Barth and Habermas on the Changing Role of Religion in a Postnational Constellation

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Currently, religion and globalization seem to be working towards opposite ends. As Mark Juergensmeyer, author of Religion in Global Civil Society, *has noted, while religiously invoked terrorism fragments society, the Internet, cell phones and the media industry foster the formation of an increasingly global social fabric. But religion is not a single faceted phenomenon. As much as there are prophets of violence such as the Abu Sayyaf leaders, there are prophets of peace and reconciliation. This paper shall thus delve on how a civil society might be configured in relation to the inherent ambiguity surrounding religious traditions, and how might Christian traditions make a positive contribution to this context. To answer these questions I will articulate a dialogue between Jürgen Habermas' theory of civil society and the politico-ethical theology of Karl Barth.*

Introduction

Religion continues to survive if not thrive amidst our increasingly global cosmopolitan societies. This phenomenon stands in the face of the predictions of secularists like Karl Marx and Émile Durkheim who argued that religion would dissipate as western culture continued to progress.[1] What is increasingly recognized by political theorists today is that these critiques of religion in the

1. For Marx, religious opiates, like heroin addictions, would be marginalized once society had alleviated the social problems which lead people to enact such habits of escape. Karl Marx, "Introduction," *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, ed. Joseph O'Malley, trans. Annette Jolin and Joseph O'Malley (Cambridge:

public and political spheres are outmoded by current reality. On the one hand, religion and globalization seem to be working towards opposite ends. Whereas religiously invoked terrorism continues to violently fragment society, "the technology of the Internet, film, television, cell phones, and other forms of rapid universal communication seems to be knitting the world into a single social fabric."[2] But this is not the whole story. Social and political theorists also recognize the importance of encouraging the kinds of social cohesion religious communities can foster and highlighting their necessity for civic engagement–the civil rights movement in the United States concerning widespread segregation and discrimination against African Americans being a classic example. Religion is therefore not a single faceted phenomenon that can be reductively dismissed, and the political role of religious traditions remains difficult to discern. Far from hoping that religion will simply disappear, however, a key may be to recognize that "the cure for religious violence may ultimately lie in a renewed appreciation for religion itself."[3]

In terms of the Protestant Christian tradition, Karl Barth's theology may be crucial towards this renewed appreciation for, as recent literatures continue to evince, Barth's theology is deeply political in its orientation. This aspect of his thought creates a point of contact with the need for religious traditions to reflect upon their role in civil society. Barth's theology can help us understand how important the reconciling act of a human God is for Christian participation in a public sphere which resists state coercion and global economic marginalization. In order to relate Barth's thought to current political theory, however, I would like to suggest that a dialogue with Jürgen Habermas can prove fruitful. Habermas offers a much more acutely worked-out explication of current political problematics than Barth. Having said that, when it comes to the role of religious traditions in

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Cambridge University Press, 1970), http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/critique-hpr/intro.htm (accessed February 9, 2009). For Durkheim, although religion's abstract conceptualizations provided the basis for valuable social cohesion, religion would eventually be left behind in favor of civil sensibilities informed by a scientific worldview. Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Karen E. Field (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 444ff.

2. Mark Juergensmeyer, ed., *Religion in Global Civil Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 3.

3. *Ibid*., 243.

Habermas' thought it will become evident how much he depends on religious traditions' own politically informed theological reflection. By setting Barth and Habermas in conversation, therefore, we can articulate more clearly two interdependent purposes for Christian traditions amidst global civil society today: first, to foster robust critically debating social solidarity structures, and second, to continually question universal claims of the state and in so doing hold out the possibility of hope for a better politics in the future.

Habermas' Structural Understanding of the Public Sphere

If there is a word to sum up the nature of Habermas' thought it would be structural. He is forever envisioning spheres of sociality which interact and impress upon each other. In many ways, this aspect of his thinking can be traced to one of his early publications, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Here he discusses, in detailed socio-historical fashion,[4] the transformation of the bourgeois public sphere as the key moment in the formation of the democratic welfare state.[5] It was as white land-owning business men congregated in coffee houses and deliberated about governance and business that the democratic welfare state came into being. Debating led to newspapers covering and publishing what was being discussed. Through this deliberative process decisions were made, and these decisions led to delegation to state authority which led to taxes and the legitimate enforcement of law and the procurement of basic civil rights and privileges – the right to education, health care, etc. Voting and representative government was therefore critically responding to and resisting state coercion upon private individuals which the members of the public sphere considered themselves to be. This bourgeois sphere spoke on behalf of everyone in society, but they did so in a manner distinct from that private realm. Habermas

4. Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger, with the assistance of Frederick Lawrence, *Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought* (Cambridge: Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1991), xi.

5. *Ibid*., 17ff.

posited that the modern state presupposes as the principle of its own truth the sovereignty of the people, and this in turn is supposed to be public opinion. Without this attribution, without the substitution of public opinion as the origin of all authority for decisions binding the whole, modern democracy lacks the substance of its own truth.

As time passed, a process of erosion ensued whereby the critically debating sphere was corrupted as the media (i.e. newspapers, culture and the arts) began to dominate public life relegating the public sphere of debate into the background. The culture of critical debate became a culture consuming public.[6] Culture became a commodity to be consumed as information was increasingly read, watched and downloaded, but rarely discussed. The state in turn could use this media to directly advertise to its various constituencies. Some contemporary examples might be recognized: "vote for yes to charter change," or vote for this candidate or that candidate, as a political debating public sphere has degenerated into the banal categorizations.

Habermas' articulation of the public sphere of debate ultimately ties him to the belief that we cannot speak of democracy as simply private interests or private autonomy. We must also embrace "the public use of reason."[7] As he succinctly puts it in *The Postnational Constellation*, "The democratic procedure no longer draws its legitimizing force only, indeed not even predominantly, from political participation and the expression of political will, but rather from the general accessibility of a deliberative process whose structure grounds an expectation of rationally acceptable results."[8] In other words, Habermas is not going to attempt to reinvigorate the modern nation-state by encouraging mass "American Idol" style voting. It is quite the opposite since he does not just want people to vote; he wants to

6. Though never explicitly stated in the text, Habermas is clearly indebted to the Frankfurt School's critique of mass culture. Compare, for instance, Theodor W. Adorno, *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, ed. J. M. Bernstein (London: Routledge, 1991).

