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INTRODUCTION

A concern for dogmatics and a concern for ethics do not always go together. The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod, for example, has always had a strong dogmatic tradition, but has in general been uninterested in what is commonly called ethics. But this is the opposite of the situation in many other American denominations. To put the problem into a broader perspective, what is the relationship between dogmatics and ethics? A helpful approach is to study the distinctive answers given by Werner Elert, Karl Barth, and Ernst Troeltsch, which prove to be distinctive not only because their personal theological convictions differ, but also because they reflect quite clearly the three major traditions which they openly espoused: Lutheran, Reformed, and Enthusiastic-Spiritualist Christianity.

Elert's Lutheranism led him to say yes to both a separate dogmatics and a separate ethics based on a specific understanding of their relation to each other, and in his lifetime he wrote one of each. Barth's Reformed heritage (often consciously

espoused against Lutheran theologoumena) led him to say "no" to any independent ethics and "yes" only to a *Kirchliche Dogmatik*. Some of the intellectual roots of Troeltsch's answer ("yes" to ethics and ethical Christianity, but little interest in dogmatics) lie in his acknowledged kinship with the "left wing" of the Reformation. Troeltsch's position — nondogmatic, antiauthoritarian, ethically conscious Christianity — has typified large segments of American Christianity.

WERNER ELERT¹

PRELIMINARY DEFINITIONS

Elert carefully defines the four key concepts — dogmatics, ethics, dogma, and ethos. Dogmatics and ethics are separate theological sciences. They are separate because they investigate two different subject matters, dogma and ethos. They are scientific in the same sense that other

¹ Werner Elert, a Lutheran theologian, was born Aug. 19, 1885, in Heldrungen, Saxony, and died Nov. 21, 1954. Following his education at the universities of Breslau, Erlangen, and Leipzig (1906—1912), he served as pastor at Seefeld in Pomerania (1912—1919), director of the Lutheran Seminary at Breslau (1919—1923), and *Professor Ordinarius* at Erlangen (1923—1954). Among his chief works are *Morphologie des Luthertums*, 2 vols. (1931—1932, Eng. [Vol. I]: *The Structure of Lutheranism*, 1962); *Der christliche Glaube* (1940); and *Das christliche Ethos* (1949, Eng.: *The Christian Ethos*, 1957).

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intellectual disciplines are scientific, as a critical (in the sense of *krisis* — making judgments) process of asking and answering the question of the “sufficient grounds” (*zureichender Grund*) for any subject matter. All sciences — theological and nontheological — do this with their specific subject matters. Dogmatics does this with Christian dogma; ethics does this with the Christian ethos. The disciplines of dogmatics and ethics are separate and distinct because dogma and ethos are distinct entities. What is Christian dogma? It is “the required content of the kerygma” (*Sollgehalt des Kerygmas*), the necessary minimum — and maximum — content of the kerygma required to keep it what it was originally intended to be. What is Christian ethos? Ethos is a qualitative label. Christian ethos is that quality which a person has by virtue of God’s own verdict.

Dogma is neither what you have to believe (*credenda*) nor what you have to teach (*docenda*), but what has to be preached (*praedicanda*) if the proclamation is to be Christian. The opposite of dogma is heresy — that which must not be preached under the guise of Christian proclamation. In this sense dogma is also the maximum necessary content of the kerygma. The authoritarian connotations implicit in dogma are not derivative from the church but from the kerygma itself which first brought the church into existence. In working with the basic question of dogmatics (What are the sufficient grounds for the church’s dogma? What is the minimum required content of the kerygma, and why must this be so?) the question of authority, at least in the sense of authorization, is inevitable.

When Christians refer to their dogmatic

formulations as “confessions,” they are already indicating that the authority of the confessions is secondary, for confessions are responses to something prior and they also indicate that they are freely given. The confessions are not coerced, but they are the personal convictions and commitment of the confessors. The authority of the dogma does not consist in coercion to believe something but in the binding obligation and commitment to preach and teach something. Neither the confessions nor the ancient dogmas preceding them are original, nor is their obligating authority primary. It is all derivative obligation. The original is the Gospel itself — or even the Gospel “Himself.” The derivative dogma and symbols are “confessions to the Gospel.”²

In seeking the sufficient grounds of this dogma, dogmatics is forced back behind the confessions and into the Bible in order to formulate the *Sollgehalt* of the kerygma. Just because it is in the Bible is not “sufficient grounds” for its being in the authorized *praedicanda*.³ Thus the dogmatician himself must listen to the kerygma. This does not mean listening to the church, but to the Christ and the canonical books to which the church itself listens. The centrality of Christ’s own person is that He is the one absolute point, the irreplaceable center, in all the canonical documents. He is both “the authorizer as well as the content of the church’s kerygma

² Werner Elert, *Der Christliche Glaube. Grundlinien der Lutherischen Dogmatik*, 4th ed. (Berlin: Furche-Verlag, 1940), pp. 38f. Hereafter cited as *Glaube*.

³ A favorite illustration of this for Elert is the passage in Jude 9 about Michael and Satan arguing over the body of Moses. *Ibid.*, p. 261.

since in him the formal and the material 'Sollen' of the proclamation coincide."⁴

However, when one gets all the way back to Christ as the necessary required content of the kerygma, then it is no longer Christ's own authority which stands behind the requirement (*Sollen*). "But the obligatory character of this *Sollen*, since it issues from Christ, is rendered even more obligatory because it is perceived to be a *Sollen* from God Himself. Here is the ultimate and most profound point where dogmatics must begin. Here and here alone one can seek and find sufficient ground for the required content of the kerygma which is the church's dogma."⁵ The sufficient grounds of the church's dogma has to be "Thus says the Lord." — God Himself authorizes this kerygma with precisely this required minimum content.

In defining ethics and its subject matter, the Christian ethos, Elert says that ethos is not descriptive of what Christians do, nor is it the prescriptions which they seek to follow. It is not the corresponding *agenda* (what you must do) to the *credenda*, which Elert has already rejected as the valid notion of dogma. Although the Christian ethos is normative, it is not normative in terms of the laws that guide one's daily life. Ethos is the quality, the value, which man has by virtue of God's verdict upon him. Therefore the central task of theological ethics is the question of the sufficient grounds of the divine judgment — what is it and how can we ascertain the quality of the divine judgment?

With these definitions in mind, the

⁴ Ibid., p. 51.

⁵ Ibid., p. 52.

distinction and connection between the disciplines of dogmatics and ethics in Elert's thought is easy to follow. Ethics is basically theological anthropology. Dogmatics is in the narrow sense theology, the sufficient grounds for what God Himself authorizes as the necessary core of His own kerygmatic word. The fact that these two distinct disciplines are traditionally subsumed under "systematic theology" is largely a formal consideration, the product of 19th-century intellectual history, and not grounded in a material unity of both within the same "system" as this was understood under the hegemony of idealistic philosophy.⁶ For Elert their different subject matter makes such a "systematic" treatment inappropriate. If some shorthand description of their relationship need be given, it is not *credenda/agenda* nor *docenda/agenda* but *doctrina/qualitas*.

The subject matter of the disciplines does, however, give them some common ground. 1) Both presuppose God's authority to make judgments, as does all theology. In fact, in this way any discipline becomes a theological one when God's address to men becomes audible in it. 2) Both are dependent on Scriptures; however, not for the doctrinal statements of dogmatics nor for the moral regulations of ethics but rather for the content of the kerygma and for the source of the ethos. 3) By virtue of their subject matter, both have a common foundation in Christ Himself. 4) Both also have contact with the same kerygma, though

⁶ An example of this is Theodor Haering, whose systematic theology was centered on the principle of the kingdom of God. In his systematics, then, dogmatics demonstrates how the principle becomes a personal quality for man, and ethics demonstrates how the Kingdom may be realized.

in different ways. Apart from the kerygma of the church, of which dogma represents the mandatory content, there can be no Christian ethos.

In this sense "kerygma and ethos stand in the same relation to each other as cause and effect."⁷ The dogma in dogmatics delineates what has to be preached, the Christian ethos of ethics is the quality of a man's life that comes with his hearing and believing the kerygma. But the cause/effect relationship is not automatic. The Christian ethos is not the necessary consequence which must follow in a man when he has encountered the kerygma. Instead Elert's emphasis is that when God's verdict about a man changes and thereby that man's quality and worth also change, it is because the man has come in contact with the kerygma, and in believing its *Sollgehalt* (= Jesus Christ) the quality of his existence has changed.

THE CENTER IN ELERT'S THEOLOGY

These somewhat formal considerations about the definition of dogmatics and ethics rest on the "material" content of Elert's notion of the heart of Christian theology, namely, the distinction between Law and Gospel. The Scriptures themselves, says Elert, convey nothing about God apart from the rubrics of Law and Gospel. There is no undifferentiated "neutral" revelation of God referred to in Scriptures. The rubrics "Law/Gospel" refer to the "double dialectic" about God and man that comes into being by virtue of

God's revelation. Law/Gospel on the one hand indicates the wrath/grace dialectic in God Himself and on the other the sin/faith dialectic in man. The dialectic of Christian theology is not God vs. man, but wrath/sin vs. mercy/faith, two antithetical relationships.

