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THE VALIDITY OF THE SOCIOLOGY OF LUTHERANISM
OF ERNST TROELTSCH

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Practical Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Divinity

by

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June, 1951

Approved by:


Advisor


Reader

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Ernst Troeltsch was born at Haunstaten, a town two miles south of Bamberg, Germany, on February 19, 1866. He was educated at the universities of Erlangen, Berlin, and Göttingen from 1883 to 1888. He held theological professorships at Göttingen, Bonn, and Heidelberg, and, in

Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, translated from the German by Olive Lynn Johnson, George Allen and Unwin, 1908, New York: The Macmillan Co., 1912, 2 vols. The original work was published in Germany in the year 1911 under the title: *Die Soziallehren der christlichen Kirchen und Gruppen*.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Man and His Theology

It is not within the scope of this paper to treat the theology of Ernst Troeltsch in any kind of detail. Much less is it the intention of this study to pass judgment on his theology as a whole, except in the most general way, and on the basis of the judgment of others. But in order to make the review of his work The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches¹ more understandable, and to provide a background for the critique of his sociology of Lutheranism, a few paragraphs at the very beginning will be devoted to a rapid overview of the theology of Ernst Troeltsch.

Ernst Troeltsch was born at Haunstetten, a town two miles South of Augsburg, Germany, on February 17, 1865. He was educated at the universities of Erlangen, Berlin, and Goettingen from 1883 to 1888. He held theological professorships at Goettingen, Bonn, and Heidelberg, and, in

¹Ernst Troeltsch, The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches, translated from the German by Olive Lyon (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., New York: The Macmillan Co., 1931), 2 vols. The original work was published in Germany in the year 1911 under the title: Die Soziallehren der christlichen Kirchen und Gruppen.

1914, went to the University of Berlin to teach in the philosophy department.

Theologically Troeltsch is placed in the German Neo-Protestant movement, which is marked along the whole line of its development by contributory thoughts of Kant, Schleiermacher, Strauss, Baur, the school of Ritschl, Rothe, the Historico-Religious school, Pfleiderer, Dilthey, de Lagarde, and many others.² Hugh Mackintosh characterizes Ernst Troeltsch as the systematic theologian of the movement, "whose life work as a whole may fairly be indicated by the phrase 'Christianity and Philosophy,' or the Philosophy of History in its broadest sense."³ Trained in the Ritschlian school, he considered himself confronted with two tasks: To make clear to himself both the ecclesiastical dogmatic tradition of Protestantism in its own historical sense, and the intellectual and practical situation of the present day in its true fundamental tendencies.⁴

Werner Elert is grateful to Troeltsch for demonstrating to what logical ends the relativistic and historical treatment of Christianity will lead. He says:

²J.L. Neve, A History of Christian Thought (Philadelphia, Pa.: The Muhlenberg Press, c.1946), II, 91.

³Hugh Ross Mackintosh, Types of Modern Theology (London: Nisbet and Co. Ltd., 1937), pp. 185 and 188.

⁴Troeltsch, op. cit., I, 19.

Es ist das grosse Verdienst von Ernst Troeltsch...in immer neuen Wendung gezeigt zu haben, dass die Verwendung allgemeinwissenschaftlicher Methode bei der Behandlung der christlichen Religion unter keinen Umständen zu einem anderen Resultat...[fuehren kann, als zur] geschichtsphilosophischen Relativierung des Christentums.⁵

This method, he concludes, must lead to a yielding of the absoluteness of Christianity, which is just where it did lead in Troeltsch's thinking. Historical relativism was decisive for Troeltsch's thought. He was consistent. Because he was so thoroughly historical in his approach to Christianity, he was also thoroughly relative. His synthesis of Christianity and general culture, states Elert, demands his unconditional relativism.⁶

Historical Christianity, so says Troeltsch, "ist eine historisch individuelle und relative Erscheinung, so, wie es ist, nur moeglich auf dem Boden der antiken Kultur und der romanisch-germanischen Voelker."⁷ So it is that he considers such things as the resurrection of the flesh, the visible return of Christ to judgment, and the new birth of the world, "brutale Wunder."⁸

⁵Werner Elert, Der Kampf um das Christentum (Munich: C. H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, Oskar Beck, 1921), p. 408.

⁶Ibid., p. 409.

⁷Paul Althaus, Die christliche Wahrheit (Guetersloh: C. Bertelsmann Verlag, 1947), I, 519.

⁸Elert, op. cit., p. 371.

It is Troeltsch's contention that Christianity has undergone material changes throughout the course of history, and that it is today's task for Christianity to continue this blending of Christian and other elements. To quote Troeltsch:

[Diese Veraenderungen des Christentums waren begruendet] in der Noetwendigkeit der Auseinandersetzung mit fremden Kulturen, mit der antiken und der mittelalterlichen, wobei die aufgenommenen fremden Kulturelemente mit christlichen Elementen so verbunden wurden, dass eine nachtraegliche Aussonderung der beteiligten Faktoren nicht mehr moeglich ist.⁹

Troeltsch considers it ridiculous to believe that the death of Christ is the center of absolute religion. He comments:

Das Alter der Menschheit auf der Erde betraegt einige hunderttausend Jahre oder mehr. Ihre Zukunft mag noch mehrere Jahrhunderttausende betragen. Es ist schwer vorzustellen, einen einzigen Punkt der Geschichte auf diese Zeitlaenge hin--und zwar gerade den Mittelpunkt gerade unserer eigenen religioesen Geschichte--als alleiniges Zentrum aller Menschheit zu denken. Das sieht doch allzustark aus nach Verabsolutierung unseres zufaelligen eigenen Lebenskreises.¹⁰

Troeltsch believes that there is no such thing as an absolute revelation from God in Christianity. This much he admits:

Das Christentum ist der hoechste Punkt der Selbsterschliessung Gottes in den Religionen, aber nicht der endgueltige Punkt der Selbsterschliessung Gottes. Es darf mit noch hoeheren Erschliessungen der Gottheit

⁹Elert, op. cit., p. 409.

¹⁰Althaus, op. cit., p. 127.

gerechnet werden.¹¹

Many of the fundamental Christian doctrines he finds in other religions. From this he concludes that "die historische Erscheinung des Christentums nur eine Individuierung des allgemeinen geschichtlichen Phänomens der Religion ueberhaupt ist."¹² Christianity is for us of the West an undeniable demonstration of the power and truth of God. This religion is "das uns zugewandte Antlitz Gottes."¹³ But this by no means establishes Christianity as absolute in its final form, or absolute for all men:

Aber es ist dadurch nicht ausgeschlossen, dass andere Menschheitsgruppen im Zusammenhang voellig anderer kultureller Verhaeltnisse den Zusammenhang mit dem goettlichen Leben auf eine individuell ganz andere Weise empfinden und eine ebenso mit ihnen gewachsene Religion haben.¹⁴

From here we will proceed to an analysis of Troeltsch's book, The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches, with but a brief word on his written style from Mackintosh:

Encyclopedic in learning, he often appears to know too much. His books now and then leave the impression that the author has emptied out the contents of his notebooks into the printed page without too much re-

¹¹Elert, op. cit., p. 410.

¹²Elert, loc. cit.

¹³Althaus, op. cit., p. 77.

¹⁴Ibid.

guard for form or clarity.¹⁵

With this we concur.

¹⁵Mackintosh, op. cit., p. 188.

CHAPTER II

THE BACKGROUND OF THE SOCIOLOGY OF LUTHERANISM

Troeltsch's Introduction to His Study of the Social Teachings of the Christian Churches

Troeltsch's basic considerations in a study of the social teachings of the Christian Churches also apply to his study of the sociology of Lutheranism. One such basic consideration, which ties in with his over-riding relativism, is that Christianity is first and foremost a matter of practice, whose main problems lie therefore in the sphere of practical life. It is from this realm that the most complicated difficulties and contrasts arise in opposition to the world of Christian life. He is of the definite opinion that "particularly in relation to social ethics the ethic of the churches is out of date."¹ It was in an attempt to determine just how the Christian attitude to life was related to its own ancient organizations, the churches, that Troeltsch resorted to an application of the sociological formulation of the problem to the whole sweep of the history of the Christian Church. This work of his is that

¹Ernst Troeltsch, The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches, translated from the German by Olive Wyon, (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., New York: The Macmillan Co., 1931), I, 20.

application.

But what is the basis of the social teachings of the churches, what is the sociological formula which Troeltsch applies here? For one thing, the churches are great traditional organizations, whose roots are entwined with traditions of great historical importance and vital energy.² The churches are also strongly influenced by the political and class interests which these parties represent, and are likewise interested in the social conflicts of the day. It is not a question as to whether or not it is permissible to formulate social doctrines from the standpoint of the churches and of religion in general. All we have to do, says Troeltsch, is to ask whether these attempts have achieved something useful and valuable for the modern situation.³

At the outset, he maintains, we are faced at once with the fundamental fact that the churches and Christianity, which are pre-eminently historic forces, are at all points conditioned by their past, by the gospel which, together with the Bible, exerts its influence ever anew, and by the dogmas which concern social life and the whole of civilization.⁴ His method is to study the social doc-

²Ibid., p. 23.

³Ibid., p. 24.

⁴Ibid., p. 25.

trines of the gospel, of the early Church, of the Middle Ages, of the post-Reformation confessions, right down to modern times, in order to present the Christian ethos in its inward connection with the universal history of civilization.

By his own definition, Troeltsch considers the social problem as really consisting in "the relation between the political community and these sociological phenomena, which, although they are essentially non-political, are yet of outstanding importance from the political point of view."⁵ These sociological phenomena arise out of economic life, the sociological tension between various groups with different customs and aims, division of labor, class organization, and some other interests which cannot be directly characterized as political, but which actually have a great influence on the collective life of the state. The relation of Christianity to social problems, can only mean the relation to these great questions specially emphasized by the present situation, which, however, have always been present in society in the narrower sense of the word.⁶ In connection with these defining statements he adds:

All social groups possess independent instincts of organization; all that we can do, therefore, is to

⁵ Ibid., p. 28.

⁶ Ibid., p. 29.

try to discover how far the religious-sociological fundamental theory has been able to penetrate into these motives, and to what extent it has been able to assimilate these groups into itself.⁷

It is Troeltsch's hypothesis that state and society, together with innumerable other forces, are still the main formative powers of civilization. On the basis of this, he says, the ultimate problem may be stated thus: "How can the Church harmonize with these main forces in such a way that together they will form a unity of civilization?"⁸ It is just here, at this point of the relation between the churches and the state, that there still remains today the characteristic difference between the Catholic and Protestant social doctrines. He concludes:

The Catholic Church still demands, even at the present day, dominion over the state, in order to be able to solve the social problem on ecclesiastical lines; the Protestant churches, with their freedom from the state, are uncertain in their aims; sometimes their aim seems to be a Christian state, and sometimes it is that of a purely ecclesiastical social activity exercised alongside that of the state. On the other hand, at the present time, to a great extent the state is inclined to look upon the churches as free associations representing private interests, and thus to regard them as part of "society" from which the state is differentiated.⁹

If it is the task of the churches to harmonize with these main social forces in such a way that together they

⁷Ibid., p. 30.

⁸Ibid., p. 32.

⁹Ibid., p. 33.

will form a unity of civilization, then it is not to be admitted for an instant that an organization which expresses the love which flows forth from God and returns to him once more can meet the need of the social groups which make up humanity as a whole. Indeed, every idea of that kind only obscures the understanding of the real historical significance of the gospel, and of its historical development.¹⁰ Much of the talk about the "social spirit of Christianity" is full of this ambiguous meaning, even with reference to the problems of the present day.

In view of the foregoing, Troeltsch sets forth two leading questions as guidelines for his study of the social teachings of the Christian churches:

In the first place we shall have to inquire into the intrinsic sociological idea of Christianity, and its structure and organization We shall then have to ask further: What is the relation between this sociological structure and the "social?" Finally, to what extent was an inward contact with, and penetration of social life rendered possible, and how far did it lead to an inward uniformity of the collective life?¹¹

In all of this study, the gospel, the Bible, and the early Church constitute the permanent basis of the inquiry.

The Early Church

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid., p. 34.

The foundation fact from which we have to start a discussion of the foundations in the early Church for the social teaching of the Christian churches, says Troeltsch, is that the values of redemption were purely inward, ethical, and spiritual, leading inevitably and naturally to a sphere of painless bliss.¹² The early Church did not come forth with arguments dealing either with hopes of improving the existing social situation, or with any attempt to heal social ills. It was based solely upon theology, philosophy, and ethics. These ethical considerations were always aimed at fostering habits of sobriety and industry, with the usefulness of the Christian as a citizen.

It is an evident mistake to believe that the early Christian movement was a class movement of the proletariat or a religious reshaping of the socialism of the ancient world. The sociological developments in the Roman world after the advent of Christianity all demonstrate that we here are dealing with an essentially religious movement, and it is a clear proof of the error of the opposite view.¹³ There was, indeed, a connection between the rise of Christianity and the social struggle at the close of the ancient world. The whole great religious crisis of the an-

¹²Ibid., p. 40.

¹³Ibid., pp. 42-43.

cient world was itself a result of the social struggles of the period, and obviously it was the collapse of the national states in the East and in the West which paved the way for this whole process. But the result of the emergence of Christianity was due only indirectly to the course of social development. Its most genuine and essential elements were simply the results of its own religious thought. It does not offer simply a transformed social ideal; the Christian ideal means rather the entire renunciation of the material social ideal of all political and economic values, and the turning toward the religious treasures of peace of heart, love of humanity, fellowship with God, which are open to all because they are not subject to any difficulties of leadership and organization. "The whole conception of Eudaemonism," asserts Troeltsch, "or the fundamental ethical principal of happiness, which implies that moral excellence and political and economic well-being coincide, has been altered."¹⁴ The early Church was not produced by the social crisis of the age, but it was very much affected by it.

