the belief of those gathered that "race relations are soon to be replaced as a major concern by population increase, industrial development and economic fluctuations."[3] Those in attendance—including future president of the United States Jimmy Carter—oversaw the formation of The Southern Growth Policies Board, whose mission would be to manage and facilitate the transition of the Southern economy into this highly anticipated period of mutually entwined racial harmony and economic growth and expansion. Under the banner of the "Post-Racial South," Sanford, Carter, and others aspired to develop a new vision of Southern politics that, as Roopali Mukherjee has suggested, "urged a departure from the ideological structures of white supremacy, and prioritized modernization, development and securing capitalist expansion as essential to race reform."[4] Yet Durham, NC is more than just the birthplace of this conceptuality of the "post-racial," understood as a "centrist paradigm of racial assimilation organized primarily around economic revitalization."[5] It has also served as its proving ground.

While articulated as early as 1971, this "post-racial" vision of racial assimilation through economic development has, since the turn of the twenty-first century, taken hold as the governing economic and political paradigm in the city of Durham. Beginning in 2000, public and private investments totaling more than $1.2 billion have poured into

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[2] James T. Wooten, "Compact Set Up for 'Post-Racial' South," *New York Times*, October 5, 1971.
[3] Ibid., 1.
[4] Roopali Mukherjee, "Antiracism Limited," *Cultural Studies* 30 no. 1 (2016): 54.
[5] Ibid., 54.

downtown Durham, facilitated in large part by the 501(c)6 organization Downtown Durham, Inc. which was founded in 1993 to oversee the city's revitalization efforts.[6] In 2017, Durham—a city once popularly associated with urban blight and violence—now appears on *Forbes* magazine's list of the top ten "Best Places for Business and Careers" in the United States and can claim the distinction of being the "South's Tastiest Town" according to *Southern Living* magazine.[7] Indeed, there is a strong case to be made that Terry Sanford's "New South" vision of economic growth and development has largely been realized in the city. However, Sanford's prophecy that such growth would result in increasing racial equality and assimilation has not come to pass.

Durham's economic revitalization, far from inaugurating an age of racial equity, has instead created an affordable housing crisis in historically black, working-class neighborhoods throughout the city that has drawn national media attention.[8] Indeed, these neighborhoods have experienced the much-lauded wave of economic "resurgence" as a tsunami of gentrification, a ferocious riptide that has torn families from their homes and destroyed tight knit communities that have existed for generations. The return of economic investment and the elevation of Durham's cultural profile have come at a tremendous cost to working-class people of color and their communities. Neighborhoods that for decades were seen by outsiders as undesirable hotbeds of violence, decay, and

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[6] Melissa Norton, "Downtown Durham Investment" (oral presentation, Durham C.A.N. Affordable Housing Tour, Durham, NC, January 30, 2016). Norton's timely and significant research on development and gentrification in Durham can be accessed online at https://youtu.be/2u66urIaYS4.
[7] Jason deBruyn, "Forbes: Raleigh, Durham rank among top 10 cities for business and careers," *Triangle Business Journal*, August 8, 2013, http://www.bizjournals.com/triangle/blog/2013/08/forbes-raleigh-durham-rank-among-top.html; Paula Disbrowe, "The South's Tastiest Town: Durham, NC," *Southern Living*, January 18, 2013, http://www.southernliving.com/travel/tastiest-town-durham-north-carolina.
[8] See, for example, Gillian B. White, "The Downside of Durham's Rebirth," *The Atlantic*, March 31, 2016, https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2016/03/the-downside-of-durhams-rebirth/476277/.

urban blight have witnessed a meteoric rise in housing prices as they have—almost overnight—found themselves transformed into much sought after locales perched on the doorstep of a resurgent metropolitan center.[9] Durham, once home to one of the first self-sufficient African-American communities in the South after the Civil War—which had its own schools, library, hotels, hospital, and college alongside thriving businesses and banks—is becoming "whiter, richer, and pricier" with each passing day.[10] Observing this phenomenon, it is hard to deny the truth of James Baldwin's famous assessment: "Urban renewal … means Negro removal."[11] At least as far as the city of Durham is concerned, Terry Sanford's vision of a "Post-Racial South" has proven itself to be more of a fanciful projection than a prophecy.