However, the revelations of God's wrath and grace and the correlative revelations of man's sin and faith are not the uncovering of secrets, nor the transmission of previously unknown information, but the creation of a reality. Elert calls it the *Geltung* (to be paraphrased as "validity" in spite of apparent paradoxes) of both Law and Gospel, God putting a particular word of His into effect. Therefore the Law and Gospel tension cannot be resolved by subsuming the terminology or the content into a higher unity. The *Geltung*, the effective presence of contradictory realities, is the point of conflict, and if there is to be reconciliation between these, it will only come from the One who stands behind them and puts them into effect. This is exactly what happened through the manifestation of Christ (*Offenbarwerden Christi*).⁸ In Christ these conflicting realities were reconciled.

That is why the New Testament views Christ Himself as the central content of the Gospel. He is the Gospel's content in two dimensions — as the announcement (*Bericht*) of the historical words and events of Christ's ministry together with the announcement of the theological consequence of these words and events for the relationship between God and men, namely, "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself," and as the hortatory

⁷ Werner Elert, *Das christliche Ethos: Grundlinien der lutherischen Ethik* (Tübingen: Furche-Verlag, 1949). English translation: *The Christian Ethos* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1957), p. 15. Hereafter cited as *Ethos*.

⁸ Elert, *Glaube*, p. 141.

proclamation (*Anrede*) of the significance of the announcement for the hearers and readers: "We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God." The hortatory exhortation calls for faith, but not faith in general, not even faith in God, but faith in the Gospel.

The alternative operative reality called "Law" is indicated by the apostles when they label their life before they had faith in the Gospel as a life "under the Law." When they came to faith in the Gospel, it was their "redemption from this life under the Law."⁹

Because ancient Israel had a verbalized and codified law, it was easy for her to have the mistaken concept of God's law which Elert calls the "moral misunderstanding," to which even the ancient church succumbed.¹⁰ But the revelation of "Law" is not the revealing of moral legislation and the resulting legal knowledge of God. The revelation of the Law takes place not by its being verbalized, but rather by its *de facto* being put into effect. Law is being revealed when its fatal consequences are taking place, when sinful man is being provoked to exorbitant rebellion against God, when wrath, curse, and death are in effect and operative.

The revelation of the Law does not have to be verbally expressed to be in action. By contrast the Gospel must be expressed, "originally spoken in the person of Christ, and subsequently proclaimed by the apostles," in order to be revealed and to be operative.¹¹ God's law can be and has been preached vocally and verbally, but it is

also validly in effect and operative on all those to whom it was not verbally addressed. *Das Gesetz Gottes wirkt . . . auch wo es nicht bekannt ist.*¹² ("The Law of God is effective also where it is not known.")

This concept of the Law Elert contrasts with the "moral misunderstanding" which views it only as God's legislation. Law is not simply God's legislation (*Gottes Legislativ*) but God in action administering justice (*Gottes Judikativ*).¹³ This is the Law that "always accuses" (cf. the *lex semper accusat* of the Lutheran Confessions), wherein the Law is never simply divine information but divine accusation, divine condemnation, and divine execution. It is this radical judgmental character of the Law which is central to Elert's view of the important relation between Christ and the Law. In a word: the Law killed Him.

Elert points out that not only St. Paul but also St. John (1:17) contrast Christ with the Law. Therefore Christ is no law-giver. It is the united testimony of the New Testament that Christ was not on the giving but on the receiving end of the Law. If nothing else, His death testifies that He was "under the Law." Although it killed Him, the end result of His willing submission to the Law is that He silenced it. His death destroyed the Law's "order of death" and brought life and resurrection into human history. "God was in Christ reconciling," not for Christ's own

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 131f.

¹³ A concise summary of the *Judikativ* nature of the Law is presented in Elert's article "Gesetz und Evangelium" in *Zwischen Gnade und Ungnade* (Munich: Ev. Presseverband für Bayern, 1948), pp. 138ff.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

sake, but *pro nobis*. The *pro nobis* turns the announcement (*Bericht*) into a hortatory exhortation (*Anrede*). For all who receive this exhortation in faith, the revelation of Christ is the revelation of the grace of God and the veiling of His wrath. The paradox that God's wrath is both revealed and done away with cannot be grasped and understood apart from faith in Christ, in whom the paradox was revealed.¹⁴

Faith *in* this Gospel, in the resolved paradox of a man's relationship to God through Christ, is always "faith *against* (*gegen*) the Law, against appearances, against the God of wrath and judgment,"¹⁵ "against the death verdict."¹⁶ The paradox is always and only resolved in faith, specifically in faith in Christ, for He is the only entity which man can interpose "against" the Law, wrath, judgment, and death which continue as one paradoxical side of Christian human existence.

THE FORMAL SHAPE OF ELERT'S "ETHICS"

These considerations set the stage for the pattern in which Elert arranges the material in his book on ethics. The arrangement would be different, of course, if one viewed the basic question of ethics to be, "What ought I do?" Although many in the Christian tradition have written about ethics in these terms, Elert says it is inadmissible, for it necessarily winds up with the Law. Even though such ethics admit man's need for the grace of God in Jesus Christ, and thus avoid crass synergism, the Law invariably has the last word

and the Gospel of grace in Jesus Christ is used to help man serve the Law. The truth of Christian ethics is, of course, the exact opposite. The Law is ultimately subject to and subjugated by the Gospel, for the Gospel is the "last word."

In an ethics oriented to God's verdict about man, reference to the Law will be inevitable. But the upshot of man's life under the Law is the *semper accusat*. That puts man under God's negative verdict — the extent of which Elert develops under the qualitative rubric "nomological existence." Understanding nomological existence or acknowledging it does not make an ethics Christian. Specifically *Christian* ethics first enters the picture when we heed another of God's pronouncements, the assurance of forgiveness. Not God's Law as rules, regulations, demands, commandments, prohibitions, but God's verdict about man is what Christian ethics presents; and the distinctive verdict of God which brings about the distinctive quality of the Christian man is God's verdict of the Gospel.¹⁷ Therefore Elert says that Christian ethics "must approach its subject from two directions."¹⁸ It must examine man's quality under God's verdict of the Law and also man's quality under God's verdict of the Gospel.

So Part I of his ethics is "Ethos Under Law." It treats the quality of "natural man" in God's perspective, whether the man acknowledges this quality of life or not. Part II is "Ethos Under Grace." It treats the person and work of Christ as it changes the "quality" of the natural man. The task of the ethicist is to clarify the

¹⁴ Elert, *Glaube*, p. 143.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 504.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 460.

¹⁷ Elert, *Ethos*, p. 16.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

anthropological qualities of these judgments of God.

This includes considering under the legal ethos such questions as creaturehood, existence, responsibility, guilt, individuality, and relationships with others in the created orders. In the ethos of grace there arise the questions of the role of Christ, the tangibility and empirical perceptibility of the new quality, the dilemma of the two qualities in one man, the change with respect to the old ethos, the new elements of the new ethos, etc.

After these two major units Elert unexpectedly adds a third part called "Objective Ethos." The term "objective" here is used in contrast to the "subjective" individualized ethos of Parts I and II. Elert's section on "Objective Ethos" considers the church as a whole, the community which is "still something other than the sum total of all Christians."¹⁹ The community as a whole is also subject to the judgment of God. In this section Elert says "the Lutheran character of this ethics becomes apparent," and he expects that it will be "unacceptable to other Protestant groups."²⁰

CONSEQUENCES FOR THE CHARACTER OF CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

Since the Law will be operative even if it is not proclaimed, God does not "need" the church to get *this* word of His communicated. The wrath of God and His justice upon the sinner happen "naturally." But the Gospel does not happen "naturally." It is not operative except by special effort.

Christ's ministry is the special effort which brought it into existence, and subsequently where it is not proclaimed by Christ's people in correspondingly "special efforts," it is not present and operative. But God really does want this, His last and final word, revealed to men. Therefore He has instituted the church for this role of ambassadorial communication. (2 Cor. 5:19 f.)

As God's ambassador the church does not function "creatively" in producing her message, but she passes on what she has been commissioned to speak by Him who authorized her. Not only in her life but also in her message, the church is "following after" (*Nachfolge*). She speaks God's Word *after* Him so that her theology is not her word about God, but her communication of God's Word about Himself. The church does not communicate how she "feels" about God, but she announces God's Word about Himself and about how He "feels" toward man. The unveiling of God always results in an unveiling of man.

"In executing the ambassadorial role, however, the church is not simply "on her own." God is personally present in the church, *His* church, supervising the work the church does for Him. This personal presence is the Spirit. The Spirit functions as the "plant director" for the church's operation. Consequently the church's theology comes under the jurisdiction of the Third Article. The Third Article tells the theologian about His place and work. The Spirit (Paraclete) with His *paraklesis* is the presupposition and the subject matter for the theologian. "Being touched by the Evangel . . . is a prerequisite for theological thinking. . . . It is *theological*

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 19.