7. Jürgen Habermas, *The Postnational Constellation: Political Essays*, trans. and ed. Max Pensky (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), 110. See also Jürgen Habermas, *The Inclusion of the Other: Studies in Political Theory*, eds. Ciaran Cronin and Pablo De Greiff (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998), 239-52.

8. Habermas, *The Postnational Constellation*, 110. See also, Habermas, *The Inclusion of the Other*, 239-52.

ensure that the voter base is critically engaged and rationally thinking through the decisions it makes. He believes that the autonomy of the voter base is crucial to democratic legitimacy. In order to ensure the autonomy of private individuals, he envisions a sphere of public debate whereby individuals congregate in communal groups to argue out their ideas. These groups then bring their ideas, beliefs and values to a broader political sphere of public debate.

TRANSCENDENCE AS A CONDITION FOR SOLIDARITY

In Fig. 1 below, a critically debating public sphere is made up of a diverse group of social solidarities. This is not Habermas' language, but I am calling them this in order to emphasize the importance of solidarity in his thought. This is more or less how he conceives of the ideal nation-state. State authority is legitimated by a critically engaged voter base which is protected from direct coercion by the sphere of public authority and mass media.

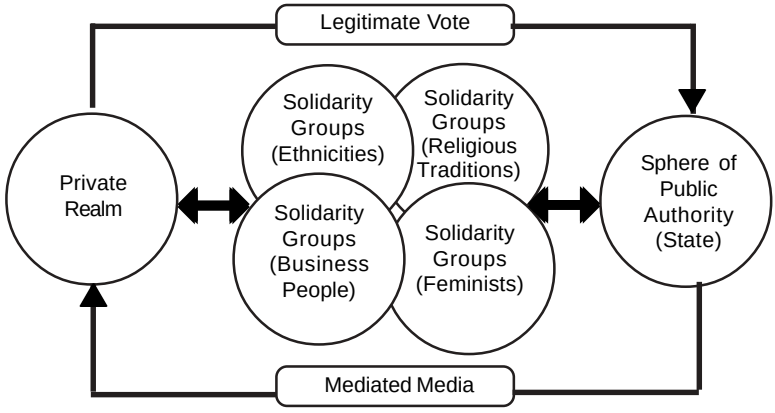

Figure 1.

What is important to note is that the structural nature of Habermas' thinking requires a number of levels of solidarity. For instance, when we ask what is the basis upon which people from various dispositions come together to argue out their differences in a public sphere? Or, why should we suppose diverse cultures and nations can coordinate a series of cosmopolitan associations?

Habermas responds through a series of arguments developing solidarity in terms of rational communicative procedures,[9] constitutional allegiances, "the consciousness of a compulsory cosmopolitan solidarity"[10] and even as "methodical atheism"[11] in conversation with theologians. Furthermore, it is as we unpack Habermas' understanding of solidarity that we will come to see a critically engaged point of connection with Barth's theology. The key to understanding Habermas' arguments for solidarity is to recognize that they all, to one degree or another, depend on a universal condition. The reason people can come together is because there is an intersubjective transcendental basis which cuts through ethnic, economic, or cultural-linguistic differences. Detranscendentalization is his term for this, and it becomes the condition for the possibility of his notion of solidarity.[12] Once we recognize this approach, it then becomes clear how his thought functions like a fractal. No matter how broad or deep you look at his approach, the same basic strategy is at work.

In Habermas' essay, "From Kant to Hegel and Back Again," he develops more precisely what he means by detranscendentalization. Here he articulates the problem with Kantian transcendentalism in

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9. When he argues for the legitimation processes necessary for a democracy to function, he "aims at a new balance between the forces of societal integration so that the social-integrative power of solidarity – the 'communicative force of production'– can prevail over the powers of the other two control resources, i.e., money and administrative power." Jürgen Habermas, "Further Reflections on the Public Sphere," trans. Thomas Burger, in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 444.

10. Habermas, *The Postnational Constellation*, 112.

11. Jürgen Habermas, "Transcendence from Within, Transcendence in This World," trans. Eric Crump and Peter P. Kenny, in *Habermas, Modernity, and Public Theology*, eds. Francis Schussler Fiorenza and Don S. Browning (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 235.

12. *Detranscendentalization* is a negation of Kantian *transcendental* philosophy, which is concerned not directly with objects but with the a priori conditions which provide for the possibility of empirically cognizing objects. For Kant, the objectivity of our knowledge is secure because these conditions are universal and necessary. Peirce, the thinker who Habermas most closely follows on this issue, enacts a detranscendentalization of these conditions by tracing them back to our capacity to use signs. In undertaking a general critique of the Cartesian assumptions that underlie modern epistemology, Peirce formulates a semiotic theory of mind in

terms of its mentalist conception of subject-object relations. He believes Kant's mentalism kept him from realizing the way in which subjects are always already interrelated with their objects. In his words, "the mentalist concept of a bounded, self-contained subjectivity . . . is that conception from which all the oppositions I have mentioned derive: inside vs. outside, private vs. public, immediate vs. mediate, and self-evident vs. fallible."[13] In response to this problematic, he draws upon Hegel's recognition of the inherent inter-relationality between subjects and objects, and how the subject is always caught up in the world of objects in an intersubjective way.[14] Hegel therefore moves beyond abstract transcendental philosophy, but importantly also resists a reduction to historicism as well. He does this by demonstrating how situated reason is part of a larger learning process. Hegel's inter-subjectivity includes a process of absolutized growth. He argues that this absolutizing reflects back into a Kantian transcendentalism of what he calls detranscendentalization. Thus, Hegel goes beyond Kant, but then returns to him in a revitalized way. What I am arguing is that this detranscendentalization becomes

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which a representation is a representation of an object, not simply by being causally provoked by the object, but by being interpreted as a representation of that object by another representation (its interpretant). By necessarily taking part in the triatic structure of the sig n– a sign stands for an object to an interpreter in some manner – mental representations themselves become semiotic tokens. Here the basic impulse of the linguistic turn is found: to examine the structure of the mental we can circumvent introspection and psychology generally and instead examine linguistic structures. Detranscendentalization is not only concerned with "empirical judgments, but grammatical propositions, objects of geometry, gestures, speech acts, calculations, logically connected propositions, actions, social relations or interactions – in short, basic types of rule governed behavior in general." In examining such behavior the focus shifts from examining reason's explicit rule-consciousness to explicating the "practical knowledge that makes it possible for subjects capable of speech and action to participate in these sorts of practices." See Jürgen Habermas, *Truth and Justification*, trans. Barbara Fultner (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003). On this conception, reason is no longer located in a transcendental consciousness located outside of space and time, as in Kant, but rather within everyday communicative and lifeworld practices.