Furthermore, while Sanford and his colleagues were far too sanguine about the power of economic growth to accomplish racial equality, they were equally mistaken in their belief that they stood on the brink of a southern political future marked by the rejection of the ideology of white supremacy and an end to racial discrimination. In the

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[9] Melissa Norton, "Gentrification and Human Rights in Durham" (oral presentation, Duke Franklin Humanities Institute, Duke University, Durham, NC, September 30, 2015). According to Norton's research, in the Walltown neighborhood, the cost of a 1,500 square foot single family home has risen from $107,000 in 2005 to $230,000 in 2015. In the highly coveted Cleveland-Holloway neighborhood, the cost of the same 1,500 square foot home has risen from $40,000 to $236,000 in the same stretch of time, a 490% increase in just ten years.

[10] White, "The Downside of Durham's Rebirth," 2. In a reflection written in 1912 during a visit to Durham, W.E.B. Du Bois lauded a city in which, "A black man may get up in the morning from a mattress made by black men, in a house which a black man built out of lumber which black men cut and planed; he may put on a suit which he bought at a colored haberdashery and socks knit at a colored mill; he may cook victuals from a colored grocery on a stove which black men fashioned; he may earn his living working for colored men, be sick in a colored hospital, and buried from a colored church; and the Negro insurance society will pay his widow enough to keep his children in a colored school." See W.E.B. Du Bois, "The Upbuilding of Black Durham: The Success of the Negroes and Their Value to a Tolerant and Helpful Southern City," in *World's Work* 23 (1912): 338, via the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's *Documenting the American South* archive: http://docsouth.unc.edu/nc/dubois/dubois.html.

[11] James Baldwin, interview by Dr. Kenneth Clark, *WGBH*, May 24, 1963.

second decade of the twenty-first century, Durham has endured a resurgence, not only in economic growth, but also in thinly veiled white supremacist politics and racially discriminatory legislation in the North Carolina General Assembly. Following the Supreme Court's January 2010 decision in Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission, which removed limits on corporate campaign contributions, Republicans—propelled in no small part by the very contributions made possible by Citizens United—won majorities in both the state Senate and House of Representatives.[12]

Firmly in control of the General Assembly's redistricting process following the 2010 Census, Republicans redrew the state's legislative maps in 2011 to consolidate their power, in no small part by weakening the power of black voters by packing them into a handful of districts and widely scattering them over the rest.[13] The General Assembly's redistricting labor bore electoral fruits the following year, as Republicans running in the new districts won veto-proof supermajorities in both chambers of the Assembly. Every elected member of the Republican Party in both chambers was white.[14]

Following the 2012 elections, the all-white Republican delegation began implementing a whole body of legislation that either had disproportionately negative effects on people of color or, in some cases, was found to be intentionally racially discriminatory. The NCGA cut federal unemployment benefits for 170,000 North

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[12] Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission, 558 U.S. 310 (2010).
[13] Vann R. Newkirk II, "North Carolina's General Assembly Districts Are Unconstitutional Gerrymanders, Too," *The Atlantic*, June 5, 2017, https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/06/north-carolinas-general-assembly-districts-are-unconstitutional-gerrymanders-too/529212/. Federal courts have since ruled that two federal congressional seats, nine state senate seats, and nineteen state house seats drawn up in the 2011 redistricting process are unconstitutional racial gerrymanders.
[14] Pat McCrory's victory in the gubernatorial race only further cemented Republican control of the state government.

Carolinians. Legislators passed a bill banning the expansion of Medicaid to 500,000 eligible residents. They also repealed the Racial Justice Act, which had given inmates on death row the right to appeal their sentence on the grounds of racial bias in their sentencing.[15]

Most importantly, the General Assembly enacted legislation to suppress the votes of people of color following the Supreme Court decision in Shelby County v. Holder, which invalidated key provisions of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 that required certain states with a history of discrimination—including North Carolina—to receive preclearance from the federal government before altering their election laws. HB 589 implemented strict photo ID requirements, cut early voting periods, eliminated same day registration during early voting, and invalidated provisional ballots cast out of precinct—all of which disproportionately affected African-American voters. In 2016 the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals struck down HB 589, finding that the central provisions of the bill "were enacted with racially discriminatory intent" and targeted "African-Americans with almost surgical precision."[16] This summary of legislative activity represents only the worst aspects of the first year of the General Assembly's thinly veiled assault on people of color that began in 2013. In the twenty-first century, Durham, NC has not realized the Southern Growth Policies Board "post-racial" dream. Instead, it has found itself in a

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[15] For further analysis of the General Assembly's legislative activity, see William J. Barber II, with Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, *The Third Reconstruction: Moral Mondays, Fusion Politics, and the Rise of a New Justice Movement* (Boston, Beacon Press: 2016), 55-98.