²⁰ Ibid.

thinking only if it is thinking the evangelical speech of the Paraclete after him."²¹

The Spirit is God Himself present in the church promoting God's own Gospel. This is the *paraklesis* of the Paraclete. In speaking the *paraklesis* of the Spirit "after Him," the theologian must remember that his subject matter is *paraklesis*. It is not merely divine information. As *paraklesis* his subject matter is essentially exhortation, and if the theologian is to handle it scientifically, he will have to do justice to its "paracletic" character and not smother that which makes it most distinct. According to this perspective if the theologian no longer is handling the *paraklesis* of the Spirit, he is no longer engaged in Christian theology.

CONSEQUENCES FOR DOGMATICS AND ETHICS

In Elert's mind dogmatics is the science investigating the *Sollgehalt* of the church's proclamation. By virtue of her ambassadorial role, the church's kerygma is God's kerygma. Consequently the dogmatician in reflecting (*Nachdenken*) on his subject matter is not reflecting initially on his own faith in God, his "verdict" about God, but he is reflecting on God's own "self-reflection" about him, the dogmatician, as this is communicated in God's kerygma. One might still call this "faith's self-reflection," if faith were clearly defined as "receiving God's verdict about man."²²

The church's proclamation of God's message is distinct from the "quality of man" which results from that message, whether the message is Law or Gospel.

Dogmatics is concerned with the "that" (*Dass*) and the "what" (*Was*) of the divine speech. Ethics is concerned with the actual "quality" that a human life takes on when the man is the recipient of that particular divine speech.

Elert calls the relation between dogma and ethos the relation between cause and effect. The essential Gospel content of the church's kerygma produces in the man who trusts it the new descriptive qualification "forgiven sinner." The essential content of the other message, Law, whether consciously perceived or not, produces the equally genuine qualification "sinner." Dogmatics investigates *what* God says men are, together with the need, the grounds, and the urgency of the communication. It is a science oriented to and focused on the kerygma, past and present. Ethics, on the other hand, investigates what men are by virtue of that proclamation. It is oriented toward the man who is the object of the proclamation, describing what happens "qualitatively" to him and in him.

One might ask whether the common focus on Law and Gospel might not establish some common bond between dogmatics and ethics, in addition to the cause-and-effect connection already mentioned. The answer is obviously "yes," but not in the sense that we could assign either Law or Gospel to one or the other discipline. Insofar as both Law and Gospel are God's speech, both belong in dogmatics. Insofar as both have an operative effect on people qualifying their actual existence, both belong in ethics. For Elert, the common concern with Law and Gospel is the common concern of all theology — historical, exegetical, practical, etc. In fact, what makes any history, any philology, any systematics, *theo-*

²¹ Elert, *Glaube*, p. 199.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 226.

logical is that God's verdicts are being heard in, with, and under it, and there are only two verdicts from God, judgment and grace, Law and Gospel. *Tertium non datur*.

There is another way to see how Elert's understanding of Law and Gospel leads to his distinction between the disciplines of dogmatics and ethics. One can approach this by asking for the *sufficient reason* behind the Lutheran passion for the radical distinction of Law and Gospel. The sufficient grounds for this distinction are not Biblicistic ("That is the way it is in the Bible"), nor traditional ("That has always been the Lutheran position"), but soteriological and pastoral. The Lutheran Confessions, to which Elert is admittedly committed, criticize the "mixing" of Law and Gospel in medieval Roman theology on precisely such soteriological and pastoral grounds, which eventually become christological and doxological. The confessions call for keeping Law and Gospel distinct, because if they are mixed the results are:

- 1) the merits and benefits of Christ are reduced, and Christ is dis-graced;
- 2) the gift character of the Gospel is turned into performance-demanding Law; and
- 3) disturbed sinners are robbed of the genuine comfort which God wants them to have.²³

Law and Gospel must be kept distinct from each other for the sake of the Gospel, for Christ's sake. It is not enough for Christian theology to insist, "Let God be God." It must also insist, "Let Christ Be Christ." The corollary to letting Christ

be Christ is to "let the Law be Law." The Law dare not be "evangelized." Only Christ has taken the sting and strength out of the law with His death. Any attempt to manipulate the Law into some sort of merger with the Gospel is finally a vote of "no confidence" in Christ. In his monograph on Law and Gospel, Elert speaks precisely in this fashion when he criticizes the peaceful coexistence of Law and Gospel in Calvin's theology. He says: "Thereby the Law is actually disarmed . . . which carries with it the consequence that the Gospel also is similarly reduced in power."²⁴

To keep the Gospel distinctive and to let Christ be Christ for people is the sufficient grounds for insisting on the distinction between Law and Gospel. The serious heresies in the history of the church have been those aimed at the distinctiveness of the Gospel. One way of seeing that Elert's separation of dogmatics and ethics into distinct disciplines stems from a concern for keeping the Gospel distinctive is to examine the anti-Donatist and anti-Pelagian motifs inherent in the separation.

THE ANTI-DONATIST MOTIF IN SEPARATING DOGMATICS AND ETHICS

Elert's anti-Donatist position on the nature of the church is centrally involved in his division between dogmatics and ethics. It is a distinctive characteristic of his ecclesiology that "the church is not dependent upon the ethos of men,"²⁵ as the Donatists maintained. This means that the empirical ethos of the proclaimer, in-

²³ Cf. Apology to the Augsburg Confession IV, 18, 81, 110, 120, 150, 157, 204f.

²⁴ Elert, *Zwischen Gnade und Ungnade*, p. 168.

²⁵ Elert, *Glaube*, p. 400.

cluding his "faith," or the empirical ethos of the person addressed do not add to nor detract from the content of the message. Such-and-such is the content of the church's message simply because God says so. This is so even if no one in the world believed it and even if no one's ethos even suggested it. This applies both to man's ethos under law where the empirical behavior of a man might be so "good" that it would suggest that this man cannot be a sinner, and also to man's ethos under grace, where a Christian's empirical behavior might be so "bad" that it would suggest that this man cannot be a saint.

Ethics "portrays man as God perceives him."²⁶ Insofar as this theological anthropology is part of the necessary content of the kerygma, it, too, will appear in dogmatics. But the extent of the ethos of the earthen "vessel" does not affect the nature, extent, or genuineness of the "treasure."

In terms of his favorite passage (2 Cor. 5), Elert might well have said that dogmatics is concerned with the "God was in Christ reconciling the world. . . . Be reconciled to God" (*Bericht* and *Anrede*), while ethics is concerned with the "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation." When Elert discusses the role of each discipline in connection with Christ, his remarks tend in this direction. He says that both dogmatics and ethics address themselves to the same question: Who is Christ? "But there are differences. Dogma is doctrine. When dogmatics raises the question 'Who is Christ?' it seeks to understand what the church teaches concerning him ['God was in Christ. . . .'] Ethics

is the quality of man under God's judgment as factual reality. The ethical inquiry into the nature of Christ is the question of His importance for God's judgment of men or — and this definition amounts to the same thing — it is the question about the quality of man. The purpose of its inquiry is not the formulation of a correct Christology, but the elaboration of the fact that the Christ-encounter endows human ethos with a new quality ['If any man is in Christ. . . .']"²⁷

The anti-Donatist stance asserts that a man's faith is ethos, not dogma. Thereby from another angle the proposed *credenda/agenda* scheme for dogmatics/ethics is invalidated. This *credenda/agenda* scheme views dogmatics as concerned with God-man relationships and ethics as concerned with man-man relationships. But this is invalid since the man who exists in either of the two possible God-man relationships (Law or Gospel) is always at the same time already in a multitude of man-to-man relationships, and his actual ethos is manifested in both his relationship to God and his relationships to other men. The quality of his ethos (either under Law or under the Gospel) includes his "attitude" and actions toward God as well as his attitude and actions toward his human fellows.

Ethics treats the quality of human life as it is lived. Under the Law it is life lived for ourselves, in rebellion against God and in enmity against our neighbor. Under the Gospel, "precisely by virtue of the redemption we live our earthly life in freedom for others. To make this clear is the task of theological ethics."²⁸ Since "faith"

²⁷ Ibid., p. 177.

²⁸ Elert, *Glaube*, p. 514.

²⁶ Elert, *Ethos*, p. 7.

towards God is one quality of man's life when he is under the Gospel, and unfaith or sin the corresponding quality of life under the Law, both of these concepts belong primarily in ethics and not in dogmatics. For in the *Sollgehalt* of the kerygma there is no section on either "faith" or "sin," even though it is addressed to sinners and produces the faithful. Elert is true to this formal commitment in that he does not have a section devoted to either *sin* or *faith* in his dogmatics, despite its title, *Der Christliche Glaube*, but he does have a chapter on each in his ethics. The content of the word(s) of God as treated by dogmatics is Law or Gospel; the consequence, the realm of ethics, is unfaith and its sinful manifestations or faith and its faithful manifestations. The church lives and grows by virtue of what God says, and not by virtue of the ethos of her people. To contradict this is to affirm Donatism.