The more the Christian community becomes a society within a society, or a state within the state, the more

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 48-49.

strongly it becomes conscious of the fact that it is bound up with concrete social problems, and it then turns its attention and its power of organization to these matters. All this, however, is simply the result of the new religious idea, it is not its starting point.¹⁵

The basis of the ethic of the early Church as of its religion, was the gospel. The ethical ideal of the gospel is absolutely steeped in a two-fold idea: 1) the religious idea of the presence of God, which is both penetrating gaze and fascination, and 2) the infinite and eternal value of the soul to be obtained through self-renunciation for the sake of God.¹⁶ The gospel ethic neither completely or systematically manifests itself, but neither is it purely subjective:

It is also clear that among the various demands which the general consciousness recognizes as valid, distinctions are made which force moral instruction to concentrate on certain definite points, so that the ethic of the gospel deals not merely with the will and its intention, or with the inner constraint of conscience, but also with certain definite concrete demands All the virtues, therefore, are thoroughly systematized from the fundamental religious point of view: union with the will and being of God, and cooperation with the work of God.¹⁷

One of the social characteristics of the gospel ethic

¹⁵Ibid., p. 50.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 52.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 53.

is an unlimited, unqualified individualism. Its basis and justification lie in the fact that man is called to fellowship with God, to be the child of God. This absolute religious individualism, however, which removes all distinctions by concentrating entirely upon differences in character in individuals, each of whom has his own value, also contains within itself a strong idea of fellowship; this idea is based just as clearly upon the specifically religious fundamental idea. Out of an absolute individualism, therefore, there arises a universalism which is equally absolute.¹⁸

The only economic doctrine of the gospel is this: God allows everyone to earn his living by means of work; if distress should arise, then love can help; wealth, however, must be feared on account of its danger for the health of the soul. It is clear that the message of Jesus is not a program of social reform. It is rather the summons to prepare for the coming of the Kingdom of God. ✓ This preparation; however, is to take place quietly within the framework of the present world order, in a purely religious fellowship of love, with an earnest endeavor to conquer self and cultivate the Christian virtues.¹⁹ As

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 55-57.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 61.

for the early practice of communism in the Church, it can be described only as the religious communism of love. The fact that it was merged immediately in the wider work, without even a struggle for the principle, is only a further sign that this communism was a by-product of Christianity and not a fundamental idea. The fundamental idea was solely that of the salvation of souls.²⁰

The Pauline ethic was quite different from the gospel ethic, but was nevertheless true to the spirit and meaning of the gospel.²¹ It was a necessary development in the Church as it spread throughout the Roman Empire. The situation had changed. The religious community was no longer in the simple rural surroundings of Galilee, with its oriental freedom from economic needs and its casual system of justice, but in the urban world of slaves and lesser citizens with its more complicated domestic economy and a stricter system of justice.²² The state was ignored in the gospel ethic, but in the ethics of Paul the state and the whole order of society are to be respected by the Christians, who are to turn it to good account, since

²⁰Ibid., pp. 62-63.

²¹Ibid., pp. 80 and 85.

²²Ibid., p. 81.

their citizenship is not on earth but in heaven.²³ They must prove themselves good and industrious citizens, and above all each man must labor to gain his own living, for the sake of general order, and that he may be able to share with those who have need.²⁴ Paul's attitude toward patriarchy, marriage, the family, and sex was very conservative.

It is Troeltsch's contention that the conservative attitude of Christianity toward political and social life, in spite of the entirely revolutionary and radical principle of unlimited individualism and universalism, was decided by Paul's doctrine that inequalities are the occasion and material for the activity of love.²⁵ Because Christianity's individualism and universalism proceed from the religious idea and are related to religious values, such a conservative attitude is thoroughly possible.

Because of this radical individualism and universalism, Troeltsch believes that Christianity seems to influence social life in three ways:

Either, on the one hand, it develops an idealistic anarchism and the communism of love, which combines radical indifference or hostility towards the rest of the social order with the effort to actualize this

²³Ibid., p. 59.

²⁴Ibid., pp. 80-81.

²⁵Ibid., pp. 77 and 82.

ideal of love in a small group; or, on the other hand, it develops along social conservative lines into an attitude of submission to God and his will, so far as the world is concerned, combined with a strong independence of an organized community which manages its own affairs, which, as its range of influence increases, finds that it cannot ignore secular institutions, but that it must do its utmost to utilize them for its own purposes The third possibility, that of using the ordinances of society positively, as preliminary phases for the attainment of the highest religious-ethical goal, lies still entirely beyond the vision of the early Church.²⁶

These three stages are to be found in that order in the history of the Christian Church, and at the same time are constantly reasserting themselves.

Early Catholicism

The most obvious sociological development of the early Catholic Church was the rise of the monarchical episcopate. A bridge between the Church and the world was desired, a "sociological point of reference" to use Troeltsch's expression. There always had been such a point of reference, but from the sociological point of view in particular, the Christian community felt the need for establishing the sociological point of reference upon a firmer basis, and of providing it with a more objective point of view, a more practical method of definition with a more coherent lucidity and with a more logical certainty of interpretation.²⁷

²⁶Ibid., pp. 82-83.

²⁷Ibid., p. 91.

This represents, however, a further extraordinary limitation of the original sociological idea of absolute religious individualism and universalism. Once the Church had been organized on these lines, she became an independent body, and it was only natural that her conception of her own nature should lead her to form her own juridical constitution.²⁸

An equal and opposite reaction to this development, which was not of an essentially religious nature, was the rise of asceticism.

The more the Christian movement closed its ranks and became an organized and unified body, the more it tended to regard the rest of life as the "world." In the eyes of Jesus the ordinary life of humanity, in spite of its sin, was full of traces of the divine goodness, and he recognized the naive and natural accents of piety in children, sinners, and Samaritans; to him the dividing line was not drawn between the world and the Church, but between the present and the future With the idea of the sacerdotal and sacramental church as the civitas Dei, around which the angels play, and in which the Christ-God sits enthroned, the opposite idea of the "world" as the kingdom of Satan, in which there is nothing but perdition and impotence, was intensified.²⁹

It was a confusion of thought. The gospel did teach self-denial, and its ethical demands were severe. But asceticism made everything which was difficult, self-denying, and contrary to nature a service to God, and added that it

²⁸Ibid., p. 96.

²⁹Ibid., p. 100.

was so demanded by the gospel. A similar confusion of thought is evident when the exercises which were meant to aid in religious concentration, and the preservation of morality, were made an end in themselves, and were used to satisfy the desire to attract attention and appear singular, as nearly always happens in groups which practice an overstrained piety.³⁰

But while it is true that asceticism contained an element of passivity, of pure negation and ethical aimlessness, which constituted a hindrance to the true Christian ethic and was in opposition to its fundamental tendencies, it is nonetheless always, or at least very frequently, one of the strongest means of vivifying and stimulating Christian movements of thought. This is true because an asceticism of this kind presupposes an extraordinary effort of the will and of enthusiasm.³¹

The Christian ethic during the period of early Catholicism consisted, in fact, rather in an extremely varied mass of regulations in which the Christian element depends mainly on achievements effected by grace but tinged with asceticism. The Church was, however, already so firmly united as a sociological organism, and it contained the

³⁰Ibid., p. 103.

³¹Ibid., p. 104.

fundamental ethical ideas so clearly within its structure, that this uncertainty in the realm of ethics could not endanger it.³²

The Church's relationship toward social problems during the early Catholic period was first of all affected by the decline of millenarianism and the transformation of the idea of the Kingdom of God, whose imminence was replaced by the doctrine of eschatology. Secondly, the conviction that existing conditions are static and immutable became firmly entrenched in the Church's thinking. Thirdly, the increasing complexity of the social and economic situation of the members of the Church made it all the more difficult to regulate the life of these complicated masses because the principles which were contained in the canonical Scriptures referred to far simpler conditions. Finally, we must not forget the immense influence exercised by the growing worldliness of the Church, which affected the practice of the Church to a greater extent than it did the theory of the Church.³³

The development of what Troeltsch calls the Christian relative natural law is of primary importance in his study of the social teachings of the Christian churches. The

³²Ibid., p. 110.

³³Ibid., pp. 113-115.

early Catholic period was a crucial time in the development of this Christian relative natural law, which was the final result of a process created by the Church through the following stages:

First of all she gradually modified that indifference towards the natural basis of life which characterized the gospel, owing to the great enthusiasm and heroism with which it lived only for eternity; then the Church tolerated the natural basis unchanged as she found it, as the product of relative natural law; and finally, from the time of the Middle Ages, with the changes in the general conditions of life, she regarded the natural basis of life as instituted by Providence for the purpose of the Christian Church. The sociological, purely ethical, and religious fundamental relationships of the gospel then become an integral part of the life of the Church, embodied in obedience to the Church and in the sense of the unity of the Church, while the social and political elements are embodied and assimilated by means of the Christian theory of the natural law of the Church. In this natural law, however, there still remains the root idea of Stoic rationalism--that is, that God is related to the universe as the soul is to the body, and the rational equality of all beings endowed with reason.³⁴

It is this Christian natural law which will be the means through which it will become possible to speak of a Christian unity of civilization at all, and, in the opinion of Troeltsch, will likewise provide the daughter churches of Western Catholicism, Lutheranism and Calvinism, with the means of regarding and shaping themselves as a Christian unity of civilization.³⁵

³⁴Ibid., pp. 160-161.

³⁵Ibid., p. 160.

The big contribution of the early Catholic Church to the development of the social teachings of the Christian churches, was that the sociological energy of Christianity was narrowed down to the Church. The Church, as the living extension of the incarnation, had, indeed, replaced or enlarged the New Testament, but it had not discarded it. In the Bible, in the absolute law of nature, and in monasticism the old sociological ideals lie ready to exert a new spiritual influence upon the whole of life. In the Church, through the concentration of the divine power in priest and sacrament, these ideals have been ecclesiastically united, and the creation of the Church is the real great sociological achievement of this period, whose inner fundamental theory does not penetrate too deeply into the common life; so far its influence was mainly felt in family life.³⁶

Medieval Catholicism

In the study of Medieval Catholicism, Troeltsch sets out to show how, under the new conditions, the sociological development of the Christian system itself was achieved, how as a result the characteristic alienation between the Church and the world disappeared, making room for a mutual

³⁶Ibid., p. 163.

inward penetration, and how from that development there sprang the ideal of an all-embracing international ecclesiastical civilization.³⁷ As a reaction to this the sects and their social ethic develop a type of Christian social doctrine which is peculiar to themselves, alongside of the ecclesiastical type and its social doctrines.

It is a fact that the Middle Ages created a unity of civilization, at least as an ideal. It is Troeltsch's conviction that this was not the obvious flowering of the Christian idea.³⁸ But it did exist, and was due to the development of the Church, to asceticism, and also to the life of the world itself, which in its new form fitted into the whole more easily than it had done hitherto.³⁹

The Gregorian struggle for the independence of the Church from the state is, and remains for all future time, the logical result of the sociological conception of the sacramental-sacerdotal church and of the redemptive institution. One of the most important aspects of this movement was the development of the canon law into the universal law of Christendom, laid down and administered

³⁷Ibid., pp. 204-205.

³⁸Ibid., p. 200.

³⁹Ibid., p. 246.

by the Pope. The concentration of the hierarchy in the papacy is the dogma which completes the sociological tendency toward unity, as it was bound to develop and become complete once the process had begun by which the Church and the Christian priesthood were conceived as the body of Christ. The sacraments of penance and the mass became the great support of the spiritual domination of the world.⁴⁰ Out of penance there develops the whole Christian ethic of the Church--as self-examination and direction of conscience, as absolution, and as the key to the whole system of satisfactions and merits, as the unification of all ethical problems and inconsistencies by the authority of the Church, which removes the responsibility for the unification of the duties of life from the individual, and takes it on to its own shoulders.⁴¹

The ecclesiastical civilization was shaped far more by the independent logical evolution of the sociological idea of the Church (always, of course, combined with asceticism), which made mankind submit, not to asceticism, but to the sacraments and to the priesthood. Asceticism, which in the ancient world was a dangerous element, and a menace both to the Church and to the world of thought, was

⁴⁰Ibid., pp. 226-227.

⁴¹Ibid., pp. 232-233.

subdued by the Church, and practically incorporated into the cosmos of ecclesiastical activity while in theory it made it possible to secure a harmonious relationship between the piety of medieval Christian life in the world, and the piety of monasticism.⁴² In itself asceticism is not merely mortification and dualistic contemplation, but positive work for the whole, a method of service at the disposal of the corpus Christianum, while in its release of religious feeling it forms at the same time an emotional and artistic transfiguration of the world.⁴³

Medieval society was favorable to the development of the medieval Church. Above all, the conditions of property and possessions were favorable to the Church's ethical system. Man's relation to the world was conceived in terms of "duty." As the Church itself was a great communistic institution, full of the spirit of solidarity and care for all, so every smaller group bore the same stamp of mutual love and loyalty and service. The town, representing a non-military, peaceful community of labor, needing the military element solely as a means of protection, and devoid as yet of capitalistic and city features, was a picture of the Christian society.⁴⁴

⁴²Ibid., p. 240.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 245.

⁴⁴Ibid., pp. 252-255.

The ecclesiastical unity of civilization was developed, both in theory and in practice, under the influence of theological ethics. The Church is the universal principle, and strives to appropriate everything that will enable it to represent Christianity as universal truth and as an ethic which is applicable in all circumstances.⁴⁵ The principles of Thomism were the logical result of the thinking of the medieval Catholic Church, and were assiduously developed and followed in the later Middle Ages.

The Christian Church, according to Troeltsch, had always had difficulty with the absoluteness of the ecclesiastical ethic, which it identified with the absolute natural law of the Stoics.⁴⁶ This tension was relieved by the Thomistic doctrine of nature and supernature, which provided for steps or degrees between the state of nature and the state of grace. It is possible to conclude, therefore, that Catholic civilization is based on the relative natural law of the fallen state moulded by the ethic of grace.⁴⁷

Natural religion and ethics are the knowledge of God and obedience to the law of God. But supernatural religion, the supernatural aim and the supernatural law--in short, supernature--means the vision of God given through grace.

⁴⁵Ibid., pp. 257-258.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 266.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 269.

as he sees himself. In the last resort all ethics and all social philosophy in particular are now concerned with the mediation between nature, perfect or imperfect, and super-nature. The decalogue is not the Christian ethic. It is the same as the absolute natural law, and is an introductory and preparatory stage.⁴⁸ The real Christian ethic only becomes possible through the infused energies of sacramental grace.⁴⁹ This is still the standard of the Roman Catholic ethic:

Until the present day, therefore, the fundamental basis of the Catholic ethic still remains formally, alongside of the ecclesiastical theocracy, the principle of the scripturally acknowledged rational natural law, whose content is a conception of the natural law which is in harmony with the patriarchalism of the Old Testament and the conservatism of Aristotle; it thus regards the social reality of the Middle Ages, in its main features, as the expression of reason. The true Christian ethic, on the other hand, moves on the plane of the sacramental ethic of grace, and intervenes on the natural plane only through the all-embracing theocracy of the Church. Therefore the actual rules for life in the world still do not issue directly from the Christian ethos, but from the natural law, from Aristotle, the decalogue, and the Old Testament.⁵⁰

This was essential if the Church was to maintain both the ideal of the Christian ethos and its own universal recognition:

If the Christian ethical ideal is to be maintained at

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 263.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 264.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 270.

all as the supreme aim, and is to be brought to universal recognition, it will have to incorporate within itself the natural forms of life, and the ethical ideals of this life, and this will never be possible otherwise than by means of the idea of an ascending development, which ascends from the values of the life of this world to those of the transcendent realm.⁵¹

By these means, the doctrine of the later Middle Ages, and especially that of Thomism, was able to construct a uniform social philosophy, because it started from the idea of the actuality and necessity of a Christian unity of civilization.