13. Jürgen Habermas, "From Kant to Hegel and Back Again: The Move Towards Detranscendentalization," trans. Peter Dews, *European Journal of Philosophy* 7, no. 2 (1999): 134, Academic Source Complete, *EBSCOhost*, http://search.ebscohost.com (accessed July 18, 2007).

14. *Ibid.*, 135.

the basic logic of Habermas' social solidarity and structural interpretations of political interactions.

The reason, therefore, why diverse social solidarity groups can come together and debate with each other is because there are universally valid rational procedures that will inevitably follow the internal logic of history which is becoming more rational. Or, as Habermas will also argue, the reason why people can come together is because they all internalize a constitutional patriotism that they recognize as their own.[15] When Habermas begins to talk of global civil society, or a postnational constellation in his book by that title, he is far more skeptical of the legitimacy of a global government. As he says, "The institutionalization of procedures for creating, generalizing, and coordinating global interests cannot take place within the organizational structure of a world state. Hence, any plans for a 'cosmopolitan democracy' will have to proceed according to another model."[16] Nonetheless, he believes that politics must "catch up with global markets."[17] This leaves him arguing for "a diffuse picture – not the stable picture of a multilevel politics *within* a world organization, but rather the dynamic picture of interferences and interactions *between* political processes that persist at national, international, and global levels."[18] His conception of a global cosmopolitanism, therefore, speaks of mid-level transnational decision-making processes and world organizations which, although removed somewhat from the contexts of smaller national political spheres, nonetheless can be reconnected to the grassroots level.[19] Even these transnational processes and organizations always take up positions in a broader universal field of argumentation.

Habermas consistently argues for a universal transcendence inherently rooted in a condition common to all people's socio-linguistic practices. This is his logic. This is what drives the structural nature of his thought, and why he is always forever trying to protect the autonomous structural solidarity groups all the while maintaining

15. Habermas, *The Postnational Constellation*.
16. *Ibid*., 109.
17. *Ibid*.
18. *Ibid*., 110; original italics.
19. *Ibid*., 111.

a common detranscendentalized basis for their interaction. Ultimately, universal detranscendentalized processes will be recognized as part and parcel of various social solidarity groups' own diverse dispositions.[20] The question we need to address more specifically, however, is how this logic works itself out in Habermas' reflections upon religion.

Religion as a Test Case

Religion becomes a helpful test case for Habermas' notion of solidarity on the interpersonal level. The reason is that transcendence is already a resource drawn upon by religious traditions to form social solidarity. Thus, a competition arises between different ways of thinking transcendence in immanent ways. In an essay responding to theological dialogue with his work, Habermas develops his concerns about theological transcendence and proposes what he calls transcendence from within or "methodical atheism."[21] He develops this approach in relation to Hegel's religious methodology,[22] but he argues that Hegel's philosophy of religion fails in that it cannot claim the same base of experience as the theological does with the religious tradition which it describes. He recognizes that if religious traditions are to provide a viable source of resistant solidarity, then they must be able to articulate their concerns in their own voice. He proposes his a-theistic (not atheistic) method as a means of maintaining

20. Habermas, "From Kant to Hegel and Back Again," 130.

21. Habermas, "Transcendence from Within, Transcendence in This World," 235.

22. In Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, the death of God in Christ represents a moment within God's own self-revelation and self-understanding in which there is a renunciation of the natural and finite. The Christian God sublates (*Aufgehoben*) or is elevated beyond, which allows God to transcend the finite and become the consummation of all religious concretizations. "It is a passing over of finite things, from the things of the world or from the finitude of consciousness . . . to the infinite, to this infinite being more precisely defined as God." Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Peter Crafts Hodgson, trans. Robert F. Brown, Peter Crafts Hodgson and J. M. Stewart, 3 vols. (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), I, 414.

communicative fellowship with a religious tradition in a way that doesn't get distracted by what religious language believes it speaks about.[23] As he puts it, "We are exposed to the movement of a transcendence from within . . . In this way we become aware of the limits of that transcendence from within which is directed to this world. But this does not enable us to ascertain the countermovement of a compensating transcendence from beyond."[24] It is not that Habermas cannot conceive of how a transcendent surplus might be possible, but that he does not see it as a necessary condition for the formation of religious solidarity. Expressed in another way, religious transcendence doesn't always submit to the logic of detranscendentalization. As a result, he consistently reads his irreligious detranscendence back onto religious communities at the interpersonal level. He justifies this because he believes his method's linguistic nature is able to capture a common communicative coincidence with the religious tradition's own language about itself.

Habermas' way of reading his a-theistic "transcendence from within" back into the basis for religious solidarity can be seen in his argument for the value of tolerance in "Religious Tolerance—The Pacemaker for Cultural Rights." Here, a serious tension begins to arise. Habermas recognizes that religious communities sometimes form in anti-rationalistic ways.[25] He therefore argues that religious communities must develop the normative principles of the secular order within themselves.[26] Religious groups are called to work out

23. Habermas, "Transcendence from Within, Transcendence in This World," 235.

24. *Ibid.*, 238.

25. In a certain speech, Habermas discusses such anti-rationalistic ways as turning two "civilian means of transport into living missiles against the capitalist citadels of western civilization." Jürgen Habermas, "Speech by Juergen Habermas Accepting the Peace Prize of the German Publishers and Booksellers Association (October 14, 2001)," trans. Kermit Snelson, *Nettime Mailing Lists: Mailing Lists for Networked Cultures, Politics, and Tactics*, http://amsterdam.nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-l-0111/msg00100.html (accessed July 18, 2007).