THE ANTI-PELAGIAN MOTIF IN SEPARATING DOGMATICS AND ETHICS

Dogmatics concentrates on the core content of the church's kerygma as it is preached and taught. Although one can teach the core content of the kerygma, one cannot teach the subject matter of ethics. Ethos as a quality is not taught, it is produced by God revealing His Law and His Gospel. It cannot be produced even by teaching people what ethos is, what quality they would have *if* they believed, or what quality they will have *if* they do not. As Luther's apple tree bore apples because it *was* an apple tree and not because it had been taught to do so, so man's life *has* specific qualities because he is either a sinner or a forgiven sinner. He does not

become a sinner or a forgiven sinner by producing, achieving, capturing, learning, or being taught the qualities. The work of God, God's verdict, creates the qualities. In the dogma, the core content of the kerygma, we hear what God's creative work is and, insofar as He has revealed this, why He is doing it. Ethos is the anthropological manifestations of that work of God. It is the concrete theologically "tangible" life that really follows (*Geltung*) from this work of God.

There is no absolute break between dogmatics and ethics, since the revelation of what God is (*Offenbarung Gottes*) is always correlative to the manifestation of what man is (*Offenbarung des Menschen*). Nor does Elert posit any absolute dichotomy. As we noted above, he sees their common ground at several points. His basic assertion is that they cannot be joined together in one and the same system. Faith and works, of course, are joined in one and the same Christian, just as unfaith and its works are joined in one and the same unforgiven sinner. But dogma cannot be coupled with ethos for this reason. This is especially so because ethos is never empirically clear and definite, but always partially hidden, whereas what God says about Himself and me *in Christ* (dogma) *is* clear and must be clear if faith is to exist at all. For faith is always faith in *that* message and never faith in the qualities I have learned to produce or even such as I see God producing in me.

Elert seeks to keep the disciplines separate not because he wants an "independent ethic" which will allow for the autonomy (*Eigengesetzlichkeit*) of the orders of creation free from any specific dogmatico-

theological connections (the charge frequently made against the Lutheran tradition), but because he wants to preserve faith in Christ from every nomism inimical to this life-center of Christianity. In short, it is an anti-Pelagian motif that comes to the fore here. Elert wants to demonstrate formally that materially it is "the Gospel of Christ" which solves man's personal theological problem, *justificatio coram deo*, and not the Gospel *plus* human qualities.

Christian ethos is the actualization of God's verdict about man. But this actualization is not the grounds of the church's kerygma. This is true in the anti-Donatist sense: the validity of the kerygma does not depend on the ethos of the *keryx*. It is also true in the anti-Pelagian sense: the ethos of the recipient does not determine the truthfulness of God's verdict about him. What God says, however, regardless of the extent of its actualization in empirical ethos, *is* the ground of the kerygma. Therefore "everything that dogmatics has to say wishes to be understood as coming from God,"²⁹ if for no other reason than to keep the Gospel as Gospel, that is, God's good Word to men who do not have a very godly ethos.³⁰

²⁹ Ibid., p. 398.

³⁰ The operation of these anti-Donatist and anti-Pelagian intentions can be seen in two of Elert's arch-Lutheran theologoumena, (1) his opposition to any form of the *tertius usus legis* in "subjective ethos" and (2) his ecclesiology with its "objective ethos." The *tertius usus* is rejected because it invariably becomes a crypto-Pelagian competitor to Christ. The anti-Donatist ecclesiology focused on Article VII of the Augustana deals with Elert's point that "the ethos of the church's members or her clergy does not constitute . . . the essence of the church. The essential element in her . . . is the activity of God's Spirit." (Ibid.)

SUMMARY

The "sovereignty and certainty" of the Christian church is to be found in her relationship to the Gospel. The greatest "danger" to the Gospel is the Law. One form of the "danger" is "pre-Christian minimalization" of the Law. It occurs in the non-Christian naturally, and the situation is made worse when the church in its preaching to him concurs with him in the minimalization of it, so that he does not hear its radical call to him to justify himself before God. Or, on the other hand, he hears it but not in its radical condemnation; therefore he believes that he has succeeded in justifying himself *coram deo* but without the Gospel. Another form of the "danger" of the Law is "post-Christian maximalization." This happens in the third use of the Law (*tertius usus*) or any similar attempts to rehabilitate the Law into some combination with the Gospel for the Christian.³¹ Both situations are instances of mixing dogmatics and ethics.

Elert's separation of dogmatics and ethics into relative independence from each other is thus related to (though not identical with) his basic and central distinction between Law and Gospel.

Man has a theological ethos apart from the Gospel. It is the ethos of a sinner. Although there is a theological ethos apart from the Gospel, there is no dogma apart from the Gospel, since without the Gospel there is no kerygma to proclaim, and dogma only comes into existence as the *Sollgehalt* of the kerygma. Since there is the theological ethos of "sinner" apart from the kerygma, there could be a theological

³¹ *Formula of Concord, Thorough Declaration*, VI, 11, 20, 22—23.

ethics, an investigation of the sufficient grounds of that ethos, without any dogmatics. To be sure, this is only the ethos and the ethics of a sinner, but it does indicate the relative "independence" of theological ethics from dogmatics.

Because the living Christ — one might even say Christ's own *ethos* — is present in the kerygma, there is no place for man's ethos, his own biographical qualifications, to be part of the saving message. In fact, man's ethos *dare not* be part of the kerygma. For if it were, it would become a competitor to Christ's exclusive claim. When the early church rejected Pelagianism, it was acknowledging Christ's exclusive claim. In effect, it was also separating dogmatics from ethics by excluding man's ethos from the kerygma.

This does not, however, exclude the "preaching of good works" from the kerygma. But it does exclude the legalistic preaching of good works. Christian preaching of good works means reconnecting men to Christ so that they can be free to be Christ's people under His Lordship and then to do *in faith* what the indwelling Spirit with His imperatives of grace prompts them to do.³² Because such preaching is the preaching of Christ, it is kerygma and belongs in the province of dogmatics and not ethics. On the other hand, legalistic preaching of good works tells people what good works they ought to do, now that they are Christians. It mixes dogma and ethos, which in this

³² The terms mentioned in this sentence (freedom, Christ as Lord and Master, life "in faith," the Spirit as living leader, the grace imperatives) are what Elert sees as the evangelical alternatives to the *tertius usus legis* as tangible resources for the Christian "ethical life."

instance is also a mixing of Gospel and Law. Instead of implanting the indwelling Christ anew, it is evicting Him. It is seeking to implant God's written code, or worse yet, the preacher's own code, in lieu of the living "mind" of Christ.

The "informational" notion of the Law in all forms of the *tertius usus* stems from the notion that men generally do *not* know what they ought to do. The more realistic truth of the matter is that they do indeed know what they ought to do, but the trouble is, they do not *want* to do it. Such an "ethical" dilemma can only be solved by the subject matter of dogmatics, the kerygma, and not by ethics.

KARL BARTH³³

In defining dogmatics and ethics Barth begins with the problem of all theology as he came to understand it during his days as a parish preacher. The problem of theology is the problem of preaching — the Word of God. Speech that is obviously the word of man claims to be the Word of God as the preacher wrestles to unite the Word of God with human life. "The task of dogmatics is . . . investigating church proclamation as to its agree-

³³ Karl Barth, Swiss theologian, was born May 10, 1886, in Basle, Switzerland. Educated at the universities of Berne, Berlin, Tübingen, and Marburg, he began his career as a minister in Geneva (1909—1911) and then became pastor at Safenwil in Aargau Canton (1911 to 1921). He was *Professor Extraordinarius* at Göttingen (1921) and then professor at Münster in Westphalia (1925) and Bonn (1930). Expelled by the Nazis (1935) he became professor of theology at Basle (1935 to 1962). Barth has received honorary doctorates from the universities of Glasgow, Oxford, Münster in Westphalia, and Utrecht. Among his chief works are *Der Römerbrief* (1918) and *Die kirchliche Dogmatik* (1932 ff.).

ment with the Word of God.”³⁴ But this is not simple comparison with the Scriptures. Preaching must be congruent to the revelation behind the Scriptures to which these writings testify. This pre-Scriptural revelation Barth calls “Word of God in its original form” (*ursprünglicher Gestalt*).³⁵ Dogma (singular) is the agreement which exists between the church’s preaching and the “Word of God in its original form.” Dogma is not an assertion or a set of assertions (dogmas), but the congruence (*Beziehungsbegriff*) between the church’s speaking and the original form of the Word of God. Dogmatics is the science of this dogma. The dogmas, venerable and worthy of respect though they be, are the word of man, separated from the Word of God “as the heavens are above the earth.”³⁶ They dare not be viewed as a final and perfect comprehension of the Word of God. Instead the dogmas point to the dogma, the congruence, and then keep open the “inquiry after the Word of God.”³⁷