The vital factor in this doctrine is the new conception of the law of nature, in which the difference between the absolute primitive state and the relative state of fallen human nature becomes less important, and in which the more positive emphasis is laid on aspects of healing and progress towards a higher ideal, than on the negative aspects of destruction and punishment.⁵²

This is the explanation of the medieval social philosophy which represents a Christian culture and a Christian society, and yet does not mean that society is based upon and moulded by directly Christian principles. From this standpoint it is easy to prove how the great social institutions--especially those of the family, the state, and society--could be controlled by the principles of a Christian social philosophy. In each case they were special forms of the realization of the fundamental theory, directed toward an

⁵¹Ibid., p. 277.

⁵²Ibid., p. 282.

end of natural law, which it behooved them to strive to attain as their special contribution to society. Their Christian character consists in the two following elements:

- 1) That the union between the individual and the community which takes place within them is conceived and molded in the organic and patriarchal sense; and that
- 2) the primary particular aim which is founded upon their basis in natural law is placed in a fixed relation to the central religious purpose, and thus with the all-embracing, inclusive unity of the Church and of the ecclesiastical authority.⁵³

But there were dissident factors in the development of the Church ethic in the Middle Ages. Chief of these was the sect movement. It is part of Troeltsch's thesis that from the very beginning the social doctrines of the Christian Church had a dualistic tendency which caused them to flow in two channels, conservative compromise and radical separation. The strict law of the scriptures, the radical law of nature, monasticism, and the theological theory of the primitive state there revealed themselves as motives and expressions of a second radical tendency which accompanied the compromise of the Church. This was the sect movement, which broke out afresh with great power in the central period of the Middle Ages. "Thus it was," says Troeltsch, "that the development of the sects alongside of the social doctrine of Thomism, which is the classic epitome of the ecclesiastical ethic, became the second classic

⁵³Ibid., p. 311.

form of the social doctrine of Christianity."⁵⁴

The word "sect," however, does not mean that these movements are undeveloped expressions of the church type; it stands for an independent sociological type of Christian thought.⁵⁵ "The all-important point is this: that both types are a logical result of the gospel, and only conjointly do they exhaust the whole range of its sociological influence, and thus also indirectly of its social results."⁵⁶ The gospel contains the idea of an objective possession of salvation in the knowledge and revelation of God, and in developing this idea it becomes the church. It contains, however, also the idea of an absolute personal religion and of an absolute personal fellowship, and in following out this idea it becomes a sect. The Waldensians in southern Europe, the Franciscans, the Poor Men of Lyons and the Poor Men of Lombardy in Italy, the Lollards in England, the Hussites in Bohemia, and various peasant risings are all examples of the sect movement in the Middle Ages.

Under their influence and that of the growth of town civilization and individualism the ecclesiastical civilization began to disintegrate in the late Middle Ages. But it was especially due to the influence of the sect type,

⁵⁴Ibid., pp. 329-330.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 338.

⁵⁶Ibid., pp. 340-341.

in which radical individualism and the radical ethic of love combined against the church type with its relative approval of civilization and the secularization of religious energies.⁵⁷

⁵⁷Ibid., pp. 378-379.

CHAPTER III

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SOCIOLOGY OF LUTHERANISM

Luther's Religious Thought and the Sociological Problem of Protestantism

Luther's new religious idea gave a new meaning to grace. Rome, too, had a doctrine of grace: of sacramental grace, of supernature, of a higher, mystical, and miraculous power, imparted by the hierarchy, entrusted to the Church, which has a double effect: the forgiveness of sins and the mystical elevation of humanity. The idea of law was easily combined with this idea of grace. Luther's new idea was therefore not merely the general re-emphasis upon grace, which makes a clean sweep of all compromise with legalism, but beyond that, it gave a new meaning to the idea of grace by giving a new meaning to the law. Not that the idea of the law was removed from its central position in Protestantism. It remained as a stimulus to repentance, and as the pre-supposition of faith and the gospel of grace. The essential element in this new conception of grace which gives to the law a different meaning and position from that it has in the Catholic idea of grace is this:

Grace is no longer a mystical miraculous substance, to be imparted through the sacraments, but a divine

temper of faith, conviction, spirit, knowledge, and trust which is to be appropriated; in the gospel and in the love and spirit of Christ towards mankind it can be discerned as the loving will of God which brings with it the forgiveness of sins.¹

This fundamental position contains, directly and indirectly, further implications. The first result is the reduction of the whole of religion to that which alone can be an object of faith and trust, that is, to that idea of God--evolved from the apostolic picture of Christ--which represents him as a gracious will, holy, forgiving sins, and thus leading men upwards into a higher life. This is an immense simplification in doctrine, and a new method of basing doctrine upon its conscious power to awaken faith and trust.²

The second result of Luther's teaching was that of religious individualism, that inwardness of communion with God which is independent of man or of a priesthood. This leads to the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, and to lay religion, to the renewal of the primitive Christian independence and autonomy of the knowledge of God effected by the Spirit.³ At this point, says Troeltsch,

¹Ernst Troeltsch, The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches, translated from the German by Olive Wyon, (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., New York: The Macmillan Co., 1931), II, 468.

²Ibid., p. 470.

³Ibid.

Luther came into touch with the corresponding tendencies in the sect movement, which were also derived from the Bible. "All that was actually discarded," he asserts, "was the idea of sacerdotal mediation; mediation through the Word, that is, through the Bible . . . is emphasized all the more strongly."⁴

The third conclusion to which this fundamental position leads is the principle of a pure spiritual ethic. This spiritual ethic leads to the acceptance of the world, to the disuse of monastic asceticism, to the new meaning given to the idea of the vocation or the calling. The "perfection" which results, which is the same for all, is still not the rigorism of the Christian law, as in the sect, but rather it means the "spiritual equality, in principle created by the blessedness of forgiveness, from which the 'doing of the 'new creature' issues freely."⁵ The real problem, however, is to overcome the world wherever we find it, and in the midst of the life of the world to free our hearts from the world and to live in a spirit of detachment. "There is no longer any room for self-chosen spheres of action, for forms of fellowship alongside of the life of the world, which claim to rise above it,"

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid., p. 472.

concludes Troeltsch.⁶

The main types of "calling," such as the calling of a house father, or of marriage, the calling to be a paternal ruler, or to the exercise of authority in general, are held to have been specially instituted by God himself. The whole system of callings is no longer a product of the lower sphere of nature, according to Luther via Troeltsch, which is still a sphere to be transcended, but, like the natural sphere itself, it is a direct and immediate institution of God.

From these premises, Troeltsch draws these conclusions:

To put it briefly: this system of vocational organization is a stable class system of a patriarchal kind, fixed by divine appointment in the Old Testament and by the law of nature, to which each individual belongs, in permanent categories, usually receiving at birth his assigned calling Thus this ethic of vocation within the life of the world certainly means an acceptance of the world, but this acceptance is an act of obedience and surrender rather than one of joy in God's world It is an asceticism which is in the world, yet not of it, which conquers the spirit of the world without fleeing from it.⁷

This is one of the main points of issue between Troeltsch and other commentators of Luther and his teaching, and will be treated at length in the next chapter.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid., pp. 473-474.

No room is left for compromise, adaptation, transitional processes, or evolution, as in Catholic dogma, in the doctrine of man and the conception of the world. In the doctrine of man the influence of the new ideas appears most clearly in the doctrine of the primitive state.

Here the idea of an ascent from natural to supernatural perfection has disappeared. In its stead we find the theory that the perfection of the primitive state consisted in a spirit of complete and filial trust in God as an inherent element in the essential nature of man. Sin, therefore, is the destruction of human nature, and redemption is the restoration of human nature to full trust in God within the natural order of life.

So far as the conception of the world is concerned, the natural consequence is the disappearance of the gradation idea. Matter and nature do not constitute a stage in the divine creation of the world which is more remote from the pure world of spirit; nature is the sphere appointed by the creator for the realization of ideal values, which were completely realized in the primitive state and which are restored by redemption.⁸

Last of all, the whole change of view in Protestantism is summed up and expressed in its idea of God

In his idea of God Luther discards scientific metaphysics and all attempts to reconcile the finite with the infinite; with resolute anthropomorphism this idea of God is conceived as the divine will. No longer are

⁸Ibid., p. 474.

⁹Ibid., p. 475.

the ideas of nature and supernature placed side by side, but their place is taken by the antitheses of the law and the gospel The method of harmonizing these elements is found in the atoning death of the God-man. The atonement, therefore, becomes the central doctrine of Protestantism, and the idea of vicarious achievement, discarded in every other connection, is here developed to its fullest extent.¹⁰

The sociological results of this religious transformation of Christianity were immediately apparent in the new conception of the Church.

In this connection, the decisive element is not the peculiar juridical form of the Lutheran conception of the Church but, primarily, it is the fundamental fact that, from the very outset, this whole intellectual outlook belongs, essentially, to the church type.¹¹

Luther's conception of the Church is extremely spiritual and idealistic, making the essence of the Church to consist in the Word, the sacrament, and the office of the ministry, and restricting it to a purely spiritual sphere of influence. "It is, however, always and supremely a 'church' conception. It is the Catholic theory of the Church, only purified and renewed."¹² The activity of the Church is the proclamation of the Word which creates faith.

This predominance of the church type, however, meant that all the essential sociological effects also appeared: It led first of all to the demand for the uniformity,

¹⁰Ibid., p. 476.

¹¹Ibid., p. 477.

¹²Ibid., p. 479.

unity, and universal dominion of the Church, which, in the impossibility of carrying through a thorough Reformation, either European or German, finally led to the establishment of united territorial churches. Secondly, this emphasis on universality led to the extension of the ecclesiastical ethic into the sphere of secular civilization and of the social order, to the acceptance of the general order of life which did not harmonize directly with the Christian moral ideal, but which was inevitable; and, finally, to the perpetuation of the fundamental conception of the lex naturae, which was the complement of the purely Christian ethic.¹³

If Luther's thinking led him to the Church type, it also led him to an investigation of truth and authority. In Catholicism this idea of truth was achieved through dogma and tradition, through the hierarchy and the sacraments. In Protestantism this central fact was the Word of the Scriptures, and the sacrament which was the sign and seal of the gospel. The Word which lay at the root of this conception should be, in Luther's great and free way of thinking, the activity of Christ--the Pauline and Johannine conception of Christ contained in the Bible, interpreted in the sense of the Nicene Creed and the Creed of Chalcedon, through the doctrine of the Trinity.¹⁴

Under this conception of the Word of God as absolute truth, the ministry of the Word becomes the means of organization. The hierarchy is not the support of the Church, the Word is. But this does not mean that Luther gave up

¹³Ibid., pp. 484-485.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 486.

the idea of the essential and vital unity of the Church. He did not. He regards it as so essential, that he can account for its breakdown only by regarding it as a sign of the beginning of the final throes of a dying era. Eventually the idea of a universal world-wide Church was replaced by the territorial church system, without, however, doing away with the idea of the universal Catholic Church, since wherever the ministry of the Word and the administration of the sacraments are practiced, even under very difficult forms, there is the Catholic Church.¹⁵

The territorial church system, therefore, finally secures the following elements:

The universal character of the Church, its claim to dominate the life of the world, the maintenance of "pure doctrine," and an ordered ministry on orthodox lines.¹⁶

All that Luther desired was to secure the kind offices of the various governments for the Church. But he also expected that the Word of God within these churches would be left entirely free. Luther's conception of the Church was obliged to adopt an element which was quite alien to his own thought, but which became logically necessary if the unity and universality of the Church were to be retained, that is, the compulsory supremacy of this uniform ecclesi-

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 488-489.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 489.

astical system. Luther was not a champion of religious toleration; the cause for which he fought was the freedom of the Word to exercise its purely spiritual influence without the aid of external compulsion.¹⁷ The Church was to exercise her function in freedom and in love, and in the face of opposition she was merely to warn and exhort. But in order to ensure that all citizens should be baptized and come under the control of the Church, the custom was introduced of uniting all civil rights with the exercise of the Christian religion, and in cases of permanent heresy the state intervened with its penalties, since heresy also is a breach in the social order.

Parallel with the development of this first logical outcome of the church type is the second result, namely, the steady development of an ethic which accepts the life of the world. This raises the question of the Protestant, specifically the Lutheran ethic, and compromise. In Luther's mind, Troeltsch admits, the attainment of a fundamental religious position was the one genuine moral imperative.¹⁸

Faith is the highest and the most real moral demand, and at the same time it is a gift of grace: this is the high paradox and the leading idea of the ethic of Luther. Conduct, however, flows from this naturally But this radical religious ethic, especially

¹⁷Ibid., p. 491.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 495.

in the earlier statements of Luther, is entirely remote from the whole sphere of reason, might, law, force, to which the Christian only submits because it all forms part of this sinful world, and because, as things are in this world, it is impossible to render loving service to one's neighbor without using these secular institutions.¹⁹

But, insists Troeltsch:

This stress upon free grace and human impotence leads Luther into an emphasis upon spiritual freedom and abandonment, which merges almost imperceptibly into a kind of quietism It is, or course, true that Luther believed that grace ought to bear fruit in a genuine Christian piety expressed in daily life, but he taught that divine grace is in no way dependent upon this result, and that in general, owing to the sinfulness of mankind, it is only very imperfectly realized.²⁰

The extent to which faith issues in works affects neither the quality of Christian piety nor the fact of personal salvation. Right in line with this, according to Troeltsch, Luther believed that any attempt to estimate the "state of grace" in individuals by the standard of radical Christianity would lead to the making of distinctions and divisions among Christians, to self-made agitations and sects, which would have the result of breaking up the unity of the Body of Christ. This could only culminate in the pride of the sectarians and the lovelessness of separation.²¹

This radical Christian ethic of the love of God, and

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 495-496.

²⁰Ibid., pp. 497-498.

²¹Ibid., p. 498.

of that love of the brethren which flows from the love of God, was now to constitute the ethic both of a national church and of an exclusively Christian society. If this were to be realized, however, the idea that a living faith would spontaneously generate a spiritual and moral order was felt to be inadequate.