26. Jürgen Habermas, "Religious Tolerance – The Pacemaker for Cultural Rights," *Philosophy* 79 (2004): 12. This applies not only to violence, however, but carries over into a number of issues contended by religious traditions. Habermas mentions dogmatic prejudices against homosexuality in particular as one of the things religious communities must revise. *Ibid.*, 13.

how to internalize the normative values of rational communicative procedures. Furthermore, he argues that these procedures will inevitably be enforced by the state. When religious communities internalize these values they no longer have to be enforced as such. But this brings up an important question. In what ways are religious groups able to resist state authority and call its practices and procedures into question if they are forced to internalize its norms and values?

This tension between submitting to the universal state procedures all the while resisting mass media and state coercion demands careful attention when considering the debates Habermas had with the then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger.[27] In this debate Habermas is attempting to affirm religion while simultaneously maintaining his theories of rational argumentation which supersede all religious communities under a common state rule. In this discussion, the question is raised about the dependency of secular states upon presuppositions that they cannot guarantee in and of themselves. Habermas follows this question through by arguing against the possibility of a totally secular state that does not in some way depend or relate back to religious traditions and discourses.[28] As such, he seems to concede the importance of Christian religion to Ratzinger, but only insofar as religious language can inform a non-religious political discourse.[29] Habermas concedes post-secularism, but this is not a recantation of his concerns about the negative potentiality of metaphysically informed religious transcendence.[30] This has to be read in light of

27. Jürgen Habermas, "On the Relation Between the Secular Liberal State and Religion," trans. Matthias Fritsch, in *The Frankfurt School on Religion: Key Writings by the Major Thinkers*, ed. Eduardo Mendieta (New York: Routledge, 2004).

28. In particular he discusses the "interpenetration of Christian and Greek metaphysics" which influenced both theology and philosophy in positive and negative ways. Habermas, "On the Relation Between the Secular Liberal State and Religion."

29. This can be seen in the way Habermas hangs on to the importance of translating religious language into public political language. *Ibid*.

30. For instance, in his *Inclusion of the Other* he critiques the metaphysical (*ontotheologisch*) conception of a God's eye view in favor of a reconstructed post-metaphysical and intersubjectivist universalism capable of the same moral benefits – i .e. moral knowledge attached to moral motivation and morally right action integrated into the conception of a good life – without the specifically Christian theological content. Habermas, *The Inclusion of the Other*, 9-11, 34.

the logic of a public sphere under state rule which is undergirded by an irreligious detranscendentalization. As he argues, because religious membership differentiates itself from the "role of societal citizen . . . universalist order of law and the egalitarian morality of society must connect from within the congregational ethos in such a way that *one* emerges consistently *from the other*."[31] Habermas' aforementioned essay on religious tolerance published contemporaneously with this debate as well as his most recent remarks upon the acceptance of the 2005 Kyoto Prize both bear this out. In both cases he qualifies his positive statements about the role of religious communities by explicitly calling them back to an irreligious discourse.[32] The question we must ask of Habermas is not whether or not western democratic procedures are genealogically rooted in theological conceptualities. Rather, we must question his own articulation of the logic of how this transition should continue to progress. If there is to be a shared ethos between religious communities and state procedures, the least that he requires at this point is politically engaged reflection by those religious communities.

Transcendental Aporias

Habermas raises an important question concerning the legitimacy of the democratic nation state. His suggestions for a critically debating public sphere offer insightful trajectories to pursue in response to this problematic. However, what is at stake in his thought is whether or not his social solidarities can challenge the basis upon which transcendence is related to concrete practices, or to use more theological language, the way transcendence is thought in immanent ways. Can the stability of his dependence upon things like rational communication and procedures of argumentation be called into question? This, it seems to me, is the question Jacques Derrida is

31. Habermas, "On the Relation Between the Secular Liberal State and Religion," 347; original italics.

32. Peter Rowe, "Spotlight on Public Role of Religion: Kyoto Prize Winner to Probe Issue at USD," *The San Diego Union Tribune*, March 3, 2005, http://www.signonsandiego.com/uniontrib/20050303/news_lz1c3role.html (accessed February 16, 2009).

asking of Habermas' thought. Derrida wanted to maintain a place for the open-ended nature of democratic practice which always looks forward to a better politics that remains out in front of us. In an interview conducted by Ris Orangis in Paris, February 19, 2004, Derrida spoke of a "messianicity without messianism . . . a promise of an independent future for what is to come, and which comes like every messiah in the shape of peace and justice, a promise independent of religion, that is to say universal . . . In a sense, a faith without religion of some sort."[33] Derrida's work raises the transcendental specter in a much more radical way than Habermas' various detranscendentalized logics would readily admit. In other words, there is a deeper transcendental *aporia* which can be articulated here. It is in this same space that I would like to insert Barth's theology.

Barth's Political Theology

Many have decided that Karl Barth's theology is little more than other-worldly ecclesiocentrism that showed his nonchalance towards political engagement in the real world. Habermas seems to follow this interpretation as he identifies Barth as a prototypical example of the Protestant alternative to his methodical atheism.[34] Barth is often seen as a Protestant separatist who makes a choice between the natural world of historical experience and faith. In choosing faith he neglects the political concerns most important to Habermas. This interpretation, however, needs to be challenged in light of more recent Barthian literatures. In addition to Barth's own statements, the works of Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt and Helmut Gollwitzer[35] have drawn out the implications of socialism upon Barth's theology. Building on this foundation has been the continuing work of Nigel

33. Jacques Derrida, "For a Justice to Come: An Interview with Jacques Derrida," in *The Derrida-Habermas Reader*, ed. Lasse Thomassen (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 268-9.

34. Habermas, "Transcendence from Within, Transcendence in This World," 231.

35. Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt, "Socialism in the Theology of Karl Barth," in *Karl Barth and Radical Politics*, ed. George Hunsinger (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), 47-8. See also Helmut Gollwitzer, "Kingdom of God and Socialism in the Theology of Karl Barth," in *Karl Barth and Radical Politics*.

Biggar and John Webster who both have shown the inherent connection between Barth's theology and his ethics and politics.[36] Biggar for instance draws upon subsection 78, "The Struggle for Human Righteousness" of the unfinished last volume IV, 4, *The Christian Life* of Barth's *Church Dogmatics*. Though he believes Barth's position on political leadership became more nuanced in his later work,[37] he nonetheless draws upon the ongoing and consummate interest Barth had in politics and ethics. The question is never whether or not Barth's theology was oriented around political and ethical action, but how and to what degree. In like manner Webster points out the way Barth saw his theology as the foreground for an ongoing political subtext.[38] What is increasingly coming to light is that Barth was deeply invested in the political nature of theology. This compounded with the historical weight of his involvement with the confessing church in Germany during World War II gives ample evidence that he was by no means politically complacent. My goal here is to show him as a descriptive example, not a paradigmatic prescription for all theological dialogue with politics. His theology is not the only way to do this, but he was as concerned with the world of politics as Habermas. Furthermore, and more importantly for our interests here, Barth chose to respond from within the faith commitments of Christian theology in resistant communal solidarity which punctuated all political practices with a question mark.