The word “science” applies to dogmatics in the literal sense of the term, for dogmatics claims to be a “path to knowledge.”³⁸ But this path to knowledge is the path that leads to knowledge of God, and consequently the term dogmatics for Barth finally covers the whole of theology, and he can use the terms dogmatics and theology interchangeably.³⁹ Thus Barth’s

life work has been a dogmatics, for dogmatics encompasses the entire field of theology. All that belongs to the Word of God belongs to the field of dogmatics as it goes about checking the Word of God as initial revelation, or as inscripturated testimony to that revelation, or as contemporary proclamation. From this one can almost guess what the role of ethics will be, namely, an auxiliary of dogmatics. This has been Barth’s constant position on the relation between dogmatics and ethics.⁴⁰

“The problem of ‘ethics’ is identical with that of ‘dogmatics’: *Soli deo gloria!*”⁴¹ Thus Barth asserted the unity of dogmatics and ethics in his commentary on Romans of 1918. A decade later in his lectures at Münster he said, “Ethics as an independent discipline alongside of dogmatics is impossible. The ethical question is the question of human existence. The Word of God, the subject matter of dogmatics, has precisely this human existence as its own subject matter. Consequently ethics necessarily becomes an auxiliary discipline of dogmatics.”⁴²

In the first volume of his *Kirchliche Dogmatik* he indicated what the unity

⁴⁰ The oft-debated issue of any sharp break or basic change of direction within Barth’s theology over the years must be answered in the negative according to Barth’s own evaluation as well as that of such diverse and penetrating critics as the Swiss Roman Catholic Hans Urs von Balthasar, the Dutch Reformed systematist G. C. Berkouwer, and the Swedish Lutheran Gustav Wingren.

⁴¹ Karl Barth, *Der Römerbrief*. 2d. ed. (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1926), p. 417.

⁴² From John Cullberg’s summary of the 1928 lectures in *Das Problem der Ethik in der dialektischen Theologie, I, Karl Barth*, (Leipzig, 1938), p. 158. The lectures themselves exist in an “unofficial” mimeographed edition.

³⁴ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (English translation). (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936ff.), I, 1, 286. Hereafter cited as *CD*.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 304.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 306.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 308.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 316.

³⁹ E. g., *CD*, I, 2, 793.

of dogmatics and ethics would mean in the trinitarian structure of his *magnum opus*.

Ethics so-called I regard as the doctrine of God's command and do not consider it right to treat it otherwise than as an integral [better: integrating] part of dogmatics, or to produce a dogmatics which does not include it. The concept of the command [better: commandment] of God in general should in this dogmatics be discussed at the close of the doctrine of God. The commandment of God from the viewpoint of Order will be dealt with at the close of the doctrine of Creation, from the viewpoint of Law at the close of the doctrine of Reconciliation, from the viewpoint of Promise at the close of the doctrine of Redemption.⁴³

In the next volume, under the caption "Dogmatics as Ethics," he goes on to say:

The ethical question, i. e., the question concerning right conduct, is the existential problem of man (*menschliche Existenzfrage*). As we will, [so] we are; and what we do, we are. It is not as if man first exists and then acts. He exists while he acts. He exists in that he acts. The question whether and how far he acts rightly is the question whether and how far he exists rightly. And so it is . . . the problem of man's existence which theology or dogmatics makes its own when it raises the ethical question . . . as its most characteristic problem (*eigenste Frage*).⁴⁴

Barth sees himself allied with the reformers in this position. "The ethics of Luther and Calvin are to be sought and found in their dogmatics and not elsewhere."⁴⁵ After looking at the history of

theology, Barth observes that one cannot say that "the unified treatment of dogmatics and ethics necessarily implies in itself an agreement with the reformers' outlook. What we can say is that the divorce between them involves a necessary alienation from this outlook."⁴⁶ In 1946 Barth said that ". . . any such separation is deadly."⁴⁷

The Reformation outlook which Barth wants to have as his own outlook is that the unity of dogmatics and ethics is centered in "the knowledge of Jesus Christ," or the "grace of God" or the "Gospel," or his own favorite, "divine election," "predestination," which is "in one word the whole content of the Gospel, its sum."⁴⁸ Electing grace is also commanding grace.⁴⁹ Electing grace unifies dogmatics and ethics.

In the one image of Jesus Christ we have both the Gospel which reconciles us with God and illumines us and consoles us, and the Law which in contradistinction to all the laws which we ourselves find or fabricate really binds and obligates us. This is the Law to which theological ethics clings. It is ethics of grace or it is not theological ethics. For it is in grace — the grace of God in Jesus Christ — that even the command of God is established and fulfilled and revealed as such. Therefore 'to become obedient,' 'to act rightly,' 'to realize the good,' never means anything other than to become obedient to the revelation of the grace of God; to live as a man to whom grace has come in Jesus Christ. But this is the very reason why there can be no change of standpoint or

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 787.

⁴⁷ Karl Barth, *Christliche Ethik, Ein Vortrag*, (Munich, 1946), p. 15.

⁴⁸ *CD*, II, 2, 510.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 511.

⁴³ *CD*, I, 1, xiv.

⁴⁴ *CD*, I, 2, 793.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 783.

theme when dogmatics becomes ethics, or, rather, when it reveals its ethical content. It cannot live less, but must live wholly and utterly, by the knowledge of the Word and work of God, by the knowledge of Jesus Christ."⁵⁰

Whereas the all-encompassing question of theology (dogmatics) is: Who and what is God?, Barth sees man's ethical question to be: What is the good, the right action? Both questions are answered by God's revelation, and in both cases the answer is the same, Jesus Christ. Typical are such statements as "Jesus . . . does not *give* the answer, but by God's grace He *is* the answer to the ethical question."⁵¹

Barth frequently opts for Micah's short answer (6:8) to the question of the good: "He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you . . ." ⁵² In Barth's own words the answer to the question of the good is: "Good in the Christian sense is that behavior, that action, of man which corresponds to the behavior and action of God in this history [of Jesus Christ] . . . whereby man accepts and not only accepts, but assents to God's self-humiliation on his behalf so that he, man, might live and rejoice. . . . Good is that behavior and action of man which corresponds to God's grace."⁵³

Ethics is "necessarily and decisively" a witnessing to that good which is the content of "the command issued to Jesus Christ and fulfilled by Him. There can be no question of any other good in addition

to this. Other apparent goods are good only in dependence on this good."⁵⁴

All signs point back to Barth's Christology as the hub from which his statements about dogmatics and ethics radiate. But the form of that Christology is already conditioned by several theological opinions, some of which are intimated in the citations above. 1) Man's personal theological problem centers in his lack of knowledge of God, who is the Good, so that in his ignorance he must ask Who is God? What is the Good? The task of dogmatics and ethics, and theology as a whole for that matter, is primarily an epistemological one. Man needs God's revelation, Jesus Christ, as the answer and solution to this personal theological problem. The revelation that does come in Jesus Christ is primarily a communication of the predestinarian verdict of God, concerning which man is ignorant. Jesus does not and does not have to *achieve* or *execute* man's redemption. Rather He reveals to man the news that God and God alone has done all this, and has done so in His eternal decree of predestination before the world began.

2) Related to this is Barth's notion of the qualitative difference between God and man. This gap is occasioned not by sin, but by the given ontological separation between Creator and creature. No earthly human action, even that of the faithful Christian, can qualify for the adjective "divine." God and things divine are always *totaliter aliter*. No human action, nothing in creation, can be more than a parable, a testimony, a sign and pointer from the earthly temporal realm into the heavenly

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 539.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 517.

⁵² E. g., Ibid., p. 537, 566, 572, 574, and throughout the Barth corpus.

⁵³ *Christliche Ethik*, pp. 9f.

⁵⁴ *CD*, II, 2, 518.

realm which is truly godly. It has significance and value only insofar as it fulfills the function depicted by Gruenewald's figure of John the Baptist in the Isenheimer altar — as it points away from self to the wholly other grace of God in Jesus Christ.⁵⁵ Barth has developed a whole vocabulary, which Prenter calls "sign language" (*Zeichensprache*), to discuss this relationship of human to divine action and reality.⁵⁶ Such terms as correspond, reflect, demonstrate, represent, copy, imitate, symbolize, indicate, point, parable, analogy, mirror, reproduction are used to relate the *Sein* of man to the *Sein* of God. The predicament of man's language or any human activity is like that of a creature in an imagined two-dimensional world when faced with the task of constructing three-dimensional figures. *De facto* this is impossible because of the ontological structure of two- and three-dimensional worlds. But it is possible in a two-dimensional world to indicate, reflect, imitate, symbolize, a three-dimensional world — as a painter does, for instance, when by shadows, foreshortening, and perspective he "creates" a three-dimensional landscape on a two-dimensional canvas.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ For Barth, Gruenewald's Isenheimer altar plays a similar role in painting as Mozart does in music. It is constantly cited, as for example, in "Evangelium und Gesetz," *Theologische Existenz Heute*, xxxii, (1935). The exclusive role which John the Baptist plays as model preacher in the New Testament for Barth is not without significance for Barth's theological system.

⁵⁶ Regin Prenter, "Die Einheit von Schöpfung und Erlösung. Zur Schöpfungslehre Karl Barths," *Theologische Zeitschrift*, II (May/June 1946), p. 170.