Luther saw that a definite moral rule of life must be established, a Christian law of ethics, which could be held up to the masses as an ideal, which would also secure the very important factor of the incorporation of secular morality into the whole Christian order It is characteristic of Luther that he found the objective revelation of the moral law which manifested this inward impulse not in the Sermon on the Mount, but in the decalogue, which, again, in his mind, was identified with the natural moral consciousness or the natural law, which has been simply confirmed and interpreted by Jesus and the apostles. It was thus that the decalogue developed its characteristic absolute meaning within Protestantism, as the complete expression of the lex naturae, and of the Protestant ethic with which it was identified.²²

The decalogue was suitable for many reasons, but above all, for this, that "it provided the opportunity he sought for incorporating 'this world' morality and 'this world' institutions into his whole ethical scheme.

With this development of the Lutheran ethic Troeltsch sees an inevitable dualism:

When, however, the decalogue and the natural law had been renewed and interpreted by Christ, the purely religious aim of life and the purely religious fellowship of love emerges as the real Christian ideal, an ideal which concerns the inner life of the individual, along with the secular ethic of professional life, the

²²Ibid., pp. 503-504.

state, and society, to which man belongs either officially, or through being incorporated into the order of society and the state, with its marks of law and compulsion. This is the difficult aspect of the Lutheran ethic.²³

This was a dualism between an inward morality for the individual and an external "official" morality. Catholicism had solved this tension by its contrast between two stages-- between the lower stage of development of relative natural law and the genuinely Christian higher stage of development. The Lutheran solution was provided, not as in the medieval church by apportioning responsibility among various classes and groups for mutual and vicarious service, but by placing each individual in the midst of a dualistic ethic. "This dualism is then explained as due in part to the ordering and arrangement of God, in part to sin, and in part to the actual conditions of physical existence."²⁴

Troeltsch believes that this inconsistency of the Lutheran ethic has been overcome by Lutheranism's acceptance of the natural order of things as being essentially God's order.

The radical ethic of love disappears, and the ethic of obedience towards authority comes into prominence. Increasingly the Lutheran ethic is summed up in the following characteristic features: confidence in God founded on his grace, and love of one's neighbor which is exercised in the social duties of one's calling, combined with an obedient surrender to the

²³Ibid., p. 507.

²⁴Ibid., p. 508.

order of society created by the law of nature.²⁵

The compromise has become a more interior thing, and in the process it has become increasingly modified, since the world is accepted not so much as a sinful institution or as an order which, through sin, has obscured the light of reason, but as a direct and positive appointment by God. Joyful acceptance of the world then becomes patient endurance of the world, and Lutheranism, in particular, oscillates between these two extremes.²⁶

The Sociological Problem of Lutheranism

The ecclesiastical organization of Lutheranism is of prime importance because Lutheranism was based entirely upon the idea of an ecclesiastical civilization, forcibly dominated by religious ideas.²⁷ Although Lutheranism rejected the hierarchical church, enforced by directly ecclesiastical methods, the conception of a state church still remains the center of the social doctrines of Lutheranism. "In Lutheranism this idea was not simply part of its religious and ethical ideal; it was essential to its very existence."²⁸

²⁵Ibid., pp. 509-510.

²⁶Ibid., p. 510.

²⁷Ibid., p. 515.

²⁸Ibid., p. 516.

The center of the whole system is the specifically Lutheran doctrine of the Church. This conception, says Troeltsch, contains two main elements which control the Lutheran view as a whole:

1) The idea of the Church has been greatly spiritualized; this was Luther's intention, and in the main the Lutheran theologians maintained this point of view during the classic period of orthodox Lutheranism. 2) This entirely spiritualized Church, which does not desire any human organ of compulsion for the enforcement of the pure doctrine, and which neither is able nor desires to carry out its work of church discipline by any external method of compulsion which can be legally formulated, is, in spite of that, based entirely and wholly upon the idea of a fixed and rigid system of doctrine to which all consent, which alone has the power, in its purity and exclusiveness, to secure redemption from sin and from hell. This means that, in spite of her spiritual character, and in spite of her renunciation of the methods of law and compulsion as natural rights, the Church is still obliged to submit unconditionally to the external life of the political sphere which she dominates. Inconsistencies of this kind had existed within every previous theory of the Christian Church, but the tension which they caused never became so acute as in Lutheranism, and their mutual hostility has had a paralysing effect upon the whole course of Lutheran development.²⁹

Through the Scriptures Christ rules the Church. He achieves purely by his own spiritual influence all that the papacy, the priesthood, and the hierarchy, Roman Law and Roman compulsion, had achieved by external human methods.

If from the Catholic point of view the papacy is the extension of the incarnation of Christ, the living authority in doctrine and in jurisdiction, in Lutheranism the same thought is represented by the Word, through which, as in a living being capable of action,

²⁹ Ibid.

Christ himself is directly operative.³⁰

As for the administrative side of the Church, the Church was obliged to hand these matters over to others, since there were no divine provisions for them, and it regarded them as purely external and mechanical, of purely human interest. The Church trusted that the divine Spirit would operate to settle these questions as wisely as they could be answered from a purely human point of view. Thus it came about that it was only the ruling prince who had the duty of rendering this service to the Church. To that were added arguments based on natural law. The government protects the natural law (which is regarded as identical with the decalogue), and as a Christian government it has to maintain this natural law in its full sense, since it also includes the first table, which requires the true worship and the pure fear of God. "Thus as custos utriusque tabulae it is bound by natural law to support public worship, the pure doctrine, and the ecclesiastical jurisdiction."³¹

Thus the aim which was realized in Catholicism through a directly divine church order, Lutheranism, in its purely spiritualized form, stripped of every kind of hierarchical or sacerdotal organ, realized through the government and the civil administration, to which, however, precisely for that reason, there accrues a certain semi-divinity. The distinction between the

³⁰Ibid., p. 518.

³¹Ibid., p. 519.

temporal and the spiritual elements in this system is not a separation, but only a fresh aspect of their relationship; the state now serves the purely spiritual Church in a spirit of love and freedom, and by this service it dominates the Church which has no independent legal organ of its own.³²

But this much can be said: that the complicated church/state relationship achieved a social unity, in spite of its artificial construction.

The Lutheran ethic is of dual origin. Troeltsch says it is a dualism of love and grace on one hand, law and reason on the other. He credits the fundamental idea of this dualism to Luther, while commenting that Melancthon carried this dualistic tendency a step farther in the dualism of a philosophical and theological morality.³³ We will let Troeltsch speak for himself:

The Lutheran ethic consists primarily in the establishment of a religious relation with God, in that love to God which humbly, joyfully, and thankfully surrenders the self to him in prayer and self-discipline, and the outpouring of this love of God, which cannot give anything to God, upon one's neighbor . . . This means, then, in the second place, that "loving one's neighbor as oneself" implies that all the duties and tasks which life brings naturally in its train, especially those connected with the family, the state, the labor and vocational organizations, are to be filled with this spirit of love, which makes these forms into methods and means of expression of the Christian love of mankind.³⁴

³²Ibid., p. 521.

³³Ibid., p. 523.

³⁴Ibid., pp. 524-525.

This affects the way in which a Lutheran Christian views the law of God. It no longer appears so much as the law which effects conversion, maintains Troeltsch, but as "the interpretation and the description of the impulse towards activity which is set alongside of the bliss of justification by faith."³⁵

Troeltsch consistently asserts that this ethic, by laying a great deal of emphasis upon order, stability, and peace, "entirely obliterates in theory, and also modifies in practice, the fact of its connection with the severity of the law and the unrest caused by the struggle for existence."³⁶ He considers it, in short, a compromise. In fact, he considers it a compromise very similar to the compromise achieved by the Catholic ethic. In both instances the ethos of real life is only constructed with the additional aid of the range of ideas centering in natural law and of the ethical material of ancient philosophy. The original Lutheran ethic, he insists, was simply "the Aristotelian scholastic ethic, revived by the Stoics and by Cicero, and renewed by the Humanists, which in its scholastic form had been re-edited by Melancthon."³⁷ Its aim was to show how knowledge of this kind was useful

³⁵Ibid., p. 525.

³⁶Ibid., p. 526.

³⁷Ibid., p. 527.

in the following ways:

1) It was a preparation for repentance; 2) as justitia civilis, i.e. as a loyal external discipline emptied of all spiritual content, it helped to preserve order; 3) it provided the basis of reason for the idea of the existence of God and of the moral government of the world; and 4) finally, when this knowledge was inspired with a spiritual temper, it merged into the unity of the Christian idea of love.³⁸

This alone was the real "ethic" as early Lutheranism saw it. It is only the modern Lutherans, Troeltsch insists, who have transformed this subject into an independent "theological" ethic.

In the question of the Lutheran conception of natural law, it is Troeltsch's opinion that Luther struck out on a peculiar line of his own. From the very outset he explains the law of nature in an entirely conservative sense, which emphasizes solely the utilitarian expediency of the concrete order. In this order, society seems to have shaped itself by Providence in the natural development of history, and all order and welfare depend upon unconditional obedience towards the authorities which have come into being during the course of the historical process.³⁹

This interpretation glorifies power for its own sake, which in fallen humanity has become the essence of law; it therefore glorifies whatever authority may happen to be dominant at any given time. Even when this power is most scandalously abused its authority still holds good, and every act of resistance to this

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Ibid., p. 529.

authority destroys the very conception of the social order based on natural law, and thus destroys the foundation of society in general.⁴⁰

Because of Luther's fundamental regard for the natural law as the establishment of an unrestricted positive authority, effected by God through reason, no amount of experience of a refractory reality can shake him out of the belief that this authority is based upon reason and the divine will. This is why, says Troeltsch, he opposes every attempt to reconstruct society and mold it on rational lines, which is based on the interests and the reason of the isolated individual. "In his theory, therefore, the idea of a social contract naturally disappears."⁴¹ In spite of all the sinfulness and evil in the world, and in the governments of the world, "the fact remains that authority must not be resisted."⁴² It was at this point that medieval thinking had been uncertain. Luther knew no such uncertainty, asserts Troeltsch, but solved the dilemma by insistence upon a stable order based on natural law. It was a one-sided order, and was not always logically maintained, but it was at least a brand new attempt to solve the inconsistencies of medieval thinking on the problem of the natural law.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 550.

⁴² Ibid.

Troeltsch finds Luther's concept of the natural law to be God's activity in the world through reason. For that reason Luther likes to emphasize God as the founder of the institutions of natural law, and wherever it is possible, to try to find proofs of their direct divine appointment.⁴³

Luther, says Troeltsch, had a contempt for the masses. This, together with his rigid idea of original sin and his conception of the civil authority as the representative of divine punishment and reward, inclined him to extreme severity.⁴⁴ But at the same time, Troeltsch goes on, within the sphere of civil law, Luther desired to see the natural law administered with a leniency which takes all the various factors of motive, necessity, and circumstance into account.

In his view the guiding principle of the natural law is that we should do to everyone as we would like them to do to us. In this respect love is also the meaning of natural law, and is thus conformed to Christian morality. This leads him to demand that positive law should adjust itself to natural law and to the Christian ideal, with which, in the last resort, it is identical.⁴⁵

Troeltsch understands Luther's stand on natural law and authority to be basically "a Christian piety strongly

⁴³Ibid., p. 534.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 533.

⁴⁵Ibid.

tinged with patriarchalism," which distinguished it very clearly from the virile individualism and the corresponding legal consciousness of Calvinism.⁴⁶

But it was Melancthon, concedes Troeltsch, who was the Protestant doctor of natural law.

Melancthon laid greater emphasis upon the philosophical character of natural law, and he strove so hard for reconciliation that the Lutheran tension between the law and Christianity, between reason and revelation, was ultimately merged in the idea of a friendly harmony which has been divinely ordained. From that time forward faith in this harmony, and the ideal of such an accord between natural assumptions and spiritual inspiration, became a peculiar feature of Lutheranism.⁴⁷

Melancthon, furthermore, claims that the decalogue is valid, not as the Jewish law, but as the product of natural law, and, therefore, that the reasonable Roman law is also the law for Christians. All this, concludes Troeltsch, shows "that Melancthon was inclined to be more rationalistic than Luther."⁴⁸

As Lutheranism developed, the elements of natural law in the theory of jurisprudence were thrust more and more into the background, and were finally reduced to the bare statement of the divine guidance of reason in the production of political authority.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 534.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 535.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 536.

The more the school of Grotius developed a purely rational theory of natural law, severed from theology, the more stoutly the Lutherans maintained this theory of divine appointment; they assert that although this "divine appointment" takes place indirectly, it is divine all the same. The result is that they summarize their theory in this statement: the powers that be, just as they are, come from God.⁴⁹

Thus in classical Lutheranism, sums up Troeltsch, there is a voluntary agreement between the authorities in Church and state, in order that, together, they may realize the religious end of Christian society.

It represents the fusion of the natural, philosophical, and secular ethic with the biblical, supernatural, and spiritual ethic, blending into a whole way of life, in which the natural forms of life are to be permeated with the religious spirit of love. This constitutes a uniform system of Christian civilization, like that of the Catholicism of the Middle Ages. Similarly, this social system possesses the ideal of a uniform sociological fundamental theory; only, since the basis and meaning of the uniform system of life are now different, the sociological fundamental theory of Lutheranism is also different. This difference is obvious: the fundamental theory of Lutheranism has not been constructed upon the conception of the organism.⁵⁰

This leads us over to the next consideration, which ✓ is the social theory of Lutheranism. Troeltsch concludes from the premise stated above, that Lutheranism has not been constructed upon the conception of the organism, that in Lutheranism, therefore, Christian individualism becomes purely subjective, with no legal claim on society or on

⁴⁹Ibid., pp. 537-538.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 539.

the Church, without any power of external realization. At bottom, accordingly, Lutheran individualism "has no sense of the need for fellowship, since it is only out of love that it submits to the life of the community at all."⁵¹

Thus Lutheran Christian individualism has retired behind the line of battle of all external events and outward activity, into a purely personal spirituality, into the citadel of a freedom which no events of the external order can touch, a position so impregnable that neither joy nor sorrow, the world or society can capture it. This spirituality is based on nothing save the "Word," which is guaranteed by the Church; it therefore regards the Church simply as the herald of the Word, endowed with a purely spiritual miraculous converting power; it has no conception of the Church as an ethical organization of Christendom as a whole.⁵²

But, because this Christian individualism possesses no organ by which it can either express its own thoughts or secure its own existence, "its influence on the outside world is nil."⁵³

To the extent, however, in which the Christian spirit does attempt to permeate the natural institutions of ordinary life, it does not appear outwardly as a fellowship of individuals, formed on a religious basis, but as a spirit which seeks to absorb the whole complex of secular institutions and social life into love; this spirit of love leads the Christian to submit unconditionally to the social order which had been established by God and by reason for the good of the whole; and it regards the family, the state, society in general, and all labor merely as methods of realizing and exercising the Christian spirit of love.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 540.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Ibid.

and obedience. Thus, when we recall the two elements of the fundamental theory of Catholicism, the organic and the patriarchal elements, we see that here the organic aspect has entirely disappeared.⁵⁴

This sentence of Troeltsch's demonstrates his fundamental conclusions regarding the Lutheran ethic:

This fundamental idea, however, of love filling the institutions of social life arising from the natural law did not develop quite smoothly. For the forms of social life which have arisen out of natural law are still meant to serve the ends of natural life, and their independent existence becomes increasingly obvious the more one enters into practical life. It then becomes clear that it is impossible to absorb these natural ends purely into the religious purpose of life.⁵⁵

From this it is easy to see how he concludes that the final result was "a terrible spiritual and intellectual sterility, which formed a glaring contrast to the social doctrines of Catholicism and of Calvinism."⁵⁶ It comes as no surprise to Troeltsch, then, that when Lutheranism was faced by the whole new world of Western thought in the eighteenth century, its social theory broke down completely.