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36. See, for instance, John B. Webster, *Barth's Moral Theology: Human Action in Barth's Thought* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1998); and Nigel Biggar, *The Hastening That Waits: Karl Barth's Ethics*, Oxford Studies in Theological Ethics (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

37. Biggar, *The Hastening That Waits*, 61. Biggar believes that Barth made a shift from discussing the political equality of individuals and political leadership was rooted in the doctrine of creation in 1928. "By 1951, it seems, Barth had simply come to the conclusion that . . . the political form of God's command will be discussed in the context of the doctrine of reconciliation." *Ibid*., 60-1. His reason for arguing this point is Barth's argument in subsection 78 of Karl Barth, *The Christian Life: Church Dogmatics IV, Part 4: Lecture Fragments*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1981).

38. Webster, *Barth's Moral Theology*, 4-5, citing Karl Barth, *Letters 1961–1968*, ed. Jürgen Fangmeier and Hinrich Stoevesandt, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1981), 251.

Barth's Feuerbach

I would like to begin with Barth's essays on Feuerbach[39] because here we find a brief example of Barth's condition for relating political solidarity to transcendence. Feuerbach appeals to Barth because of his critique of both metaphysical and anthropomorphic projections of God. In both, humanity gets lost in the projection rather than the embrace of itself.[40] Thus, in rejecting these human abstractions Feuerbach seeks to return all the more fully to embrace human being as it is. As Feuerbach has it, "Think within *existence*, in the world as a part of it; not in the vacuum of abstraction as a solitary monad, nor as an absolute monarch, as an unparticipating God apart from this world."[41] In this regard Feuerbach finds an unlikely ally in Luther whom he reads for his affirmation of the humanity of the Christian religion whose God is love. It is this affirmation of humanity that Barth affirmatively cites in Feuerbach's thought. In Feuerbach's formula, "God becomes man, man becomes God," and in this regard Barth affirms Feuerbach's recovery of Luther's "enthusiastic overemphasis… that the deity is to be sought not in heaven but on earth, in the *man*, the *man*, the man Jesus."[42] The question which arises for Barth is how we speak of man becoming God. The problem is not the formula as it stands, but rather, all that is at issue for Barth with Feuerbach is the reversibility of his formula[43] for whatever we say of God must first be said of God, and then, and only then, of humanity. It is this emphasis upon what must be said first which he carries forward in his other politically-oriented theological writings.

39. Two of the most important are Karl Barth, "Ludwig Feuerbach (1920)," in *Theology and Church: Shorter Writings, 1920–1928*, trans. Louise Pettibone Smith (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), and Karl Barth, "Feuerbach," in *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century: Its Background and History*, trans. Brian Cozens and John Bowden (London: SCM, 2001).

40. In Feuerbach's words at the opening of Chapter II, "The True or Anthropological Essence of Religion": "But in religion man contemplates his own latent nature. Hence it must be shown that this antithesis, this differencing of God and man, with which religion begins, is a differencing of man with his own nature." Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. George Elliot (New York: Prometheus, 1989), 33.

41. Barth, "Ludwig Feuerbach (1920)," 220.

42. *Ibid*., 230; original italics.

43. *Ibid*., 231.

At this point we should note the context of the First World War and Barth's dissatisfaction with his teacher's support for the Wilhelm II war policy.[44] His interest in Feuerbach speaks to his desire to critique those projected cultural ideologies which had worked their way into German theology at the time, bending to the will of violence rather than resisting it. Furthermore, part of the reason why Feuerbach's critique of Idealist theology was so pervasive is because he was in fact building upon the full inheritance of Kant's critique of metaphysics. When Barth affirms Feuerbach's critique he is also affirming the totalistic and pervasive nature of Kant's philosophy. In fact, had Feuerbach's argument been made prior to Kant it would have been rejected out of hand as "purely psychological hypotheses without any metaphysical significance."[45] However, "because of Kant's careful investigation in his *Critique of Pure Reason* which limits rational, theoretical knowledge to the phenomenal world, such an easy dismissal of Feuerbach is not possible."[46] Kant himself recognized the problem of anthropomorphic theology in his *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* written near the end of his life (1793),[47] and this helps explain why Barth comes to take Feuerbach's positive theological suggestions so seriously. When Feuerbach reversed his formula (man becomes God, God becomes man) Barth recognizes a metaphysical abstraction. As he says, "like all theologians of his time, Feuerbach discussed man in general, and in attributing divinity to him in this sense had in fact not said anything about man in his reality."[48] Because Feuerbach did not concretely enough embrace the human being to include its frailty and mortality[49] his humanity is again a form of projection. In neglecting his own mandate Feuerbach ended up with a distance between his divinized humanity, and the

44. Barth cites the event in his later essays, in Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God*, trans. John N. Thomas and Thomas Weiser (London: Collins, 1967), 14.

45. Joseph C. Weber, "Feuerbach, Barth and Theological Methodology," *The Journal of Religion* 46, no. 1 (1966): 28, http://www.jstor.org (accessed October 17, 2008).

46. *Ibid*.

47. Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, trans. Theodore M. Greene and Hoyt H. Hudson (London: Open Court, 1960), 156-7.

48. Barth, "Ludwig Feuerbach (1920)," 525.

49. *Ibid*., 526.

human as he or she is on earth as a mortal being "who must surely die."[50] Barth argues that if he had addressed the human as he or she really is, he would have recognized the need to more critically appraise the relation between divine and human ontology.