⁵⁷ Prenter draws a parallel between Barth's "sign language" and the *est vs. significat* controversy in past Protestant history. "At stake in the debate between Barth and Lutheran theology

3) The qualitative opposition between God and man and man's personal theological dilemma of not knowing God, not knowing the Good, correspond to a characteristic concept of "faith" in Barth's theology. Faith is essentially knowledge, man's knowledge of the divine reality, the "grace-full God," on the other side of the divine-human gap. Faith "has no creative, but only a cognitive character. It does not alter anything. . . . It is simply the confirmation of a change which has already taken place."⁵⁸ In Prenter's words: "A transformation of the *est* into a *significat* in the ontic sphere corresponds consequently with the transformation of *credo* into an *intelligo* in the noetic sphere."⁵⁹ Man's unbelief is his theological ignorance. Faith is the solution to the problem of unbelief. Faith is knowledge to replace ignorance. Thus the real contrast between church and world is the "contrast between the church's awareness [*Wissen*] and the world's terrible ignorance [*Nichtwissen*]."⁶⁰ The main theological terms related to faith — baptism, justification, sanctification, sin, repentance, preaching — undergo under Barth's hand the basic transformation indicated by the formula *credo = intelligo*.⁶¹

is still this same *est*. Barth's entire theology of creation [Prenter was reviewing *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, III, 1] stands under the rubric *significat*" (Prenter, p. 180). Already in 1922 Barth admitted that "as a Reformed theologian I of course have the duty to maintain a certain final distance in the face of the Lutheran *est*." (*Das Wort Gottes und die Theologie* [Munich, 1925], p. 178)

⁵⁸ CD, IV, 1, 751.

⁵⁹ Prenter, p. 171.

⁶⁰ CD, III, 2, 607.

⁶¹ Very important at this point is Barth's book *Anselm: Fides Quaerens intellectum*. An-

Thus we can see that the formal unity of dogmatics and ethics in Barth's theology has its roots in (1) the identification of God and the Good, (2) the noetic conception of man's theological problems of sin, as a problem of knowledge which in turn is rooted in man's ontic separation from God, (3) the predestinarian character of grace and the subsequent informational character of revelation, (4) an intellectualized notion of faith (*notitia* of and *assensus* to God's predestinarian verdict),⁶² and (5) the "sign" character of human language and human action in pointing beyond to God's word and action.

In Barth's presentation of Christology these roots became apparent. Jesus is the answer both to the question Who and what is God? and What is the Good? Jesus Christ is true God. He is Immanuel, God-with-us. "The truth of God is exactly this and nothing else."⁶³ God is with us, not against us. God is graciously disposed towards man; He does not demand that man merit His favor. God is reconciled with man. Jesus is also the answer to the

selm's Proof of the Existence of God in the context of His Theological Scheme (Richmond, Va.: John Knox Press, 1960), in which he exegesizes Anselm's thesis indicated in the title, and which verbally parallels Prenter's formula. Barth asserts of Anselm's influence on him: "I believe I learned the fundamental attitude to the problem of the knowledge and existence of God . . . at the feet of Anselm of Canterbury." (CD, II, 1, 4)

⁶² There is little place for *fiducia* in Barth's *Glaubensbegriff* because there is no genuine reality in the world (sin, death, devil) in the face of which the Christian needs to trust in God. There also is no actual verdict of condemnation from God against which to trust God's verdict of forgiveness.

⁶³ Karl Barth, *Humanity of God* (Richmond, Va.: John Knox Press, 1960), p. 49.

question of the good in human life. He is true man. This includes His life of perfect obedience to the Father's will, but also the true and good humanity that constantly points beyond itself to the One alone who is truly good.

Man's theological problem of separation from God and ignorance of God is solved by the person and work of Christ. Barth's preferred term for Redemption is Reconciliation. The message of reconciliation, the heart of the Christian message, is Immanuel. With this phrase Barth is incorporating Old Testament covenantal patterns into his Christology; he even has a 45-page section on the covenant as the presupposition of reconciliation.⁶⁴ "'Reconciliation' is the restitution, the resumption of a fellowship which once existed but was then threatened by dissolution." Jesus Christ is "God in the work of reconciliation."⁶⁵ What happens in this reconciliation is that the gap between the two covenant partners is bridged. "Reconciliation . . . [is] a sovereign act of God. . . . God's crossing the frontier to man."⁶⁶ "The frontier is a real one. On the one side there is God in His glory as Creator and Lord, and also in the majesty of His holiness and righteousness. And on the other side there is man, not merely the creature, but the sinner . . . in opposition to Him. It is not merely a frontier, but a yawning abyss. Yet this abyss is crossed, not by man, not by both God and man, but only by God. . . . That is the insoluble mystery of the grace of God enclosed in the name Jesus Christ."⁶⁷

⁶⁴ CD, IV, 1, 22—66.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 22.

⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. 81f.

⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. 82f.

For Barth the original "sovereign act" is predestination in God's eternal (i. e., pretemporal) decree. Jesus Christ is central to the work of reconciliation, but more in an illustrative than a causative way. Therefore reconciliation as Barth views it is centered in the incarnation, where one body bridged the gap between the two sides of the abyss.⁶⁸ Bethlehem becomes the key event in his Christology. Everything after that is somewhat an anticlimax, the automatic consequences of God's having stepped over the boundaries to reveal His gracious predisposition toward man. As a result, in Barth's Christology Good Friday and Easter play a subordinate role in the reconciliation. Although Barth warns against separating the person and work of Christ in the sense that what we do is what we are, and vice versa, it clearly seems that the "work" of Good Friday and Easter is subordinated to the "person" incarnate at Bethlehem.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Despite this concentrated focus on incarnation ("The central mystery of Christian proclamation is the incarnation": *Gottes Gnadenwahl* [Geneva, 1936], p. 15), Barth has problems right here by virtue of the "abyss" between the human and the divine, which, in Wingren's words, "remains unbridged even in the incarnation. This is the idea, presented especially in *CD*, III, 2, that the humanity of Jesus Christ mirrors the divine in Jesus Christ. The idea of a mirror or a reflection . . . appears also in Christology and extends therefore to . . . the humanity of Jesus Christ." "The statement, 'the word became flesh', ought to be rendered 'the word assumed flesh.'" Gustav Wingren, *Theology in Conflict* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1958), pp. 30f.

⁶⁹ The preferential treatment of Christmas over Good Friday and Easter running throughout Barth's work is consonant with his unwillingness to see the latter events as the ones which "produced" the forgiveness of sins and reconciliation. Instead of an Easter kerygma that sin, death, and wrath are dead, Barth prefers the

Cross and resurrection are extensions of the original obedience shown by the Son of God in becoming man.⁷⁰ Cross and resurrection are additional revelations, conclusive and final, concerning the "true God and true man" of the incarnation. Revelation here answers the ethical question; here Christ reveals how a "true" man of God obeys God. This work of Christ does bring about "the alteration of the human situation,"⁷¹ but it must be kept in mind that what is central to the human situation as Barth views it is man's erroneous concept that God is not gracious and therefore must be placated. Thus for Barth reconciliation entails changing man's verdict about God rather than God's verdict about man.

The *est = significat* equation and the "sign language" that accompanies it expose some of the implications of Barth's Christology for ethics. In the Christian's ethical life of discipleship (*Nachfolge*), Jesus is the "true man." His humanity is the prototype, the "original" (*Urbild*), and that of his followers is the "copy" (*Abbild*).⁷² However, the truthfulness of Jesus' own humanity is that in all things He constantly signified and pointed toward the divine realm and the graciousness of God on the other side of the abyss. Consequently the Christian's ethical life as *Abbild* of this humanity is typified in Gruenewald's John the Baptist, viz., a *demonstratio*, a *significare* that points be-

Christian kerygma that man's sinfulness is not so drastic as to prevent God from covenanting with him.

⁷⁰ *CD*, IV, 1, 313.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *CD*, III, 2, 50.

yond the temporal and human to the *esse* of God's predestination. The Christian lives his life alert for God's clue as to how he can live each moment "demonstrationally." His ethical actions are "a kind of silhouette of the elective, free, and total activity of God Himself . . . characterized by the will to seek God and to find Him, that is to inquire concerning His commandment, to be guided by His decisions and attitudes, and to follow His direction."⁷³ Distinctive of a Christian's ethical action (*Handeln*) is that in it "he now lives as one who seeks God,"⁷⁴ enacting on his own ethical stage (is it drama or pantomime?) the script written for and about him in predestination.