In Lutheranism, as in the Catholic tradition, the family forms the starting point of all social development. The family forms the starting point of government, of economics, of the Church, of all social organizations. The family is an expression of the way in which the law of

⁵⁴Ibid., pp. 540-541.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 543.

⁵⁶Ibid.

nature regulates and solves the sociological problems which arise out of the relation between the sexes. From the point of view of the natural law the aim of the family is the ordered union of the sexes, the ordered procreation of children, and the household, which becomes the heart of all economic activity.⁵⁷ This relationship in the family becomes for Lutheranism the grounds for the most primary and elementary religious exercise of love.

This means that the sex ethic of Protestantism is very different from that of Catholicism, which began with a fundamentally ascetic spirit. Luther's own marriage, asserts Troeltsch, was the proclamation of a principle of sex ethics which regarded the sex life as something normal, and which gave it an ethical character, making it a means of the most vital ethical and religious functions for all believers.⁵⁸ But marriage in Lutheranism, says Troeltsch, as the organization of sensuality instituted by God and reason, is still at bottom only a "frenum et medicina peccati, a concession to sin, which God winks at, and the sin which marriage inevitably incurs he restricts and heals."⁵⁹

Thus in this conception of the family the various

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 545.

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Ibid., pp. 546-547.

constituent elements were in no way fully combined into a unity. Luther also was quite conscious of the fact that his marriage was a high one, far removed from the actualities of life. He blamed sin for this discrepancy, but has no doubt that the ideal can be realized.

The Lutheran conception of the state, according to Troeltsch, presents the same characteristics as that of the family. It is the product of reason. Reason dictates that its aims are to be the preservation of external discipline and order, and the securing of human well-being. Authority forms its most peculiar attribute, which it always preserves, and which may not be destroyed by any of its subjects.⁶⁰ It is the duty of the state to use this authority according to the divine law of nature and for the purpose of reason. If the powers that be refuse to observe this law, just as in scholasticism, they are to be regarded as tyrants, who may be deposed from their office. According to Luther, though, passive resistance, or exile are the only forms of resistance which are legitimate.

Since the state has to use forceful measures to maintain itself and its authority, it violated the pure Christian ideal of a pure fellowship of love, apart from state or law. This implies that the state--in spite of its divine character and its basis in reason--is still only an

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 546.

institution rendered necessary by and against sin. It is, therefore, "a product of the merely relative natural law, reacting against sin under the conditions of the fallen state."⁶¹ Faced by these facts, and the implications that go with them, such as refusing civil service, "Luther appeals with great emphasis to the belief that the powers that be are ordained by God, and confirmed in their positions by him."⁶² Furthermore, states Troeltsch:

It is at this point that Luther inserts the most characteristic and remarkable tenet in his whole system of ethics, the distinction between private and public morality, in which, in his own way, he had solved the great problem which had exercised the minds and hearts of the Christian thinkers of an earlier era.⁶³

From this point of view war also is justified. It may only be waged by the civil authorities, for secular purposes, as part of its official duty. But it must always be waged in a spirit of humility. This excludes the idea of crusades and holy wars. This position excludes all specific political thought and activity, and includes the thought that all who take part in such a "just" war have the right moral and Christian spirit. "This," says Troeltsch, "is an extremely naive kind of political idea,"⁶⁴

⁶¹Ibid., p. 549.

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³Ibid., p. 550.

⁶⁴Ibid.

for it leads to the conclusion that political alliances and treaties are an affront to a country's trustful dependence upon God.

The state takes on a new aspect when it is controlled by a Christian government. For then it is no longer merely an institution based on divine and natural law through the order of creation, but it is one of the forms used for the realization of the Christian fellowship of love and redemption. Then it becomes the duty of the government, as a service of love, to undertake the education and preservation of society, Christian unity of faith, discipline, and order, and also to care for the Word of God, for purity and for the prosperity of the Church.⁶⁵ This, says Troeltsch, is another transplanted Augustinian idea, just as the Lutheran idea of the family is essentially Augustinian. For this concept of the state is a theocracy. It is not a hierarchy, but a free agreement in love between the purely spiritual Church built upon the Word, and the secular authority, freely serving the Church, receiving voluntary advice from the theologians.⁶⁶ "It is quite clear," to quote Troeltsch, "that this ideal of the state is super-idealistic, almost utopian, in a Christian sense."⁶⁷ This

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 551.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 552.

⁶⁷Ibid.

was due, though, not to Luther's lack of political acumen, but to the inherent religious idea itself, which cannot be combined with the political spirit.

Troeltsch believes that this Lutheran conception of the state has had definite effects in modern times:

In the Lutheranism of more recent times the tension between public and private morality disappeared more and more, and there arose that type which is usually described as Lutheran: that is, unconditional obedience towards the central government, and the subordinate officials, both of whom represent God, and only hold their office by virtue of God's permission; the belief that these authorities are based on natural and divine law, which appear more and more as the fundamental laws of a true Christian society, and which cooperate without difficulty; the duty of the government to look after all secular and natural affairs, and, so far as it is possible, with its secular means, and in agreement with the ecclesiastical government, also to promote the Christian virtues; the preservation of external peace at any price, and of internal peace by a thorough guardianship over the restricted understanding of its subjects.⁶⁸

The pessimism and idealism of original Lutheranism have disappeared, and the doctrine of society bears the traces of a hearty and inwardly strong, but homely and commonplace, paternal government.

All the characteristic features of the medieval economic ethic reappear in Lutheranism. Like the state and the institution of marriage, labor is a remedium peccati. It belongs only to the relative natural law of the fallen state, and serves the ends of punishment and discipline.

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 553.

Essentially, therefore, its significance is ascetic.

The economic order consists essentially in this: to live within one's own class, according to the social standards of that class, and to regard it as a just claim on the government to be protected by it within this order. It is against all law, both natural and divine, to wish to rise in the world, to break through existing institutions on one's own free initiative, to agitate and destroy society by individual efforts, to improve one's manner of life, or to improve one's social position.⁶⁹

The forms of social organization which ought to be maintained, and which, above all, have a right to be protected and morally recognized, are the classes which live nearest to the natural order: farmers, officials and soldiers, workmen, servants, and merchants. The Christian sanction for this natural economic ethic consists in this: "obedient service in the callings which have just been specified comes to be considered the first duty of a Christian, and the true and proper sphere for exercising the love of one's neighbor."⁷⁰

Troeltsch passes this judgment on the Lutheran economic ethic:

In itself, however, the spirit of the economic ethic of Lutheranism was thoroughly reactionary: it was a combination of natural and divine law; it urged contentment with the simplest conditions, and a toleration of the existence minimum according to one's class, accompanied at the same time by the readiness, in case of need, to renounce the right of holding property, a right which was only introduced by

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 555.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 557.

sin.⁷¹

The difference between Luther and the conservatives of the present day, however, lies in this: "Luther had in mind essentially ethical and religious standards alone; class feeling did not enter into the question at all."⁷² From his naive point of view, the changes being made in society were the work of the Devil. Luther, says Troeltsch, could not imagine that the universal general changes in the world situation might also cause changes in the economic and ethical sphere, and this is why he summoned the world back to the natural and divine law.

The whole social ideal of Luther--the organization and construction of society in general--is finally explained by political and economic and ethical ideas.

As in medieval Catholicism, it was the ideal of the social hierarchy, as a "cosmos of callings;" the only difference is that the duty of the "calling" is now extended to all, which involves the direct incorporation of the idea of "the calling" into the very heart of Christian ethics.⁷³

The reason for the emphasis upon "callings," which result in a static view of society, is perfectly clear in Troeltsch's thinking.

The social hierarchy does away with competition, so far as that is possible in the fallen state, and in

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²Ibid., p. 560.

⁷³Ibid., p. 561.

so doing it harmonizes both with the ideal of love, and with the ideal of natural law which aims at law and order.⁷⁴

Eventually the Lutheran theory leads to mercantilism, in Troeltsch's opinion, since

where the good of the community is concerned, the government is permitted to do that which is forbidden to the individual, that is, to gain an increase of property and profit, to initiate new industrial enterprises, monopolies and royalties, immunities, and alterations in the social structure and its compulsory character.⁷⁵

Next Troeltsch raises this question: "To what extent did Lutheranism attempt to mold society according to Christian ideals, or to introduce a scheme of social reform?"⁷⁶ Although Lutheranism has existed during an amazingly complex social history, the answer is simple. The simplicity of the answer is due to the fact that down to the present time the Lutheran position is based essentially upon the religious theory of the purely spiritual nature and "inwardness" of the Church, while all external secular matters are handed over to reason, to the ruling princes, to the civil authority. But, the Lutheran policy of social reform through the state fell victim to the theories of the modern state, which no longer feels itself to be the secular aspect of the organism that is Christian society.

⁷⁴Ibid.

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 562.

⁷⁶Ibid.

"This was the beginning of the social impotence of Lutheranism, in so far as it has not adopted Calvinistic and modern ideas," is the judgment of Troeltsch.⁷⁷ Under the influence of pietism, Lutheranism returned to the religious-social policy of charity, without the glorification of mendicancy. Inner missions were developed. Orthodox ecclesiastical Lutheranism has only taken part in this movement in a rather hesitating way, but it has today finally become fairly sympathetic to it as a whole.⁷⁸ "Thus, down to the present time, the Lutheran Church has never advanced farther than the renewed ideal of charity; it has never made any effort to initiate a real social transformation at all."⁷⁹

As to the relationship between Lutheranism and general culture, the first point to clear up is the connection between the social doctrines of Lutheranism and the existing political and social conditions of that time. Troeltsch is sure that "so far as the actual ideal is concerned which floated before the minds of Lutheran thinkers, we must give a directly negative reply to this question."⁸⁰ Whenever, therefore, the social doctrines of Lutheranism are treated

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 563.

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 567.

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 568.

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 569.

solely as the religious sanction of the existing situation, as often happens in orthodox Lutheranism, according to Troeltsch, this always means that Lutheran thought has been weakened and despiritualized.⁸¹

It is more difficult to answer the opposite question: What influence has Lutheranism had upon social history?

"In itself," states Troeltsch, "the late medieval tendency in the development of the state and the general social classification was not altered by Lutheranism."⁸² Its political influence, however, was more central. Lutheranism did not adopt a new ideal of the state; it did not even create a new state. But, by its renunciation of ecclesiastical independence, by its deification of the government and its loyal passivity, it provided a favorable setting for the development of the territorial state. As for its service to the development of the modern state, Troeltsch says this:

Its only service to the actual modern state has been to encourage the spirit of absolutism; once that was supreme, however, it became strong enough to strike out on a modern line of its own, and it has thus gone far beyond the Lutheran principles of peace, protection, and punishment based on natural law as well as the duty of the government to promote Christian charity.⁸³

⁸¹Ibid., p. 570.

⁸²Ibid., p. 572.

⁸³Ibid.

The influence of Lutheranism in the economic sphere has been equally indirect. "Lutheranism opposed the modern development of the state [in economics] only one degree less ardently than Catholicism," is the conclusion of Troeltsch.⁸⁴ As far as its main social tendencies are concerned, and its theoretical conception of society, Lutheranism has always represented the principle of patriarchalism and conservatism. That the Lutheran countries, along with the other Protestant countries, developed economically and politically the way they did, is not the primary responsibility of their religious bases, however important these may be in particular instances.

Troeltsch quotes this rule as a general index of the Lutheran social ideal: "Everywhere Lutheranism came under the influence of the dominant authority."⁸⁵ Thus in Central and North Germany, where absolutism and the system of manorial estates prevailed, it developed the loyal spirit which characterizes the nationalist spirit.⁸⁶ In the imperial towns it glorified aristocratic-republican rule. In Wuertemberg, where there was no corresponding nobility, it even fused with the bourgeois and peasant democratic ideas. In the military national state of Sweden

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 573.

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 574.

⁸⁶Troeltsch uses the term Ostalbierstum here.

it justified the aggressive policy of Gustavus Adolphus, and in the class struggles in Austria it justified the rise of the Lutheran nobility. In Denmark and Norway it found no difficulty in adjusting itself to a firmly established peasant democracy. In America, "the most orthodox Lutheranism one can imagine flourishes under the wing of democracy."⁸⁷ Troeltsch sums up:

From the political and social point of view the significance of Lutheranism for the modern history of civilization lies in its connection with the reactionary parties; from the religious and scientific standpoint its significance lies in the development of a philosophical theology, which is blended with a religious mysticism and "inward" spirituality, but which, from the ethical point of view, is quite remote from the problems of modern political and social life.⁸⁸

And again:

Neither in theory nor in its attitude to life does it [Lutheranism] possess a systematic ethic. Again and again Lutheranism casts aside its asceticism (which it also possesses as the corollary of the doctrine of original sin), and gives itself up to repose in the blessedness of the divine mercy, and to the thankful enjoyment of divine gifts in all that is good and beautiful, and whenever it becomes dubious about the world and about sin it withdraws into the refuge of its inner happiness of justification through faith.⁸⁹

⁸⁷Ibid., p. 575.

⁸⁸Ibid., p. 577.

⁸⁹Ibid., p. 808.

The Alternatives to Lutheranism within Protestantism

Calvinism is the first and most important alternative to Lutheranism within Protestantism.

The essential differences lie within the sphere of the idea of God, of the fundamental, religious, and ethical attitude which that involves, and finally in the sphere of the peculiar conception of social duty which this implies.⁹⁰

This different doctrine of God has two particular results which differ from Lutheranism, namely, the doctrine of predestination which, in Calvinism expresses the character of God as absolute sovereign will much more than in Lutheranism, and the difference in emphasis in the doctrine of justification. In Lutheranism justification means a quietistic repose in thankful happiness, says Troeltsch, while in Calvinism it means a method of activity and a spur to action.⁹¹ In general, Calvinism is characterized by a greater reforming radicalism. This is due to the fact that "Calvinism sought to renew the whole of Christianity, in doctrine and the Church, in ethics and in dogma, solely through the Bible," plus its doctrine of election.⁹²

Calvinism developed a Christian socialism, which does

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 581.