What I would like to suggest is that Barth's theses on Feuerbach are at least as important as Marx's in a world where religion continues to resurge into the political sphere. Barth essentially argues that Feuerbach is not Feuerbachian enough, and in this sense he would want to out-Marx Marx by pointing out that the critique of abstract projections of God have to be much more carefully delimited than Feuerbach himself allows. As Barth puts it, "If only the church had been compelled before Marx to show in word and action, and had been able to show, that it is just the knowledge of God which automatically and inevitably includes within itself liberation from all hypostases and idols, which of itself can achieve liberation."[51] Barth's theology is an extended attempt to demonstrate this possibility for Christian traditions.

Jesus as the Condition for Co-Humanity

Barth's way of overcoming Feuerbach is to point out explicitly how it is that theological transcendence provides the condition for a true embrace of humanity as it is. And here we must make two points: first, because transcendence functions as the condition for concrete humanity, transcendence will have to be abstracted from the human knower's capacity to claim it as an object of its own; and second, when Barth speaks of solidarity, he does so as co-humanity of individual concrete human beings who recognize the possibility of their own free embrace of themselves in the human God on the cross.

Firstly, I would like to begin with a brief explication of the way in which Barth considers the humanity of God as an imperative for ethical action. As Robert Hood puts it in his *Contemporary Political Orders and Christ*, "Ethical action means that man's obedience is to a command which transcends his actions. The command is alien to

50. *Ibid.*
51. Barth, "Ludwig Feuerbach (1920)," 234.

man, outside himself, whose truth is not subject to the conditioning of man."[52] This way of thinking transcendence as the condition for a true command which human beings receive and cannot claim as a projection of their own ontic subjectivity is crucial to Barth's response to Feuerbach. However, although Barth considers God's transcendence beyond human subjectivity, he does so in a way that never distances God in a state of irrelevance. Here we must pay careful attention to the manner in which he thinks through the relation between human and divine being. In his *Church Dogmatics*, "God gives Himself entirely to man in His revelation, but not in such a way as to make Himself man's prisoner."[53] Theology speaks, therefore, on the condition of an ever acting God as "*actus purus*."[54] Here, he is attempting to develop a move beyond a theology which finds its ground in a greater nexus of being.[55] He is keen to demonstrate the inadequacy of attempting to appropriate the existence of God through a differentiation in the existence which is attributable to human beings. He would therefore challenge the ontological differentiations the existential theologian Emil Brunner made within the *imago dei*[56] on the grounds that such a difference could never provide the proper means of attributing existence to God.

So too, Barth would challenge the Roman Catholic notion of *analogia entis*. In his *Dogmatics*, he will develop his understanding of *analogia fidei* as a contrast to *analogia entis* by ensuring that human beings do not assume that their act of faith is in any way independent from God's act of grace.[57] It is this notion of faith that his *Dogmatics* gravitate around, and he is keen to direct his readers' attention to the

52. Robert E. Hood, *Contemporary Political Orders and Christ: Karl Barth's Christology and Political Praxis* (Allison Park: Pickwick Publications, 1985), xiv, citing Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. II.2, 649-53.

53. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. I.1, 371.

54. *Ibid*., 44-5.

55. *Ibid*., 36.

56. Emil Brunner, "Nature and Grace," in *Natural Theology: Comprising "Nature and Grace" by Professor Dr. Emil Brunner and the Reply "No!" by Dr. Karl Barth*, trans. Peter Fraenkel (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2002), 23-4.

57. It is important to note that Barth's notion of *analogia fidei* is not offering an alternative account of analogical relations. As Henri Bouillard puts it, "When Barth substitutes *analogia fidei* for *analogia entis* he is not opposing, as one might think, two formal conceptions of analogy. He wishes to affirm that there is a

manner in which the object of faith under discussion here creates the ontological possibility of knowledge for the human being. *Actus purus* is, therefore, related to his account of *analogia fidei* insofar as both are a kind of disruption to any form of direct ontological correlation between divine and human being that does not find its origin and primacy in divine being. As he concludes, "The Word of God becomes knowable by making itself known . . . The possibility of knowing the Word of God is God's miracle on us just as much as is the Word itself or its being spoken."[58] This is not to say that God's being is utterly distinct from human being. Far from it, Christ's being is a fully human being. However, if it is to be the case that this Word is truly known as God, then God must create this possibility. This demands in Barth's mind that God in some constitutive way restores the human being to an ontological status which makes knowledge possible. The first aspect of Barth's response to Feuerbach's critique that theology is simply an anthropological projection rooted in human ontology is, therefore, that it cannot be a projection if it is not rooted in the individual's ontic subjectivity.

The second aspect of Barth's response to Feuerbach will build on his affirmation of an ontological priority in God insofar as this ontological priority is in and of itself understood as the perfected human being of Christ. In this manner, Barth is thinking through Christ's humanity without allowing that conception of humanity to become abstracted from individuals as they are in their differences and frailties. As one commentator puts it, "The individual, as important as he is, stands under the divine command together with his fellow-man as a joint-covenant partner elected by God in Jesus Christ. Without this communality, ethics can become detached, irresponsible, and uncaring."[59] Because Christ exists as a truly human being, his grace makes it possible not only to know him, but to act as he acts. Hence, this understanding of Christian community will

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resemblance between man and God only through Jesus Christ, and that the correspondence between human discourse and the divine reality is only assured by the grace of revelation." Henri Bouillard, *The Knowledge of God*, trans. Samuel D. Femiano (London: Burns & Oates, 1969), 115.

58. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I.1.246.

59. Hood, *Contemporary Political Orders and Christ*, xiv, referencing, Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II.2.653-7.

inevitably affirm the common humanity of others.[60] The drive and impetus for solidarity is connected to the very core of what Jesus' death and resurrection exemplifies. In Barth's words "To be in Jesus Christ is to be oneself the new creature fashioned by Him, to belong to Him as a member of His body."[61] It is this ontological return to what human beings most truly are in Christ that they are directed towards responsibility for and to each other in concrete political praxis.[62] "For Jesus there was only a social God, a God of solidarity; therefore there was also only a social religion, a religion of solidarity."[63] This christological aspect of Barth's thought allows him to think the universal transcendence necessary to speak ethics and politics as possibilities of solidarity between different human beings without forfeiting this conception of humanity to an abstract projection of itself.