[16] Michael Wines and Alan Blinder, "Federal Appeals Court Strikes Down North Carolina Voter ID Requirement," *The New York Times*, July 29, 2016. In the decision, the judges found that "before enacting that law, the legislature requested data on the use, by race, of a number of voting practices. Upon receipt of the race data, the General Assembly enacted legislation that restricted voting and registration in five different ways, all of which disproportionately affected African Americans."

racial nightmare marked by privately and publicly sponsored gentrification at the local level and thinly veiled white supremacist politics at the state level. Where could the Spirit possibly be making Christ present in the midst of all this?

6.2 Where is the Spirit Making Jesus Christ Present for Us Today?

If the Holy Spirit makes Christ present to creation between His ascension and *parousia*, and if the Holy Spirit enables human participation in this presence during that time, then where, how, and in whom is the Holy Spirit carrying out this two-fold work in Durham, NC in the particular period of time between ascension and *parousia* that is the second decade of the twenty-first century? Such a question can only be answered with any great confidence—at least by human creatures—from the perspective of the end of time. Nevertheless, humanity is called even in the present to engage in the work of discerning, judging, and acting in response to what the Spirit is doing to reveal and to enflesh in creation what God has already accomplished in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. This calling is what Cone identifies as "the risk of faith."[17] The riskiness of the endeavor cannot be overlooked or minimized. As Barth suggests, the Christian who participates in divine providence will be "always rightly astonished by events, by the encounters and experiences which overtake him … constantly forced to begin afresh, wrestling with the possibilities which open out to him and the impossibilities which oppose him."[18] Yet it is a necessary risk for those who would believe Jesus' promise to the disciples in John 16: "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak

[17] *BTL*, 7.
[18] *CD* III/3, 243.

on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come."[19] Following Jesus requires the work of discerning the Spirit, attempting to "recognize the Spirit of God" who "acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh."[20]

On the account developed in this study, discerning the Spirit partially entails asking how, where, and in whom the Spirit is making Christ present to creation and enabling human participation in that presence by giving life to ordinary, overlooked, and oppressed bodies, creating surprising communities marked by boundary-breaking intimacy, and anticipating the end of all things in Jesus Christ. Because Christ's presence through the Spirit is at once universal in scope and variegated in intensity, discerning this presence does not require that one identifies a pure, uncompromised, undiluted manifestation of Christ's presence in human actions. Perfect attunement awaits the eschaton. Conversely, to be totally unattuned to the source of our existence is to cease to exist. Discerning the Spirit therefore requires making contingent judgments about how particular human initiatives at particular times and places reflect a *relative* attunement to the Spirit, such that the Spirit is at work both "through" and "in spite of" those initiatives in all their finitude and propensity for brokenness. In what follows, I offer just a sketch of what such judgments might look like in relationship to human initiatives in Durham, NC to shelter the homeless, engage in broad-based community organizing, and pursue a mass mobilization of citizens around a vision of fusion politics. Such a sketch is representative,

[19] John 16:13.
[20] 1 John 4.

not exhaustive; meant to inspire further imaginings, not prematurely foreclose them with a final verdict.

6.2.1 Interfaith Hospitality Network: Providing Shelter for Families

The sun had not yet begun to set as volunteers from an area congregation arrived at another local church that had been transformed into temporary housing for several families who were in need of shelter. That night, and every night that week, the volunteers would prepare and share meals together with these families, playing board games, sharing conversation, and spending the night in the church. The following week, it would be another congregation's turn to host, and a new set of volunteers would help to provide these families with food, fellowship, and a safe place to sleep at night.

This is the work of Durham Interfaith Hospitality Network, which partners with more than twenty congregations in Durham to provide temporary shelter for homeless families at night and to help these families pursue long-term stability through case management services.[21] Each week one congregation opens its doors every evening, while another provides transportation, food, and community for the families. During the day, the staff at Interfaith Hospitality Network work with families to achieve their goals of stable housing and finances, providing everything from aid in finding jobs, to medical care and childcare. The goal of IHN's work is to help families move into stable housing and procure the resources necessary to maintain their housing for the long term.

[21] In 2016, Durham Interfaith Hospitality Network merged with Genesis Home to become Families Moving Forward and began housing families in their own facility instead of in local churches. This new organizational model enables them to serve more families. My analysis focuses on the more than two decades of services provided by DIHN prior to the merger.