This ties in with the *credo = intelligo* equation. The role of faith for ethics is not to create that kind of new being who is "free" from concern about the divine consequences of his ethical actions as much as it gives him knowledge of the predestinarian verdict for his existence. Faith and love are two forms of the new *Sein*. Both are intellectually defined. As faith, the new being is "man's recognition, acknowledgment, and acceptance of this verdict [and] the making of his own subjection to this verdict."⁷⁵ As love "it consists in the fact that he accepts the divine direction (*Weisung*)." ⁷⁶ In ethical decisions and actions the Christian "follows the decision already made and the act already accomplished by God, confirming them in his own human decision and act; [so] that he, for his part, chooses what has already

been chosen and actualized for him."⁷⁷ "What is involved in ethical decisions is the matter of divine predestination."⁷⁸ As a new being, the man of faith searches out God's predetermined will and strives in his self-determination to correspond to it.⁷⁹

SUMMARY

Dogmatics and ethics as sciences are both human activity. The faith and works of a Christian which dogmatics and ethics investigate concerning their congruence with the Word of God are also human activities. All human actions have their highest value when they point men to God, when in this sense they are an *imitatio Christi*, a *demonstratio ad gloriam Dei*. This happens when they point man away from man, his history, and his world to the wholly other Word of the living God. The person and work of Jesus Christ as the central event in human history is the revelation (exposition, not execution) of God's reconciliation with man. Although unredeemed man ought to be living a life that points toward God, he does not know where to point. After reconciliation has been made known, he does know where to point. Jesus Christ is both revealer and prototype of the true God as well as revealer of true man. Christian *Nachfolge* is *imitatio Christi* when it, too, points men to the glory and grace of God. Dogmatics and ethics are finally united in this *Nachfolge*.

Thus dogmatics and ethics can only be "church" dogmatics and ethics. For only

⁷³ CD, IV, 1, 104.

⁷⁴ Ibid., and CD, I, 2, 370.

⁷⁵ CD, IV, 1, 93.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 99.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 100.

⁷⁸ Barth's mimeographed lectures on ethics, vol. I, p. 75.

⁷⁹ Cullberg, pp. 143f.

the church, as the gathering of those who know about the grace of God, can point out God's truth to the world. Thus the church must destroy the world's illusions about both God and man and replace the ignorance with knowledge of the truth. This truth is the knowledge of the "true" God and of the "true" man. Thus Barth can say that it is supremely the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

ERNST TROELTSCH⁸⁰

Troeltsch agonizes about the modern world and the modern breakdown of all past syntheses between Christianity and culture. All past syntheses, including the Reformation, were theologically "medieval," authoritarian, supernatural, and miraculous, and ecclesiastically patriarchal. This is in contrast to modern man's intellectual commitment to the autonomous, the immanent, and the scientific, and his organizational commitment to the rubrics of personal decision, democratic individualism, and internal *Gesinnung*. What is needed for the modern world, characterized as it is by the new components mentioned in part above, is a new synthesis, a *Weiterentwicklung* of the synthesis which historical Christianity has always been between foreign cultural elements and

⁸⁰ Ernst Troeltsch, German theologian and philosopher, was born in Augsburg, Feb. 17, 1865, and died Feb. 1, 1923. He taught at the universities of Göttingen (1891—1892), Bonn (1892—1894), and Heidelberg (1894 to 1915). He was Professor of History of Philosophy and Civilization at Berlin from 1915 to his death in 1923. Among his chief works are *Die Bedeutung des Protestantismus für die Entstehung der modernen Welt* (1906), *Die Soziallehren der christlichen Kirchen und Gruppen* (1912), and *Christian Thought: Its History and Application* (1923).

distinctively Christian elements. Neo-Protestantism, for which Troeltsch was both prophet and apostle, was working for such a synthesis, a consciously pursued *Kulturprotestantismus*.

The effect of the modern situation on dogmatics and ethics is the recession of dogmatics and the supremacy of ethics. In the modern world ". . . we do not ask: How can I find a gracious God? Instead our question is: How can I recover the soul and love?" (*die Seele und die Liebe*)⁸¹

Troeltsch himself produced neither a dogmatics nor an ethics, although a posthumous volume of his lectures on traditionally dogmatic themes was published under the substitute label significantly favored by Troeltsch, *Glaubenslehre*.⁸² He envisioned his own major contribution to be the preliminary historical studies of the modern temper and the religious-philosophical propaedeutics⁸³ necessary for both the *Glaubenslehre* and the ethics of Neo-Protestantism.

The philosophical propaedeutics to theology contained answers to the following questions: Is there any place for religion and religious experience at all in the modern world? If so, why prefer Christianity above other world religions? The former question is answered affirmatively by two means, the religious psychology of idealism

⁸¹ Ernst Troeltsch, *Gesammelte Schriften* (Tübingen, 1912—25), II, 522. Hereafter cited as *GS*.

⁸² Troeltsch, *Vorlesungen Ueber Glaubenslehre* (Munich, 1925). Retrospectively, he stated in his *GS* (IV, 13): "Understandably enough I was unable to convince myself to write a dogmatics."

⁸³ Walter Bodenstein, *Neige des Historismus* (Gütersloh, 1959), pp 49ff.

and neo-Kantian categorical epistemology.⁸⁴ The second question bothered Troeltsch to the end of his life as he wrestled unsuccessfully with the issue of the *Absolutheit des Christentums*.

Such propaedeutics have the following consequences for dogmatics and ethics: (1) Christianity is one form, to be sure the highest and most universal form, of the general category "religion," that is, an experienced encounter with the divine. (2) Kantian epistemological categories supply the criteria for judging the validity and truth of this experience. (3) Theology is therefore primarily a science of the religious experience of man who is as such *homo religiosus*. Thus Troeltsch prefers the more accurate label *Religionsphilosophie* for this science instead of theology. (4) In view of this anthropocentrism of *Religionsphilosophie*, ethics moves forward and dogmatics recedes. "The moral is the meaning of the religious"⁸⁵ is what Troeltsch means with one of his favored hyphenated terms, *religiös-sittlich* ("religio-ethical"). (5) The remaining role of dogmatics, especially in its traditional authoritarian and transcendental elements, is sharply modified to correlate with this individualism, which, although always inherent in the genuine essence (*Prinzip*) of Christianity, now necessitates even more modification by virtue of the modern autonomous and immanent characteristics of this individualism.

The effects of these principles upon a Neo-Protestant "dogmatics" is to be seen in the posthumous *Glaubenslehre*. Troeltsch

summarizes its characteristic elements in his article "Dogmatik" in *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*: (1) surrender of naive supranaturalism and acceptance of the historicity of Christianity together with other religions; (2) extensive and open cooperation with philosophical idealism; (3) allowance for religious pluralism while accepting the modern *Weltbild*; (4) resulting change in substance and not merely in the form of theological content ("de-mything and re-mything"); (5) nevertheless, a close tie-in with the prophets, the person of Jesus, and the Bible, which are essential and central; (6) a dogmatics that is no longer normative, but an advisory, inspirational *Glaubenslehre*, designed for the congregation and the proclamation.⁸⁶

Although Troeltsch did not produce an ethics to parallel the *Glaubenslehre*, ethics "actually were of central importance" to him.⁸⁷ For ethics, too, Troeltsch begins with philosophical propaedeutics to answer the first question: What is the ethical (*das Sittliche*)? Then comes the second question about the *Prinzip* of Christian ethics, and the subquestion of the *Prinzip* of Protestant Christian ethics. Finally there is "applied ethics," the practical formulation of the principles in terms of the current situation and the exigencies of a given historical epoch.

Troeltsch's answer to the first question of the essence of the moral is largely Kantian. It is the experience of an imperative (*Sollen*) in human consciousness, the experience that something necessarily

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 18f. and pp. 22—28.

⁸⁵ Quoted by Heinrich Benckert, *Ernst Troeltsch und das ethische Problem* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1932), p. 16.

⁸⁶ *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart* 1st ed. (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1909 to 13), II, cols. 108f. Hereafter cited as RGG¹.

⁸⁷ Benckert, pp. 13 ff.

ought to be, and if it is not, then man ought to bring it about.

Troeltsch's answer to the second question of the particular *Sollen* in Christian ethics is found in his historical study, *The Social Teachings of the Christian Churches*. In his concluding summary he lists four items as the distinctly Christian ethos of what ought to be.

- 1) The Christian ethos alone possesses, in virtue of its personalistic theism, a conviction of personality and individuality, based on metaphysics.
- 2) The Christian ethos alone, through its conception of a divine love which embraces all souls and unites them all, possesses a socialism which cannot be shaken.
- 3) Only the Christian ethos solves the problem of equality and inequality, recognizing differences as the inscrutable will of God and then transforming this condition by the inner up-building of the personality.
- 4) Through its emphasis upon the Christian value of personality, and on love, the Christian ethos creates something which no social order can dispense with entirely — charity.⁸⁸

The *Prinzip* which is the essence of Protestant ethics is "the Christian consciousness of blissful trust in God and loving service of the brother, which animates the system of natural callings by putting such loving service of neighbor into practice primarily in the form of fidelity to one's vocation and thus maintaining and

⁸⁸ Troeltsch, *Die Soziallehren der christlichen Kirchen und Gruppen* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1911). Eng. trans., Olive Wyon, *The Social Teachings of the Christian Churches* (New York: Macmillan, 1931); reprinted Harper Torchbook (New York, 1960), pp. 1004f.

promoting the whole."⁸⁹ Thus Protestantism's principle is actually a delegatized moral law, a ". . . completely free and autonomous explication of the Christian notion of goals by means of personal conscience and its free application to life."⁹⁰

On the question of "applied ethics" Troeltsch's creativity "stood in a certain disproportion to the amazing riches of his speculative (i. e., analytical) historical outlook."⁹¹ Nevertheless he did talk about the necessary task in contemporary ethics, but even this is handled rather intellectually, perhaps from Troeltsch's perspective the most practical thing he could do. His description of the required task was "combining the subjective ethics [of Kant] with the objective ethics [of Schleiermacher],"⁹² or combining "the morality of personality and conscience" with the "ethics of cultural values."⁹³

The ethics of cultural values in societies, peoples, and mankind as a whole is not a system that can be consciously worked out, but its individual constituent parts develop under the accidental conditions of the historical process. When, however, a given constellation of cultural values has become a system which is actually in effect, the individual moral man goes to work with his own moral reason to refine, concentrate, liberate, and direct it. Here is where "subjective ethics," individual moral conscience in its freedom, creativity, and

⁸⁹ RGG¹, IV, col. 1915.