Barth thinks ethics and politics in a post-Feuerbachian way. He relates God to this world in such a way as to provide a concretely immanent disposition human beings can take up in their political spheres. Crucially, it is because of the totally free, divine act of Christ on the cross which provides the condition for speaking and acting today. In this sense, Barth does not attempt to prove the object of faith, but rather to clarify its necessity if real human existence is to be understood concretely. As George Hunsinger puts it, "Theology is neither a storming of the gates of heaven nor a *sacrificium intellectum*. It does not seek to establish the 'general possibility' of the object, nor does it require a surrender of reason. It starts from an actuality and arrives at an understanding of its rational necessity."[64] Here, Barth develops a theological pragmatics whereby theology enters into political activity as if its God is completely realistic[65] – as if Jesus and Christian communal practices are paradigms for civic action. And this leads to an important question, how are political and ecclesial bodies to relate to each other?

60. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV.3.493-4.
61. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II.2.656.
62. Hood, *Contemporary Political Orders and Christ*, xiv-xv.
63. Hunsinger, *Karl Barth and Radical Politics*, 34.
64. *Ibid.*, 221.
65. *Ibid.*, 188.

Political Analogy

In Barth's essay "The Christian Community and the Civil Community" he begins to outline a relationship between the church and the state along the lines of an analogy. It is important to say at the beginning here that this analogy is not to be confused with what he means by *analogia fidei*. Rather, he is making an analogy between the redeemed community of the church and civic communities more generally like the state. Although not as structural in his thinking as Habermas, Barth envisions the relationship of church to state as circles with the Kingdom of God at the center (see Fig. 2).[66] This immanent transcendence is worked outwards to the outer circle of the state as the church embodies the politics of the Kingdom of God. The church's existence, therefore, functions as a demonstration of a better political life.[67] It draws various parables of the Kingdom of God to political life on the basis of Jesus' reign as king and his humble work as servant on earth. This reign is understood, however, in light of the immanent being of Christ who stands as the source of the church's solidarity as reconciled co-humanity.[68] It is through the act of God in Christ expressly in the church that a political analogy can be made. Expressed in another way, because "God acts as Jesus acts,"[69] it becomes possible to speak of the church's relation to the state.

66. Karl Barth, *Karl Barth: Theologian of Freedom*, ed. Clifford Green (The Making of Modern Theology Series) (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 265. See also Karl Barth, "The Christian Community and the Civil Community," in *Against the Stream: Shorter Post-War Writings 1946–52*, ed. Ronald Gregor Smith, trans. E. M. Delacour and Stanley Godman (London: SCM Press, 1954), 48.

67. Barth, "The Christian Community and the Civil Community," 36-7.

68. As Barth will say, "Since God himself became man, man is the measure of all things . . . Even the most wretched man not man's egoism, but man's humanity – must be resolutely defended against the autocracy of every mere 'cause.'" *Ibid*., 35.

69. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III.2, 62.

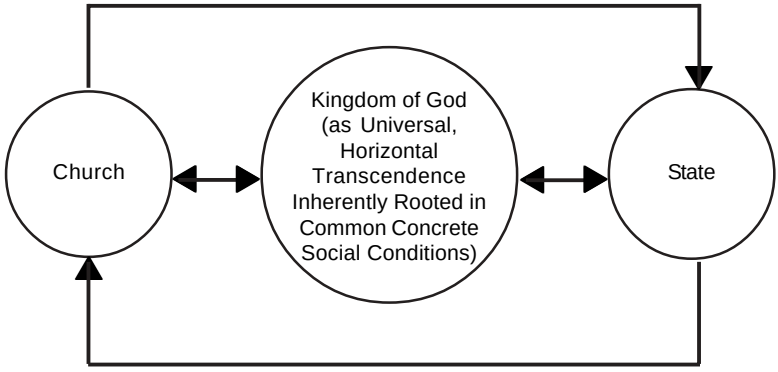

Figure 2.

In order to understand Barth's political analogy we must be clear about what he is attempting to move beyond. As he will put it:

> A simple and absolute heterogeneity between state and church on the one hand and state and Kingdom of God on the other is therefore just as much out of the question as a simple and absolute equating. The only possibility that remains – and it suggests itself compellingly – is to regard the existence of the state as a parable, as a correspondence and an analogue to the Kingdom of God which the church preaches and believes in.[70]

This analogy between the reign of Christ and the reign of the state is built upon Barth's argument that the condition for our knowledge of God is God's free action in Christ. As such, the analogy occurs insofar as the reign of Christ is revealed in the church. Barth clearly says that God is not revealed in the state,[71] but rather, "the Christian community participates – on the basis of and by belief in the divine revelation – in the human search for the best form, for the most fitting system of political organization."[72] This pattern allows Barth to speak of perfected humanity and co-humanity as concrete

70. Barth, "The Christian Community and the Civil Community," 32.
71. *Ibid*., 25.
72. *Ibid*.

realities which never confuse the reign of the state with the Kingdom of God. Jesus' humanity, as real human being, becomes the universal transcendence under which Barth can credibly encourage civic participation by the Christian community.

The church, therefore, acts as a destabilizing community capable of calling the state's ambiguous interim reign[73] into question precisely because it recognizes that to speak faithfully of humanity it must first speak of the God, Jesus Christ. The Kingdom of God always holds out an eschatological hope rooted in the ecclesial practices of the church and then, and only then, by analogy to the state. Furthermore, Barth holds out the church's obligations to publicly critical communal solidarity, no matter what state rule it finds itself under.[74] Christ's kingdom reign of humility will mean that Christian community does not rule but serve.[75] As Barth puts it, "The Christian community 'subordinates' itself to the civil community by making its knowledge of the Lord who is Lord of all its criterion, and distinguishing between the just and the unjust state, that is, between better and worse political form and reality."[76] The perseverant nature of God's mercy and short-termed nature of his anger will come to mean that violence is possible for the Christian community, but only as a last ditch when all other resources are thoroughly exhausted. "May the church show her inventiveness in the search for other solutions before she joins in the call for violence."[77] As John Howard Yoder comments upon Barth's thought, "The burden of proof is therefore with the non-pacifists."[78] It is because of Barth's Christology that his thought remains all the more critical of violence and social fragmentation. By introducing Barth's theological politics it becomes possible to see the positive role theological transcendence can have in immanent contexts where the formation of compellingly sturdy communal solidarities is necessary.

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73. *Ibid.,* 45.

74. This is a point made explicitly in Karl Barth, *How to Serve God in a Marxist Land,* trans. Thomas Wieser (New York: Associated Press, 1959), 59-60.