In the second decade of the twenty-first century, the Holy Spirit is making Christ present in Durham through the work of Interfaith Hospitality Network. The Spirit is giving life to ordinary, overlooked, and oppressed bodies. Families who have lost their housing are finding shelter, hospitality, and support that aims to help them lift themselves out of the insecurity and vulnerability of homelessness.

The Spirit is creating surprising communities, drawing together those who would otherwise be strangers. Through participating in IHN, homeless families and families with homes are drawn into a supportive community, as volunteers from area congregations cook, play, and share shelter together with the homeless families whom they are serving. People who would otherwise only ever see each other through a car window find themselves engaged in the intimate acts of eating, talking, and sleeping in shared spaces.

Finally, the Spirit is anticipating the end, working to realize the fullness of life that awaits humanity through the end of all things in Jesus Christ, even in the midst of — and in spite of—the finitude and brokenness that marks all human endeavors in the *saeculum*. The endeavors of Interfaith Hospitality Network will not end homelessness in Durham anytime soon. IHN's work does not attempt to address the long term societal roots of homelessness, focusing instead on aiding those who are in immediate need of assistance. The organization must also try to address the considerable needs of families while having to work within the confines of limited financial resources, which are dependent upon the capricious sources of government funding and charitable contributions. Volunteers come from churches with a wide variety of ideological

leanings—some of the same people who share food and conversation with the families of IHN would likely support public policies that would render those families lives more precarious. Yet the Spirit is still at work, through and in spite of these things, giving life to bodies and building communities.

6.2.2 Durham Congregations, Associations, and Neighborhoods: Campaigning for Affordable Housing

On a humid afternoon in July, several hundred residents of Durham gathered just off Fayetteville Street for a political action staged by Durham Congregations, Associations, and Neighborhoods (C.A.N.). Durham C.A.N. is a broad-based community organization affiliated with the Industrial Areas Foundation, the oldest and largest network of community organizations in the United States. On that Wednesday in July, C.A.N. had called a press conference at Fayette Place—popularly known as the Fayetteville Street projects—an abandoned public housing project developed by the Durham Housing Authority in 1967. C.A.N. had chosen Fayette Place as a key battleground on which the thirty local institutions that comprised its membership would seek to stem the tide of gentrification that was rolling through downtown neighborhoods. Long neglected, Fayette Place had suddenly become a site of much interest to local real estate developers, businesses, and universities, all of whom saw in Fayette Place a chance to secure a property with a large footprint in close proximity to downtown at a bargain price. Leaders from C.A.N. had been organizing neighborhood residents over the past several months and the press conference served as the venue for those residents to announce their intention to have a say in the future of their neighborhood.

Durham C.A.N. draws its affiliation, as well as its organizing philosophy, from the Industrial Areas Foundation founded by Saul Alinsky in Chicago in 1940. Influenced by traditions of populism, Judaism, the labor movement, and Christianity, broad-based community organizing emerged as a mode of democratic politics that drew power from local, concrete social relationships to address the conditions of life in industrialized urban centers.[22] As Luke Bretherton argues, Alinsky developed an approach to organizing that was "non-statist, decentralized, and pluralist," intended "to stimulate the appearance of those who are de-politicized or excluded from the decision making process, enabling them to appear and act on their own terms rather than be confined to either a private world of consumerism … or a disorganized arena of hostile, fearful, and broken relationships."[23] Broad-based community organizing seeks to enable ordinary people to resist the domination of state and market forces by building the power necessary to have a say in what happens to themselves and their communities.

As a broad-based community organization affiliated with the I.A.F., Durham C.A.N. seeks to develop leaders and build relationships between local institutions in order to aid low and moderate-income citizens of Durham in building the power that they require to address the problems that hamper survival and quality of life in their communities. C.A.N. organizes across religious, racial, ethnic, and class lines to develop shared democratic power that takes religious and racial differences seriously, while

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[22] Bretherton, *Resurrecting Democracy*, 21-56. For further background on Alinsky and the origins and background of the Industrial Areas Foundation, see Sanford D. Horwitt, *Let Them Call Me Rebel: Saul Alinsky—His Life and Legacy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989); Robert A. Slayton, *Back of the Yards: The Making of a Local Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986); Neil Betten and Michael J. Austin, *The Roots of Community Organizing, 1917-1939* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990).
[23] Bretherton, *Resurrecting Democracy*, 38, 45.