⁹¹Ibid., p. 584.

⁹²Ibid., p. 587.

not isolate "the religious element over against the other elements, like Lutheranism."⁹³ Calvinism is quite different from Lutheranism in its attitude toward the world:

Lutheranism depreciated this world, mourning over it as a "vale of tears," but so far as everything else was concerned the Lutheran, happy in the assurance of justification, and nourished by the presence of Christ in the sacraments, let things remain as they were, quite happy and confident, accepting the world as he found it, exhibiting Christian love in faithfulness to the duties of his calling, leaving results to God, and incidentally thankfully rejoicing in the divine glory of creation which breaks through the shadows cast by this sinful world.⁹⁴

The Calvinist, on the other hand, finds it impossible to deny the world in theory and enjoy it in practice. This lack of system is contrary to his reflective and logical mind. He cannot leave the world alone in all its horror and comfort himself with the thought of a "finished salvation." That kind of quietism is totally opposed to his impulse towards activity.

Calvinism, therefore, creates an intramundane asceticism which logically and comprehensively recognizes all secular means, but which reduces them to means only, without any value in themselves, in order that by the use of all the means available the holy community may be created.⁹⁵

Calvinism developed its most characteristic and far-reaching aspects when it developed from primitive Calvin-

⁹³Ibid., p. 602.

⁹⁴Ibid., p. 606.

⁹⁵Ibid., p. 607.

ism to neo-Calvinism. Neo-Calvinism is marked by its free church system, and its accompanying phenomena of democracy and liberalism, as well as with the pietistic rigorism of a strong self-controlled individualism, very utilitarian in secular affairs. This has removed it very far away from Lutheranism, which was still quite close to primitive Calvinism.

Within Lutheranism and Calvinism, therefore, the Christian ethic has developed in diametrically opposite directions. In German Prussia, Lutheranism has become the support of the conservative, aristocratic, legal positivist, and compulsory orthodox order of life, and develops in its genuine adherents the Christian virtues of an inwardness which is detached from the world, along with those of submission, patience, reverence, kindly care for others, and conservative endurance. Calvinism, on the contrary, has become a Christian intensification of the ideas of democracy and liberalism, and it produces the virtues of independence, love of liberty, love of humanity, and of Christian social reform.⁹⁶

The great desire of the sects was to implement the ethics of the Sermon on the Mount. Luther admitted that these were the genuine Christian ethics, but, according to Troeltsch's analysis, Luther had to fall back on a second, or "official" morality, based on the decalogue and divine natural law, in order to establish the Church among people living under conditions imposed by the state of original sin. Calvin adopted the sect ideal of the holy community, and with it the methods of realizing this ideal,

⁹⁶Ibid., pp. 688-689.

and he applied this ideal to a whole territorial and national church.⁹⁷ This could not be carried out in practice for long with such large groups, but at any rate it demonstrates Calvinism's close affinity with the sect movement, an affinity which was closer than that of Lutheranism.

Pietism was a sect movement within the Lutheran Church. In the spirit of Lutheranism it accepted the existing social order of the state; the idea of Christianizing the social order did not occur to it.

Pietism teaches that secular business and interests have no intrinsic value of their own; the Christian man takes part in them as the "Lord's steward," simply for the purposes of civil life, and of the "Kingdom of God." Pietism does not seek to reform the world; it simply gathers "earnest Christians" together into a party within the Church, and seeks to convert the heathen; this all shows how indifferent it is to question of social reform Pietism is, in fact, a revivalist form of Christianity, fitted to meet the needs of small groups, which seeks and finds its support in the territorial church, while it leaves the world and secular civilization severely alone.⁹⁸

Christian socialism is yet another sect movement in Protestantism. It is modern, and seems to contain many of Troeltsch's own ideas. He comments:

Taught by the modern science of the state and of society, and by the experiences of everyday life, Christian socialism sees clearly one thing which Calvinism (which was moving steadily in the direction of Chris-

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 694.

⁹⁸ Ibid., pp. 718-719.

tian socialism) did not see: that the possibility of a spiritual and ethical development depends entirely upon the substructure of a healthy collective social constitution, and that spiritual factors are very closely connected with physical and economic factors The fundamental distinctions within the movement, which expresses itself very differently among Catholics, Calvinists, Lutherans, and Free Protestants, and which above all has greatly agitated the Lutheran Church, cannot be described here. This point alone must be emphasized: with this movement all the interior problems of the Christian ethic and of that Stoic idealism which is so closely connected with it, have been reawakened.⁹⁹

Mysticism is the third alternative to Lutheranism ✓ within Protestantism. This Protestant mysticism also carries forward pre-Reformation ideas and tendencies, like the sect, but it is far more closely connected with Luther's original main ideas, and is therefore still more strongly rooted within Protestantism.¹⁰⁰ Mysticism has its peculiar attraction for Lutheranism in this, says Troeltsch, that Lutheranism holds to the doctrine of the present happiness of those whom Christ has set free.¹⁰¹

Troeltsch concludes that "the idea of the sect on the whole belongs to Calvinism, while mysticism is more at home within Lutheranism."¹⁰² He furthermore sees Lutheranism being influenced by ascetic Protestantism to the

⁹⁹Ibid., pp. 726-728.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., p. 730.

¹⁰¹Ibid., p. 740.

¹⁰²Ibid., p. 799.

extent that it is being slowly drawn into the forward march of the Protestant social doctrines. "This process of development will increase when, as we may expect with certainty, it is no longer supported by the state."¹⁰³

¹⁰³Ibid., p. 819.

CHAPTER IV

AN EVALUATION OF TROELTSCH'S SOCIOLOGY OF LUTHERANISM

Natural Law

The concept of the natural law is of primary importance in Troeltsch's reconstruction of Luther's and the Lutheran ethic. Troeltsch emphasizes the role of the natural law, not only in his treatment of the sociology of Lutheranism, but also in his study of the ethics of all Christendom. It is a fundamental thesis of Troeltsch that the Stoic natural law was assimilated by the early Church into its own ethic in order to establish a means of contact with the world. This, asserts Troeltsch, was a compromise with the gospel ethic. But this compromise was necessary for the Church to develop as an institution among institutions, as a state within a state. It was in this way that the Church became the great influence it was in the world. The difference, in Troeltsch's definition, between a church and a sect is that a church has compromised its ethic with the world's ethic, while the sect persists in a rigorous application of the ethics of the Sermon on the Mount. Brunner comments that although Troeltsch's conception of the compromise is unsatisfactory as a solution of the problem, it has been most fruitful as

a question.¹ Fruitful or not, Troeltsch has raised the question of the natural law to a level where it has attracted wide attention. Our concern is with his treatment of the relationship of the natural law to Luther's thinking, primarily, and then to the thinking of Melancthon by way of contrast.

Troeltsch maintains that Luther makes a distinction between the absolute and relative natural laws. This distinction is very basic in Troeltsch's development, and has a heavy bearing on his analysis of Luther's doctrines of the calling and of the two kingdoms. Troeltsch believes that Luther made a distinction between the absolute natural law, which corresponds to the first table of the decalogue, and the relative natural law, which corresponds to the laws of society, and the second table of the decalogue. It is only in this way, says Troeltsch, that Luther was able to preserve the essential characteristics of a church, rather than swinging all the way over to the sect ideal. This would have been an easy alternative, since Luther incorporated many sect characteristics into his thinking, especially in his early reform action.

That Luther ever made such a distinction is strongly denied by his chief critics. First in importance among

¹Emil Brunner, The Divine Imperative (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1947), p. 613.

these opponents of Troeltsch is Karl Holl, whose Gesammelte Aufsätze, I, Luther, takes first place among the many replies to Troeltsch.² Holl defends Luther's position on the natural law as being unified and consistent, while he labels Troeltsch's position as ambiguous. Troeltsch, says Holl, treats Luther's conception of the natural law in two different ways himself: 1) as the unchangeable, factual, nature relationship, that is, the conditions produced by nature, and 2) as the consciousness of a moral law, a moral imperative innate in man.³ This moral imperative is, presumably, dictated by these natural conditions. But Luther nowhere equates the natural law with any "conditions" produced by nature or by reason. Certainly Luther knows of a natural law, and it is important for him. But it is for him a divine imperative of love, and not a rational imperative of morality. That the two can, and often do, agree, is beside the point, even if for the Stoics they were one and the same thing.

Troeltsch makes quite a point out of the differences between the decalogue and the sermon on the mount. He declares that Luther interpreted the sermon on the mount on the basis of the decalogue, and accordingly, actually re-

²Karl Holl, Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kirchengeschichte, I, Luther (Tuebingen: Verlag von J. C. B. Mohr, 1948).

³Ibid., p. 243 f.

jected the ethics of the Sermon on the Mount. Holl insists that this is one of the instances where it is plainly evident that Troeltsch does not base his judgment on original sources, but rather under the influence of his firmly fixed preconceived conceptions.⁴ Holl says that Luther does not interpret the sermon on the mount in terms of the decalogue, but the decalogue in terms of the Sermon on the Mount. He cites the Small Catechism as proof, together with a quote from Luther, made in 1535, where he speaks of a "new decalogue."⁵ Troeltsch quotes from the "Auslegung der Bergpredigt" of 1532 to support his point. Holl points out that the editors of the Weimar edition of Luther's works, XXXII, say that the origin of this "Auslegung" is unknown.⁶ Brunner, to make the picture complete, disagrees with Holl on this point:

I cannot understand how it is that Holl, in opposition to Troeltsch's views, wishes to deny this fact; he supports this statement by saying that the passage upon which Troeltsch bases his opinion is not a genuine Luther passage. This seems quite impossible to believe, since Luther's writings contain so many passages with a similar meaning.⁷

Troeltsch is interested in establishing this point, for he concludes from it, among other things, that Luther

⁴Ibid., p. 248 f.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Brunner, op. cit., p. 626.

set the stage for the development of the decalogue as the expression in full of the natural law, which came to have absolute meaning within Protestantism then.⁸ But adopting the decalogue as the expression of natural law in favor of the Sermon on the Mount with its sterner ethic, means, for Troeltsch, that Luther compromised the ethic of the gospel. He does not find fault with this, in itself, since he believes that Luther had to do it in order to maintain the Church as a church and not as a sect. He merely observes that Luther was interested enough in the church form of Christendom to preserve the essential characteristics of a church at this crucial period of church history. This is commendable from Troeltsch's point of view, for this meant that Luther was willing to meet the world's ethic by a compromise. This, as stated above, was what the Church had done, by and large, ever since the very earliest days of its existence.

The fundamental criticism levelled against Troeltsch is that he simply cannot understand Luther's thinking on the operation of the law of love. In short, he fails to make the distinctively Lutheran separation of law and gospel. Troeltsch looks to Luther for some sort of systematized scheme or arrangement which will outline ideal be-

⁸ Philip S. Watson, Let God Be God!: An Interpretation of the Theology of Martin Luther (Philadelphia: The Muhlenberg Press, 1949), p. 110 f.

havior for the Christian based on the decalogue as the fullest expression of the natural law. This way, according to Troeltsch, Luther could accept those elements of the evangelical ethic which were conformable to the decalogue, and reject the rest as remnants of the absolute natural law. Both elements were to be obeyed, but the absolute natural law can only be followed in the most intimate personal relationships between Christians, while the relative natural law, as expressed in the decalogue, was to be the basis for morality in society as a whole. So it is that Troeltsch came to accuse Luther of teaching a dual morality (eine Doppeltessittlichkeit), with an "official morality and a personal morality." This will be discussed more thoroughly under the next heading.

Troeltsch's critics all take issue with him at this point. Holl quotes Luther: "Denn das ist auch ein beruff, der aus dem gesetz der liebe her quillet." He then remarks himself: "Aus dem Gesetz der Liebe, nicht aus der lex naturae im Sinn von M. Weber und Troeltsch!"⁹ The law of love is not a systematized thing, and Betcke points out that "die Aufloesung dieser Spannung [zwischen Naturgesetz und Dekalog] hat Luther nicht in einem Schema gesucht, sondern sie der Gewissensentscheidung des Einzelnen

⁹Holl, op. cit., p. 251.

ueberlassen."¹⁰

Watson insists on a solid connection between Luther's basic religious insights and Luther's ethics, and in this he is joined by Holl and Brunner. Watson says this:

Now it is precisely in virtue of the divine confrontation of man, as we have seen, that man possesses such natural knowledge of God as he has; and this knowledge includes a consciousness of the "natural law," which is nothing else but God's unalterable will of love. The natural law is not conceived by Luther as a part, so to speak, of the inward, psychological furniture of human nature, but as something given in and with the "theological conscience," that is, the awareness of being confronted, with a mediated immediacy, by the living God himself . . . For Luther there is only one ethical principle--the divine will of love. If this is called the natural law, it is natural, ultimately, in the same sense as the God of love is for Luther the "natural God."¹¹

Holl, insisting on Luther's unified ethical conception, says:

Aber Luther hat eine einheitliche Auffassung erreicht. Allerdings gelten bei ihm fuer das sittliche Handeln zwei Beziehungspunkte. Es ist zugleich eingestellt auf das oberste Gebot der Liebe, dessen Anerkennung im Gottesverhaeltnis begruendet ist, und auf die der tatsaechlichen Beschaffenheit der Welt und der Menschheit entsprechenden Ordnungen des Weltlebens.¹²

Again, note how Holl connects the commandment of love to the redemptive relationship to God through Jesus Christ. This, he insists, is primary with Luther. But this does

¹⁰Werner Betcke, Luthers Sozialethik (Guetersloh: Verlag C. Bertelsmann, 1934), p. 116.

¹¹Watson, op. cit., p. 112 f.

¹²Holl, op. cit., p. 282.

not preclude the ordinances of the world, which are an essential part of the world and can accordingly be termed natural law. But they have no significance for the Christian apart from the first consideration, which is the law of love.

The ordinances of the world mean very much to Luther. They are, in Toernvall's estimation "much more than God-given forms for the virtue of man. They are in themselves divine virtue. They are, to use another word, creation."¹³ But these forms must be filled with the law of love. Holl expresses this nicely with his treatment of form and freedom in natural law:

Beim wirklichen Christen werden "Freiheit und Form" fuer ihn eins, so dass die Form nicht die Freiheit ertoetet und die Freiheit nie zur Formlosigkeit ausartet. Die gottbestimmte Freiheit wird auch beim kuehnsten Handeln notwendig. Form, weil Gottes Wollen immer Richtung und Grenze gibt. Umgekehrt betaetigt sich die Freiheit schoepferisch auch da, wo sie bestehende Formen aufnimmt, weil sie diese aus sich selbst wiederzuerzeugen und sinnvoll zu verwerthen vermog.¹⁴

Brunner says that the way Troeltsch handles this whole question of the natural law just goes to prove "that an outsider--and so far as the faith of the Reformation is concerned Troeltsch is an outsider--can introduce confusion

¹³ Gustaf Toernvall, Geistliches und weltliches Regiment bei Luther, translated from the Swedish into the German by Karl-Heinz Becker (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1947), p. 119.