75. Barth, "The Christian Community and the Civil Community," 40.

76. *Ibid.,* 26-7.

77. *Ibid.,* 41.

78. John Howard Yoder, *Karl Barth and the Problem of War,* Studies in Christian Ethics (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1970), 125.

POSTNATIONAL CONSTELLATION AND CHRISTIAN TRADITIONS

Habermas posits a palliative for the ills of nationalism where cosmopolitan solidarity of people is limited to the affective ties of a nation, language, place, heritage, and religion. He calls it postnational constellation and argues that it is based on universality that is embedded in the most basic capacities that we possess as persons capable of speaking, hearing, giving and reasons for our actions and conducting our lives correspondingly in the most fundamental and distinctive human capacity – the ability to speak to one another, to decide on the basis of reasons and arguments, to distinguish between understanding and deception. Habermas insists that we find a universe, if modest, basis for the great political innovations of popular sovereignty, legally enforceable human rights, democratic procedures, and the inconspicuous but vital solidarity that binds humans together, and makes them accountable to one another, through the mutual recognition of the status of personhood. Habermas sees this in his vision of the emergence of postnational constellations that transcend all forms of tribal loyalties whereby institutions like states and religions voluntarily divest themselves of their formerly assured sovereign power by amalgamating with other institutions to fulfill their functions. In the case of states, this phenomenon is seen in the development of supra-national entities like the European Nation and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations; in the case of religions, this calls for the universalization of all singularities of religions in order to keep fanaticism at bay – without however erasing each religion's singularity, so that, for instance, Muslims, Buddhists, Christians, Jews, among others, will no longer see the world as revolving around the orbit of their respective orthodoxies, but will be open to dialogue with those who espouse different religious preferences. Integral to the religious dimension of postnational constellation is Habermas' solution to tyrannical religious fundamentalism that shirks theological transcendence in favor of his state sanctioned rational procedures which rely upon philosophical articulations of detranscendentalization and transcendence from within.

Habermas said that religion is truly indispensable and irreplaceable, as long as it continues to offer an inspiring and consoling message

that helps people cope with the existential crises of life. He clearly points to this inspiring and consoling message in the following two passages:

> Viewed from without, religion, which has largely been deprived of its worldview functions, is still indispensable in ordinary life for normalizing intercourse with the extraordinary. For this reason, . . . philosophy, even in its postmetaphysical form, will be able neither to replace nor to repress religion as long as religious language is the bearer of a semantic content that is inspiring and even indispensable, for this content eludes (for the time being?) the explanatory force of philosophical language and continues to resist translation into reasoning discourses.[79]

On the premises of postmetaphysical thought, philosophy cannot provide a substitute for the consolation whereby religion invests unavoidable suffering and unrecompensed injustice, the contingencies of need, loneliness, sickness, and death, with new significance and teaches us to bear them.[80]

From these passages, it is evident that Habermas viewed religion tolerably insofar as it is able to provide resources to help human beings come to grips with the shattering experiences that crash in on the profane character of everyday life. Religion, he suggested, in spite of its non-rational content still eludes the differentiated character of modern communicative reason and culture. As he says elsewhere, "as long as no better words for what religion can say are found in the medium of rational discourse, [communicative reason] will coexist abstemiously with [religion], neither supporting it, nor combating it."[81] For him philosophy must translate the content of religious experience into publicly accessible and rationally justifiable claims, and if this fails, it must then move into the expressive realm of literature.

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79. Jürgen Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking: Philosophical Essays*, trans. William Mark Hohengarten (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 51.

80. See also Jürgen Habermas, *Justification and Application: Remarks on Discourse Ethics*, trans. Kieran P. Cronin (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), 146.

81. Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking*, 145.

Yet what is the role of Christian communities in postnational constellation? We by no means have exhausted the possibilities of this question much less Barth and Habermas' thought. Much more could be said, but I would like to make two basic suggestions. Firstly, I believe Habermas is right to recognize the need for public critical debate and thinking today. The solution to mass mediatization and its potential political coerciveness cannot simply supply more voluntarism and political will in "American Idol" style renewal. We also must debate, and churches, with their meeting rooms built for conference-style debate, are natural places for such critical debating and thinking skills to be developed. There is no reason why major churches which are increasingly mega media communication conference centers could not function in Philippine society. The question, however, is whether or not Christian churches today will take up this sense of political activity. As we have seen, Barth's theology offers a more thoroughgoing account of Christian civic obligation in Western culture which is increasingly "bowling alone." Furthermore, this vision of Christian civic participation goes well beyond partisan issue mongering, to focus upon the necessary critical solidarity which legitimizes democracy itself.

But secondly, and no less crucially, Christian traditions must also recognize that at the heart of practices which foster social solidarity, critical debate, and civic engagement, is a robust embodiment of hope for a better politics. The Christian community can be an aporetic community which punctuates all political orders with a question mark. Here, Barth's theology returns us to Christianity's most central and controversial figure. Jesus becomes the possibility for the church's speech about human ethics and politics today. The solution to religious violence is not to shirk religious transcendence, but to deeply reflect upon it theologically and in so doing recover the self criticisms which arise within our own religious traditions. Barth offers us a complex theology which engages the subject-object relations and ontological nuance required of political theology today and is, therefore, a worthy dialogue partner of Habermas. Habermas may recognize the Christian roots of his detranscendentalized universal conditions for social solidarity, but this should embolden Christian traditions to question him all the more. Barth helps us respond to this challenge by returning Christians to the political horizon implied by the

Kingdom of God which was inaugurated by the God on the cross. Here Martha Nussbaum may be of some help in thinking Habermas and Barth together on this point as she notes:

> Christianity seems to grant that in order to imagine a god who is truly superior, truly worthy of worship, truly and fully just, we must imagine a god who is human as well as divine, a god who has actually lived out the non-transcendent life and understands it in the only way it can be understood, by suffering and death.[82]

Nussbaum recognizes the balance that must be struck between striving for universals while at the same time never leaving our human contexts behind. Like Barth, she finds a unique way of holding the two in tension in the person and work of Jesus. In striving for human ideals like solidarity, Barth's Christological theology may have unique contributions to make.

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82. Martha C. Nussbaum, "Transcending Humanity," in *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature*, ed. Martha Craven Nussbaum (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 375.