discerning the possibilities for realizing a common world of meaning and action that remains rooted in the genuine interests of its various members. Durham C.A.N.'s affordable housing campaign grew out of a citywide listening session in which ordinary people met in sanctuaries, offices, and homes throughout the city to listen to each other's stories and find common interests and shared desires for change. When affordable housing surfaced from these listening sessions as a priority, C.A.N. did not call in a housing expert to tell its leaders how to fix the problem, nor did it simply place a phone call to elected officials asking them to fix the problem. Rather, it engaged the very people whose neighborhoods were being affected by gentrification to lead the work of researching the problem and developing a strategy to address it. More than increasing the supply of affordable housing, the central goal of C.A.N.'s housing campaign is to identify and develop local leaders and build strong relationships between local institutions in order to help ordinary people resist the domination of their lives by state and market forces. If C.A.N. is successful, the residents of the neighborhood—rather than local government officials or the predatory impulses of the city's real estate market—will determine the future of Fayette Place.

The Spirit is making Christ present to creation and enabling human participation in that presence as men and women of color in low-income and working-class black neighborhoods—along with their allies—work to stem the tide of gentrification surging through downtown Durham. The Spirit is giving life to ordinary, overlooked, and oppressed bodies in these neighborhoods, as residents realize their own leadership abilities and stand together to prevent the displacement of their families and their

communities and demand to share in the benefits of the city's economic revitalization. The Spirit is creating community amongst those that the world says should be kept apart, as cross-class and cross-racial solidarities are developed through face-to-face relational meetings, testimonies, storytelling, and collective social action. Where the market would prefer a citizenry that is disorganized and isolated from one another—and therefore easily malleable—some residents of Durham are finding renewed power in listening to one another and standing together against injustice. In all this, the Spirit is anticipating the end, without thereby accomplishing it. The leaders and institutions of Durham C.A.N. continue to struggle with unjust modes of relationship across religious, racial, gender, and class lines. C.A.N.'s work is fragile and faltering, attempting to build a common life amongst the citizens of Durham, even as those attempts continue to be undermined by enduring injustices in the relationships of its members to one another and as C.A.N.'s radically democratic vision remains perpetually vulnerable to deteriorate into a middle-class respectability politics. Nevertheless, the Spirit continues to bring life to bodies targeted for displacement and to build community amongst those who would otherwise be strangers or enemies.

6.2.3 The North Carolina NAACP: Pursuing Fusion Politics

On a cold, overcast Saturday morning in February 2014, participants in North Carolina's Moral Movement gathered in front of Shaw University—the birthplace of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)—for a mass march to the North Carolina State Capitol building. The marchers—as many as 80,000 strong—represented the diverse constituencies of the Historic Thousands on Jones Street (HKonJ), a coalition

of the North Carolina NAACP and its partners founded by the Rev. Dr. William J. Barber II. The march was the capstone to a campaign of civil disobedience at the North Carolina General Assembly the previous summer, in which almost a thousand people were arrested for instructing their representatives on the immorality of their legislative agenda. This interfaith, multiracial "fusion" coalition sought to amplify the voices of those most affected by the General Assembly's unjust legislation and build political power across partisan, religious, racial, and class lines based upon a commitment to a common moral framework. When the tens of thousands of marchers reached the State Capitol building, Rev. Barber offered an address that drew equally on the Bible and the U.S. Constitution to cast a new vision for democratic politics in the South.[24]

The Moral Movement founded by the NAACP and its partners self-consciously locates its own identity in relationship to both the Civil Rights tradition of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and the multiracial "fusion" populism of the post-Reconstruction South. The rhetoric, aesthetics, and tactics of the movement draw upon King's SCLC. Evoking SCLC's mission to "save the soul of America," Barber invokes the moral more often than he does the political, framing the movement's work as a recovery of the United States' deepest values—a "moral defibrillator" to revive the heart of the nation.[25] The religious aesthetics of the movement also hearken back to King, as Christian, Jewish, and Muslim clergy dressed in full clerical attire feature prominently in the movement's public actions and press

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[24] Barber, *The Third Reconstruction*, 108.
[25] David J. Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference* (New York: William Morrow, 1986), 160, 671.

conferences.[26] Finally, the movement invokes the memory of SCLC's Civil Rights campaigns in its organizational strategy, pairing mass mobilization with strategic engagement in calculated acts of nonviolent civil obedience.[27]