¹⁴ Holl, op. cit., p. 283.

into a discussion, in spite of all the keenness of his intellect."¹⁵ He also joins Holl in challenging Troeltsch's basic assumption that Stoicism's concept of the natural law was taken over so completely by Christianity.

A good deal of confusion on this question of natural law would have been avoided if a clear-cut distinction had always been made between the thinking of Luther and the thinking of Melanchthon as regards the natural law. Werner Elert, while agreeing with Holl that Troeltsch does not understand Luther's doctrine of the natural law, nevertheless insists that Holl does not understand Melanchthon's teaching on the natural law. Holl had written: "Die Reformation dreengt ueberall das Naturrecht zurueck."¹⁶ Elert contends that while this might be said about Luther, it cannot be said about the Reformation in general, since Melanchthon's natural law was different from Luther's and his influence was felt strongly by the Reformation. He says:

Auch Troeltsch hat viel von dogmengeschichtlichen Dingen geredet, die er nicht aus den Quellen kannte, aber Melanchthon wenigstens kannte er, und er hatte daher auch ein Recht ueber ihn zu urteilen, ein Recht, das man Holl Absprechen muss.¹⁷

¹⁵ Brunner, op. cit., p. 627 f.

¹⁶ Holl, op. cit., p. 483.

¹⁷ Werner Elert, Das christliche Ethos (Tuebingen: Furche-Verlag, 1949), p. 107.

Elert believes that Melanchthon and Luther had a great deal in common on the question of the natural law. But soon this difference developed: according to Melanchthon the commandment to love "unvermerkt seine beherrschende Stellung verloren."¹⁸ He came to believe that a person is only "einen Schritt von der Proklamierung der allgemeinen Menschenrechte entfernt."¹⁹ Finally, the natural law, as stated by Melanchthon, is "nicht mehr wie bei Luther nur ethisches Motiv oder ethischer Grundsatz, sondern wirkliches Recht mit genau umschriebenem Inhalt."²⁰ While Luther held that as far as the Mosaic law was concerned, only the general ethical principles were binding, Melanchthon asserted that the decalogue as such is not only identical with the natural law (Troeltsch's conclusion on Luther!) but that it is also the guiding rule for all people. It is therefore, according to Melanchthon, the underlying principle of every right which a state has. Melanchthon just did not see, as Luther did, that the decalogue in the final analysis contains no more than articulated commendments of conscience.

Elert says that Melanchthon did develop a dual moral-

¹⁸Werner Elert, Morphologie des Luthertums, II, Soziallehren und Sozialwirkungen des Luthertums (Munich: C. H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1932), p. 345.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid.

ity, although Luther kept clear of it. To point to one example of this "doppelte Naturrecht" in Melancthon, Elert refers to his thinking on the right of private ownership:

Hier unterscheidet er auf einmal eine doppelte natuerliche Erkenntnis: Im Stande der unverderbten Natur herrschte Guetergemeinschaft. Nachdem aber durch die Suende causae quaerendi et communicandi non similes geworden sind entspreche jetzt das Privateigentum dem Naturrecht . . . Hier stehen wir also von einem doppelten Naturrecht.²¹

Holl has not seen that as well as Troeltsch. Elert feels that Troeltsch has rendered a service by distinguishing between the absolute and relative natural law. "Allein wenn auch das Wort fuer diese Sache von Troeltsch stammt, so hat er doch die Sache damit durchaus richtig gekennzeichnet."²² Regardless of Luther's position on the natural law, Elert believes it is not correct to say that "die Reformation draengt ueberall das Naturrecht zurueck,"²³ at least not as long as Melancthon belongs to the Reformation.

Amt, Stand, and Beruf

These three German words might be translated "office," "station," and "calling." They are very important concepts for Luther and for Lutheran theology, and any attempt at

²¹Ibid.

²²Elert, Die christliche Ethos, loc. cit.

²³Holl, loc. cit.

evaluating the Lutheran ethic must take them into very serious consideration.

Troeltsch certainly takes them into consideration. They are basic for his application of the "official" morality and the "personal" morality to Lutheranism. The personal morality is the concern of each individual, and can be regulated by his own conscience. But the official morality, says Troeltsch, is regulated by whatever office the person finds himself in. Troeltsch appears to regard the Amt and Stand as belonging to those natural conditions which, by making ethical demands of their own, give rise to an independent, secular ethical principle, the relative natural law. "That, however," comments Watson, "is far from Luther's view, if we consider what he actually says of the offices."²⁴

As Luther describes them, the offices represent various relationships in which a man can stand to his fellowmen, his neighbors. To quote him:

We are to live, speak, act, hear, suffer, and die each one in love and service for others and even for enemies, the husband for his wife and children, the wife for her husband, the children for their parents, the servants for their masters, the masters for their servants, the rulers for their subjects, and the subjects for their rulers, so that the hand, mouth, eye, foot, yea heart and mind of the one is also the other's--

²⁴Watson, op. cit., p. 112.

that means truly Christian and naturally good works.²⁵ Luther describes these relationships as larvae Dei, media of divine revelation and instruments by which God governs the world. These offices, and not the actions of the people in them, give expression to the will of God. "Nevertheless," insists Watson, "the offices themselves are and remain larvae Dei, in and through which God himself confronts men in the midst of their concrete environment."²⁶

This is important to note, since Troeltsch is of the opinion that the offices are, with Luther, independent of God, and merely the products of nature. Since they are such, he continues, they are governed by the natural law. This last conclusion might be permissible, if Troeltsch had a correct understanding of the natural law. But the stations and offices or neighborly relationships, might well be said to be concrete embodiments of the natural law and its demand for neighborly love. They are creatures or ordinances of God, through which he calls men to the service of their neighbors. In this sense they can therefore be described as commands and vocations. Watson sums this up as follows:

Love, which is immutable in character, is mutable in action, in order that it may render true service to

²⁵WA, X, 1, 2; 41, 5 f., quoted in Watson, op. cit., p. 113.

²⁶Watson, op. cit., p. 112.

its neighbors according to their several necessities. The same neighborly love, excluding all self-love, is required by all stations and vocations; but the neighborly services to be rendered must obviously differ in the different relationships in which a man stands.²⁷

From this he concludes that there is no place here for the dualism Troeltsch alleges to find in Luther's ethic. Certainly Luther thought it irreligious to neglect the office and vocation ordained by God, because God would reach people with his love by means of the offices and vocations. Luther's teaching shows no trace of an opposition between a purely religious ideal and a secular, official morality, which would be little else but a revised version of the familiar double standard of Catholicism that he so vigorously attacked.²⁸

It is one of Troeltsch's favorite judgments, that the ethic of Lutheranism with its many faults results in little else than the peaceful contemplation of personal salvation and heavenly bliss. Watson denies this as strongly as he can, and does it with the full blessing of Holl. Says Watson:

For Luther, faith means a certain relationship of the whole man to the God who meets him in the outward circumstances of his daily life. In this relationship, moreover, the believer, so far from concentrating on his personal salvation, is governed by the love of God, both as law and as gospel, which delivers

²⁷Ibid., p. 115.

²⁸Ibid.

him from preoccupation with himself and enables him to serve his neighbor as God wills. His relationship to God naturally and inevitably determines his dealings with his neighbors, so that "ethical behavior" and the "religious element" are inseparable in Luther's thought.²⁹

Troeltsch could not see this inseparable connection between ethical behavior and the religious element in Luther. He prefers to believe that Luther taught obedience to the natural law for the sake of order and a relative standard of morality in society. He never sees the gospel of the forgiveness of sins through Christ in the offices of life or in the callings.

Many say, and among them is Troeltsch, that Luther's ethical principle is too ideal, too divorced from life, a pure piece of naivette. Carlson points out that

on the other hand, Luther's contemporaries found fault with him because his piety was "too robust and unholy," to use Soederblom's descriptive phrase. He was too secular--"too massively earthy" It is Soederblom's judgment that no one has set his feet so squarely on the earth, so brutally urged the "right of nature," or been so concerned about all the relationships of life, as Luther.³⁰

In this critique Reinhold Seeberg concurs:

Man konnte Kind seiner Zeit und frommer Christ sein. Ein frommer Idealismus kennzeichnet die reformatorische Ethik, aber sie haelt sich zugleich auf dem

²⁹Ibid., p. 117.

³⁰Edger M. Carlson, The Reinterpretation of Luther (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1948), p. 96 f.

Boden der wirklichen Welt.³¹

If Luther's ethic is naive, it is only because his religion is naive. For the two, his ethic and his religion are inseparably united. Troeltsch's whole interpretation of Luther's ethic is vitiated by his misinterpretation of Luther's religion. This is summed up neatly by Watson:

This [Luther's religion] he removes "out of the material substantial sphere into the intellectual, psychological sphere," making it wholly a matter of the inner life of the individual believer. The accompanying ethic is then said to be purely spiritual, and to consist in aloofness from the world and concentration on the question of personal salvation. It is not surprising, therefore, that Troeltsch finds "the deduction of ethical behavior from the religious element not very certain." The uncertainty, however, arises from Troeltsch's own presuppositions, which are not Luther's.³²

As for the calling which every individual Christian has, it is the considered conclusion of Troeltsch that Luther did not differ in essentials from the medieval conception of the call. In this instance, interestingly enough, he disagrees with Max Weber, who concedes that the idea of Beruf and its meaning is a product of the Reformation.³³ Troeltsch sees something new in Calvin's

³¹Reinhold Seeberg, System der Ethik (Leipzig and Erlangen: A. Deichert'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung Dr. Werner School, 1920), p. 35.

³²Watson, op. cit., p. 116.

³³Max Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, translated from the German by Talcott Parsons (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1930), p. 80.

doctrine of the calling, but to him Luther was too conservative to actually and radically change the medieval conception of the calling. To which Holl replies: "Er, der konservative Mann wird zum Wortfuehrer des Fortschritts."³⁴ That Troeltsch gets the opposite impression is due to the fact, says Holl, that he insists on confusing Luther with Melancthon and the age of orthodoxy.³⁵ Bainton, too, insists that Troeltsch made the mistake of drawing the dividing line between Luther and Calvin rather than between Luther and the Middle Ages.³⁶

Einar Billing is so impressed with the importance of Luther's doctrine of the callings that he asserts:

Of all earthly thoughts since the days of Christ, that of Luther concerning the call is incomparably the most boldly and highly idealistic . . . Luther's idea of the call . . . descends deeper than any other ideal of life into the prosaic present.³⁷

Another idea on the call according to Luther, in contradistinction to Troeltsch, is that Luther extends the meaning of worship to include the whole of life. All of life, lived in a divine calling, becomes a grand worship

³⁴Holl, op. cit., p. 105.

³⁵Ibid., p. 106.

³⁶Roland H. Bainton, "Ernst Troeltsch--Thirty Years After," Theology Today, VIII (April, 1951), p. 90.

³⁷Einar Billing, Our Calling, translated from the Swedish by Conrad Bergendoff (Rock Island, Ill.: Augustana Book Concern, 1947), p. 19.

service to God by service to the neighbor. The new Swedish theology is especially making much of this point. Viewed in this light, the calling is the point at which ✓ Christianity penetrates into the social structure. Holl also agrees, that "unser taegliches Tun innerhalb unseres Berufes ein Gottesdienst ist, der in der Liebe geschieht."³⁸ To quote from Luther: "Nun ist kein groesserer Gottesdienst, den christliche Liebe, die dem Beduerftigen hilft und dient."³⁹

This goes back to the point made before, that love must be the driving impulse in every situation and in every moment. Only the form in which this love expresses itself is different. Troeltsch holds that Luther's position on the calling is that the Christian serves his Lord in his calling, and not through it, by means of it. Holl answers:

Man dient Gott im Beruf nicht nur deshalb, weil Gott es nun einmal befohlen hat, sondern im Gefuehl, daes man auch mit dem gewoehnlichsten Werk etwas zu der von Gott gewollten Liebesgemeinschaft beitraegt. Und dieses Gefuehl kann nach Luther doch nur aus dem Glauben kommen.⁴⁰

Accordingly, not only the offices of this world serve as the larvae Dei, but also the work done in these offices through the calling. In this way, says Holl, God himself

³⁸Holl, op. cit., p. 105.

³⁹WA, XII, 13, 26 f., quoted in Betcke, op. cit., p. 137.

⁴⁰Holl, op. cit., p. 260.

works in the world.⁴¹ So even the commonest sort of work becomes a work of God, if done in the spirit of the calling. Luther, says Billing, sees a threefold value in the work that is one's calling: 1) it educates, by toil and cross, 2) it becomes the means of service to the neighbor, and 3) it contributes to community life, order, peace, and security.⁴² It is with point two that Weber, with Troeltsch agreeing, condemns as a viewpoint which is "highly naive."⁴⁵

The call is ultimately the forgiveness of sins in Luther's thinking, to follow out the reasoning of Billing. Or, more specifically,

my call is the form my life takes according as God himself organizes it for me through his forgiving grace. Life organized around the forgiveness of sins, that is Luther's idea of the call.⁴⁴

This also works the other way around, Billing would remind us. For "in the measure in which the forgiveness of sins degenerates into an opiate, the call shrinks into a job."⁴⁵

Troeltsch believes that Lutheranism is bound to be quietistic. His reasons are that Luther has glorified the

⁴¹Ibid., p. 262.

⁴²Billing, op. cit., p. 9.

⁴³Weber, op. cit., p. 81.

⁴⁴Billing, op. cit., p. 11.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 17 f.

offices in the world, and the callings to those offices to such an extent that he believes they are not to be changed. They are part of the relative natural law, according to Troeltsch's analysis, and, although a compromise, are a necessary compromise for the preservation of the natural order of things. Weber agrees that Luther revolts at the thought of social change along the lines of general social progress. "The individual should remain once and for all in the station and calling in which God had placed him, and should restrain his worldly activity within the limits imposed by his established station in life," is the way Weber puts it.⁴⁶

Now there is no sense in denying that Luther was emphatic in insisting that a person should stay within the bounds of his calling, in his station. But this advice must be correctly understood in order to avoid the ancient but still fatal error of mixing law and gospel. Luther abolished the dual morality of Roman Catholicism, with its monasticism, and raised the level of daily living to the highest form of service to God. If he took himself at all seriously, and he did, he had to teach the people that they must take their calling into their station in life very seriously. He reasoned like this, according to Billing:

⁴⁶Weber, op. cit., p. 85.