Movement leaders also regularly invoke North Carolina's history of interracial "fusion" politics, an alliance between white populists and black Republicans that briefly came to power in North Carolina at the end of the nineteenth century, until white supremacist Democrats staged a race riot in Wilmington in 1898.[28] Rev. Barber regularly positions the movement as a reemergence of this tradition of multiracial, democratic coalition building.[29] By building the movement's priorities around the stories of ordinary people who are being negatively affected by the politics of the General Assembly, Barber seeks to unite groups that would otherwise be split by ideological or partisan divisions: "We had said from the beginning that our agenda wasn't Republican or Democrat, liberal or conservative. We weren't advocating for left or right, but for all that is good *and* right. We had studied our history. We knew that fusion politics was central to our state's history."[30] The Moral Movement's reappropriation of Civil Rights activism and fusion populism seeks to mobilize large numbers of ordinary North Carolinians around an

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[26] For an interpretation of the Civil Rights movement as primarily a religious event, see David L. Chappell *A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 87-104.
[27] Adam Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America: The Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1987), 85-142; Thomas R. Peake, *Keeping the Dream Alive: A History of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference from King to the Nineteen-Eighties* (New York: Peter Lang, 1987), 65-96.
[28] Omar H. Ali, *In the Lion's Mouth: Black Populism in the New South, 1886-1900* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2010), 135-144; Lawrence Goodwyn, *The Populist Movement: A Short History of the Agrarian Revolt in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 199, 285
[29] Barber, *The Third Reconstruction*, 7, 52-53, 56-57, 62.
[30] Ibid., 52.

appeal to a basic moral vision derived from the Bible and the U.S. Constitution in order to witness to an alternative to the thinly veiled white supremacism on display in the North Carolina General Assembly's governing agenda.

The Holy Spirit is making Christ present to creation in the second decade of the twenty-first century in North Carolina's Moral Movement. Through the Spirit, Jesus is giving life to ordinary, overlooked, and oppressed bodies. Attention to these bodies forms the foundation of the movement. Neither a partisan agenda nor an ideological framework—whether progressive or conservative—determines the movement's priorities. Rather, the movement has emerged as a response to the cries of ordinary people whose bodily existence has been rendered precarious by the General Assembly's actions: people who cannot afford cancer treatments because they have been denied Medicaid expansion; people whose children are hungry because they have lost their unemployment benefits; people on death row who have lost their right to contest racial bias in their sentencing. The movement had indicted the General Assembly, not for being conservative or Republican, but for its cynical refusal to see the suffering bodies of those being affected by its policies. Around these bodies, the Spirit is creating a surprising community. In the movement, the Spirit has drawn together a peculiar group of people. Movement leaders have sought to develop a movement that can include conservatives and liberals, young and old people, Christians, Jews, and Muslims, people of different faiths, people of no faith, members of the LGBTQ community, and white, black, Latinx and Asian people.[31] People who might otherwise have very little reason for being in

[31] Ibid., 88.

relationship are being transformed by the Spirit's surprising gifts of unexpected friendship and are responding by seeking similar transformations in their friends, neighbors, and even those who would be their enemies.

The Spirit is doing all this as an anticipation of the end and, therefore, only ever fleetingly and falteringly. Christ's presence through the Spirit is not a property or possession of the Moral Movement. It is itself a surprising gift, always appearing when least expected and never allowing itself to be captured or controlled. Because the Spirit anticipates the end without realizing it, the Spirit is not only making Christ present to creation *through* the movement, but also *in spite of* it. The Spirit is at work in spite of the tendency of movement leaders to embrace a questionable fusion of Abrahamic faith and American civil religion, inscribing their work within a trajectory that holds up both Scripture and the Constitution as sacred texts. The Spirit is at work in spite of efforts by the media and outside interest groups to flatten out the complexity and the radically democratic elements of the movement in order to assimilate the movement into the progressive mainstream. Because the Spirit anticipates the end, Christ's presence to creation may be glimpsed in one moment and obscured in the next.

Attempting to discern the Spirit in this way is risky, contingent, and fragile work. Yet it is necessary. Durham Interfaith Hospitality Network, Durham C.A.N., and the North Carolina NAACP represent three particular sites of human activity *through* and *in spite of* which the Spirit continues to make Christ present to creation in North Carolina as She joins together those who ought not otherwise be together in order to give life to

ordinary, overlooked, and oppressed bodies in anticipation of the end of all things in Jesus Christ.

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