If God has really become living to him [the Christian], he dares believe, however singular and obscure the place God assigns him, that it is the best. When the forgiveness of sins has again given him peace in his calling, it is not because he has let practical wisdom and common sense trim off his idealism, but because he⁴⁷ has learned to depend entirely on the grace of God.

So Luther came to emphasize quite strongly the important practice, not only of remaining faithful to the calling into which God has placed the Christian, but also the admonition to stay in their vocation. But he does not make a law out of this. Here is how Watson explains this problem:

He [Luther] does not mean, of course, that a man may not change his occupation. If some of the stations, such as those of parent and child, brother and sister, are unalterable, others are not; and there are occasions when men not only may, but should, seek fresh employment. No man, however, can do God's will except in a divinely ordained office and vocation, and none is divinely ordained that does not involve real service of one kind or another to one's neighbors, for that is what God wills. From this it should be clear that Luther is innocent of Troeltsch's distinction between an absolute and a relative natural law.⁴⁸

The Two Realms

The heading of this section is a translation of die zwei Reichen, or die zwei Regimente. These ideas are essential in Luther's thinking on authority in Church and state, and on the relationship between Church and state.

⁴⁷Billing, op. cit., p. 23.

⁴⁸Watson, op. cit., p. 135 f.

Troeltsch has come up with an analysis of Luther which ascribes to the Reformer a theory of power for the sake of power in the realm of secular authority. He makes of Luther a second Machiavelli. He then goes on to assert that Luther places the spiritual authority beneath the secular. ✓

Troeltsch's critics hasten to point out the failings in his analysis. Again Holl takes first place. Speaking of Holl in this respect, Toernvall says:

Gegenueber Sohm, Rieker, Troeltsch und Meinecke hebt er mit Recht die Notwendigkeit hervor, Luther von der Scheidung zwischen geistlicher und weltlicher Macht aus zu verstehen.⁴⁹

He goes on to comment that Troeltsch is simply unable to understand the connection between the secular and spiritual realms in Luther's thought.

Bei Troeltsch fuehrt dies Grundanschauung in unloesbare Schwierigkeiten. Infolge dieser Auffassung des Geistlichen als einer spiritualen Idee wird das Verhaeltnis zwischen geistlichen und weltlich fuer ihn ein unloesbares Problem. Die beiden Reiche sind fuer ihn zwei Sphaeren, die prinzipiell gesehen nicht vereinigt werden koennen.⁵⁰

Holl can hardly contain himself when he thinks of Troeltsch's statement that Luther advocated power for its own sake:

Troeltsch hat dies behauptet und Luther deshalb mit Machiavelli zusammengestellt, eine Geschmacklosigkeit die schon an Denifle erinnert. Belege braucht Troeltsch nicht; sie finden sich auch allerdings nur

⁴⁹Toernvall, op. cit., p. 98.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 64.

fuer das Gegenteil, vgl. z. B. WA, XIX, 440, 7 f.⁵¹
 But Holl does not satisfy Toernvall. He maintains that both Troeltsch and Holl miss the point in not seeing Luther's overriding religious interest in both the secular and spiritual realms.⁵²

What is Luther's concept of the state? It is much wider and more flexible than our modern concept of the state. The state, or politia, is one of the two essential means by which God governs the world, the other being religio, or ecclesia, the Church. As Watson says:

But neither ecclesia nor politia is conceived essentially in terms of political or ecclesiastical institutions. They are rather concrete expressions of the law and the gospel respectively, which are the twin forms of the eternally creative Word of God.⁵³

Troeltsch would suggest that a state is a consequence of the Fall. Luther held that politia was created before it, and altered by it. But Watson insists that "this in no way means the institution of a relative natural law. It is not the law and ordinances of God that have fallen, but men."⁵⁴ Since Luther speaks so definitely about the divinely appointed offices and stations in the state, Troeltsch,

⁵¹Holl, op. cit., p. 255.

⁵²Toernvall, loc. cit.

⁵³Watson, op. cit., p. 142.

⁵⁴Ibid.

among others, concludes that Luther opposed change in the state. This is a probable conclusion if you concede Troeltsch's judgment on Luther's relative natural law. But if this is not the case, and it does not seem to be, it would mean and does mean that "Luther does not conceive of politia as consisting of an unalterably fixed number of stations and offices, but as capable of new developments to meet new needs."⁵⁵ These needs are created by the absolute ethic of love.

The Lutheran concept of society was that of a close relationship between state and Church, not as two institutions, but as two authorities in a single organism.⁵⁶ Lutheranism, together with Calvinism and Anglicanism, transmitted the care for the cultural life into the hands of the political magistrate, definitely trusting that its action would conform to Christian standards. Wilhelm Pauck points out that "this arrangement was ended by the secularization of the modern state, which Troeltsch has called the most important event in modern history."⁵⁷

Luther's remarks in connection with the peasant re-

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶So Holl, op. cit., p. 339, who quotes Sohm with approval here.

⁵⁷Wilhelm Pauck, The Heritage of the Reformation (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press and Boston: Beacon Press, 1950), p. 127.

volt, among others, have brought Troeltsch to the conclusion that Luther believed the laws of the land must be very strictly enforced, with all their severity and even their cruelty. Tawney, who leans very heavily on Troeltsch in his discussion of Lutheranism, believes that the peasant's revolt also "helped to stamp on Lutheranism an almost servile reliance on the secular authorities."⁵⁸ Visser 'T Hooft and Oldham see in Luther's doctrine of the state a condition of obedience that the government should be a legitimate government, which fulfills its duty to protect justice and to keep the peace. "If this is not the case," they conclude, "government becomes tyranny, and will be judged by God. The Church can refuse obedience, if it is asked to condone or to commit sin."⁵⁹ This is a statement to which Troeltsch could not subscribe.

Holl takes exception to Troeltsch's statement that Luther favored sternness in following the letter of the law. On the contrary, says Holl, Luther was one of the very first to advocate gentleness (ἐπιείκεια) in applying the law.

Die Grenze zwischen Recht und Sittlichkeit will er

⁵⁸ R. H. Tawney, Religion and the Rise of Capitalism (New York: The New American Library of World Literature, Inc., 1946), p. 74.

⁵⁹ W. A. Visser 'T Hooft, and J. H. Oldham, The Church and Its Function in Society (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1937), p. 44.

damit nicht verwischen. Es liegt ihm nur daran, einzupraegen, dass auch in der Rechtsprechung des Mensch immer als Mensch, als ein "Naechster," genommen und deshalb im Zweifelsfall--man vergleiche damit den entgegengesetzten Standpunkt der Inquisition--lieber zu wenig als zuviel gestraft werden soll Erstaunlich ist demgegenueber wieder der Satz von Troeltsch.⁶⁰

This confusion can probably be resolved only by remembering that Troeltsch and Holl have two entirely different conceptions of Luther's position on the law, the one viewing it as a compromising ethic, the other as the positive ethic of love.

In connection with Troeltsch's general view of the relation between these two realms, Bainton remarks that "it is overly schematized in terms of Prussian Lutheranism and in terms of everything in Luther which could be regarded as looking in that direction."⁶¹

Luther's Social Ideal

Troeltsch makes the point that Luther did not originate any new social ideal, but simply perpetuated the corpus Christianum concept of the Middle Ages. Since a new age was dawning contemporaneously with Luther, this stamps him in Troeltsch's estimation as a reactionary conservative. Weber and Tawney agree with him. Pauck very wisely

⁶⁰Holl, op. cit., p. 270.

⁶¹Bainton, op. cit., p. 83.

remarks:

"One must distinguish between those elements of the Reformation which linked it to the medieval church and those elements which pointed to the civilization of the future. The discussion of the nature of Protestantism is frequently confused by a failure to recognize this distinction.⁶²

Thus it is a question how much of the development of society in Lutheran lands was influenced by Lutheranism, and how much was influenced by the general anti-Catholic cultural forces of the sixteenth century, such as nationalism and territorialism, the educational movement of Humanism, and, to a limited extent, capitalism.

Troeltsch believes that the Middle Ages produced a corpus Christianum, and that Luther perpetuated it. Holl ascribes the growing popularity of this expression, and also the phrase societas Christiana, to none other than Troeltsch.⁶³ Holl suggests, rightly, that Troeltsch has been misled by his determination to make Luther's Christianity conform to what he chooses to regard as the church type as opposed to the sect type.⁶⁴

Harald Dien ascribes the beginnings of this concept in its present form to Sohm. He commends Holl for his answer to both Sohm and Troeltsch thusly:

⁶²Pauck, op. cit., p. 119.

⁶³Holl, op. cit., p. 340.

⁶⁴Watson, op. cit., p. 142.

Karl Holl hat das grosse Verdienst, mit einem exakt erforschten Luther die ganze durch Sohm inaugurierte Entwicklung gestoert zu haben. Gegenueber Troeltsch haetter er verhaeltnismaessig leichte Arbeit, weil ihm ein empfindlicher Mangel an primaerer Lutherkenntnis nachzuweisen war. Gegenueber Sohm entzog er vor allem der corpus-christianum Lehre den Boden, indem er nachwies, dass diese Lehre 1) nicht einmal fuer das Mittelalter bis jetzt in Geschlossenheit erwiesen worden und 2) auch bei Luther nicht vorhanden sei. Hier bedeute der "christliche Koerper" immer das corpus Christi mysticum, d. h. einfach die Kirche.⁶⁵

That Troeltsch considers Luther to be so definitely conservative comes as no surprise to Betcke, who comments:

Es ist aber nicht verwunderlich, wenn ein Mann wie Troeltsch, dem mit naiver Selbstverstaendlichkeit der Kapitalismus der Hoehepunkt menschlicher Entwicklung ist, Luthers Gedanken ueber die Wirtschaft einfach als "kindlich" empfindet, weil sie in einer anderen Welt wurzeln. Die "traditionalistische Wirtschaftshaltung," von der Troeltsch spricht, liegt doch nur darin, dass Luther eben um ihres sittlichen Gehaltes willen die Zunftverfassung des Mittelalters bejaht, ohne dass er aber einem starren Konservatismus verfallen waere.⁶⁶

All of which would seem to indicate that Troeltsch's critics deny that Luther was interested in preserving the old, established order because in his mind it was the only possible order. He was interested in preserving it in order that virtue might be preserved. He was no economist, and probably did have economically conservative leanings. But to say that Luther's social ideal was or-

⁶⁵Harald Diem, Luthers Lehre von den zwei Reichen (Munich: Chr. Keiser Verlag, 1938), p. 16.

⁶⁶Betcke, op. cit., p. 148.

iented around his own economic conservatism and his doctrine of submissiveness to an unchangeable natural order is to do violence to Luther's fundamental and overriding religious interest. It is to confuse law and gospel as Luther was never guilty of confusing it.

Concluding Summary

Ernst Troeltsch is a reputable scholar who has produced a very spectacular but questionable book on the social teachings of the Christian churches. It has raised more questions than it has answered, probably, which is all to the good. As regards his sociology of Lutheranism, the following points must be borne in mind in any attempted evaluation of the validity of his main hypotheses. They are the criticisms of other, equally qualified scholars, among whom there is at least general agreement on these points.

First of all, there is the criticism that Troeltsch's estimate of the Reformation runs aground on his inadequate knowledge of the sources. His knowledge of Melancthon, Gerhard, and later Lutheranism is not questioned, but the assertion is quite frequently made that Troeltsch confuses these men and these periods with Luther and the time of the Reformation. This is a serious charge to level against a historian of the rank of Troeltsch, but is made so generally as to demand attention.

Secondly, Troeltsch is commonly criticized for what amounts to a confusion of law and gospel. This fundamental error is most evident in his exposition of the natural law, which he equates with the relative natural law. That Luther ever made such a distinction between absolute and relative natural law, either consciously or unconsciously, is denied by Troeltsch's critics. They assert that Troeltsch is only adding a great deal of confusion to a problem which is difficult enough without it. For Luther did have positive, and not merely negative, ethical principles. Karl Holl is supreme here. Fauck says this of Troeltsch and Holl:

Ernst Troeltsch made the mistake of seeing the Reformer too much in the light of the spirit of modern (nineteenth century) German Lutheranism. Thus it is understandable that he can attribute a "cultural defeatism" to Luther's Reformation as if it were true that Luther had failed to articulate the ethical, and particularly the social-ethical, implications of his faith. That this was not really the case is known to anybody who ever read Holl's very thorough essay included in his Luther Aufsätze, under the title "Der Neubau der Sittlichkeit." Here it is convincingly shown that Luther's faith involved clear ethical principles which were capable of a wide social and cultural application. These principles were personal freedom, grounded in faith, and social, communal responsibility, based on love.⁶⁷

Elert agrees that the confusion which Troeltsch finds in Luther, with the two laws of nature, dual morality, etc., is an indication of Troeltsch's own confusion, since he is

⁶⁷Fauck, op. cit., p. 11.

"not competent to find a dominant center" in the Reformation.⁶⁸ Billing adds that

anyone wishing to study Luther would indeed be in no peril of going astray were he to follow this rule: never believe that you have a correct understanding of a thought of Luther before you have succeeded in reducing it to a simple corollary of the thought of the forgiveness of sins.⁶⁹

This cannot be done with Troeltsch's sociology of Lutheranism. For he thinks of the relative natural law, which governs the natural world, including the Christians in it, completely apart from the motivation of the gospel. ✓

Another criticism of Troeltsch, really a corollary to the one above, is his misunderstanding of the ethic of love. For Troeltsch, an ethic to be realistic must be an ethic of law. So he comes to condemn Luther for originating the quietistic attitude toward life, which might truthfully be said to have been fostered by later Lutheranism.

A third criticism of Troeltsch is that he is incapable of sympathetically understanding the Christian problem of ethics in general, or that of Lutheranism in particular, since he is a historical relativist himself. This means that he is incapable of finding absolutes in a study of this kind, since he does not believe in them.

⁶⁸Werner Elert, Morphologie des Luthertums (Munich: C. H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1931), I, 337.

⁶⁹Billing, op. cit., p. 7.

These are the main points Troeltsch hoped to establish, and their corresponding antitheses. Neither his exposition nor anybody else's will solve all the tensions that exist in Luther's, or any evangelical Christian's, approach to the problem of the application of the Christian gospel to the problems of the world. But this much we can say of his sociology of Lutheranism: on the basis of other and more reliable authorities, it is not valid, neither for Luther, nor for us who hope to follow and adopt the sociology of Lutheranism in its most evangelical form.

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