⁹⁰ RGG¹, II, col. 1386.

⁹¹ Cited by Friedrich von Hügel in his introduction to Troeltsch's posthumously published lectures, *Christian Thought*, (London, 1923), p. xxii.

⁹² Troeltsch, *GS*, II, p. 623.

⁹³ Troeltsch, *Christian Thought*, pp. 39—99.

decision finally come into play in shaping the objective ethics of cultural values.⁹⁴

Troeltsch is not trying to establish either a personal morality or a cultural one (although World War I revealed unmistakably the catastrophic crisis in cultural values), but he is rather trying to find the possible connection between the two. Actually this is just the ethical form of his lifelong problem of relating the absolute with the historically conditioned and relative, or reason with nature, in this case, moral reason, the individual *Sollen*, with supra-individual nature or historical culture.

Because of the practical identification of the religious with the ethical, Troeltsch would say that dogmatics and ethics are one. Whereas for Barth they are united in their common concern with "Word of God," for Troeltsch their common object is the Christian *religiös-sittlich* man in his internal consciousness (*Gesinnung*) and his external actions. But even the internal *Gesinnung* is not the private domain of dogmatics, since this *Gesinnung* is where the ethical *Sollen* is to be found. Because dogmatics and ethics are describing the Christian self-consciousness of one and the same believing man, Troeltsch's hyphenated term *religiös-sittlich* is in fact testifying to the identical subject matter in both dogmatics and ethics. Therefore Troeltsch shifts away from the term dogmatics to a *Glaubenslehre*, which he calls the "practical guidelines for presenting the basic thoughts of Christian faith for congregational practice,"⁹⁵ a historically conditioned, "semiscientific,"

highly autobiographical production of the thoughts and feelings of the believer.

For Troeltsch, ethics is the fundamental discipline (*Fundamentalwissenschaft*) of theology, and dogmatics is its helpmeet. Thus he can say that dogmatics and ethics are related as "knowledge and practice" within the *ethisch-religiös* personality, yet even this knowledge is "practical, *religiös-ethisch*."⁹⁶ Dogmatics in the form of a *Glaubenslehre* is an auxiliary science (*Hilfswissenschaft*) to the ethics of the man who is already Christian. It stands in the service of completing the ethical man. It is "ultimately only a catalyst to produce one's own insights about faith, which then are to be the basis of Christian practice."⁹⁷ The chief consideration in a *Glaubenslehre* is "whether it edifies the people"⁹⁸ by mediating the needed power of God's Spirit for man's own internal and external moral life.

Troeltsch's intellectual roots can be found both in philosophical idealism and in the "left wing" of the Reformation. Troeltsch's admitted affinity to idealism has been apparent above. The following elements of idealism are relevant to his thought on dogmatics and ethics: (1) the dualism of spirit and nature, of intelligence and the senses, of God as rational spirit and the world as sensory nature; (2) the possibility of the phenomenal being a vehicle for the numinous; (3) man as the prime paradox; fully *Geist* and fully nature; (4) "redemption" via immanent "revelation" — the presence of the

⁹⁶ RGG¹, II, col. 1438.

⁹⁷ Troeltsch, *Vorlesungen über Glaubenslehre*, p. 4.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 96ff.

⁹⁵ Bodenstein, p. 31.

divine in the human soul; (5) "redemption" as the supremacy of spirit in control over nature; (6) the notion of evolutionary development in the progressive education of the human race.

The second root goes back to the 16th century. Because in his judgment Luther's personal theological search for a gracious God was essentially a medieval quest, and because the later Luther remedievalized the young Luther's discovery of Christianity as a religion of faith (*Glaubensreligion*) or a religion of grace (*Gnadenreligion*), Troeltsch could not utilize Luther for his own thought. However, he publicly proclaimed his kinship to the left wing of the Reformation which Luther had rejected as enthusiasm (*Schwärmerei*). Although Troeltsch could not accept their utopianism, legalism, or naive mythology, he viewed the left-wing Reformers as the first "modern" Christians. They were the forerunners of Neo-Protestantism because of their piety, which was interior, antidogmatic, committed, active in love, and above all a genuine spiritual experience, and their polity which he described as "free church," nonauthoritarian, democratic, simple.

These two sources, idealism and Reformation spiritualism, help shape Troeltsch's theology into the pattern of the gnostic-pneumatic tradition, wherein Christianity presents the redemption drama for freeing the spirit of man from its creaturely impediments in nature. The life of faith is the *religiös-sittlich* process of freeing the creaturely spirit from its conditionedness in nature so that it may progressively grow into the life of the divine spirit toward the goal of "a complete union with God."⁹⁹

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 381.

History itself and the conditions of historical existence are a constant threat to the life of the spirit. What is needed is an overcoming of history (*Ueberwindung der Geschichte*).¹⁰⁰

Christianity offers an encounter with the numinous, changeless, gracious, and loving supreme Spirit who is the source of all historically incarnate spirits. The redemption offered by Christianity, like that of other religions, is eventual escape of the spirit from the confining and strangling strictures of existence in the world of nature under the conditions of history, into the "freedom of the Spirit." It is God's creative will returning to itself.¹⁰¹ "The dialectic of God's self-transformation into creatures is itself transformed into the return transformation of the creature into God."¹⁰²

The modern world itself requires that ethics be the *Fundamentalwissenschaft*. In the ancient and medieval worlds dogmatics could be the cutting edge in Christianity's mission to the world, because the world itself already operated automatically with a transcendentalistic frame of reference. But in an immanentistic world, Christianity can only operate immanentistically. That means latching on to man in terms of what he automatically acknowledges, *viz.*, man's ethical self-consciousness. It means beginning with ethics. From here it may be possible to bring man to experience the Christian faith, and then to come in contact with a *Glaubenslehre*, which could not be meaningful to him before that. In the

¹⁰⁰ The phrase is Walther Koehler's, from his book, *Ernst Troeltsch* (Tübingen, 1941), p. 374.

¹⁰¹ RGG¹, II, col. 484.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, col. 1471.

modern world dogmatics as *Glaubenslehre* is incomprehensible to the outsider. It is a hidden discipline (*disciplina arcana*), necessarily mythical, meaningful only to such as have had the faith experience. Even within the Christian community it is not "universally valid," since in every case it is highly autobiographical, "corresponding to the individual scientific and religious convictions" of the author.¹⁰³

Even these stated intramural, inner-churchly tasks for a dogmatics fade somewhat, since Troeltsch has difficulty finding a necessary role for the church itself. Because of the individualistic notion of redemption and the overall internalization and spiritualization inherent in the gnostic pattern, Troeltsch confronts the externally tangible redeemed community more as an embarrassing historical fact than as an integral component of redemption. Theoretically the church is superfluous.

Ethics is the fundamental discipline in yet another way. In Troeltsch's thought ethics is the locale where actual redemption takes place. Not past history, but present history is the stage for redemption, and it takes place not by relating oneself to some past redemption-myth, but by practical and personal execution of the universal redemption-myth in one's own life. Ethics is the guideline for executing the redemption. Thus ethics compels one to plunge into his own present history, but curiously enough does so with a view toward redemption from this history. It is "overcoming history with history," my natural history with my spiritual history, my *Naturleben* with my *Geistesleben*.

¹⁰³ Troeltsch, *Vorlesungen über Glaubenslehre*, p. 4.

Dogmatics as the *disciplina arcana* is addressed to the insiders who are no longer in real danger. It is part of their cultic life, deepening their insights after they have been redeemed. Ethics speaks directly to the outsiders, those who are still in mortal danger from nature and history. It portrays the *via salutaris*. It is absolutely necessary. It is the *Fundamentalwissenschaft*.

SUMMARY

Inherent in Gnosticism is a depreciation of history. Strange as it may sound for such a prominent historian, history was for Troeltsch the great nemesis, the threat to *Geist* and knowledge, to all the great absolutes. Once he called raw history the *bellum omnium contra omnes*.¹⁰⁴ He himself could not be content to remain within it.¹⁰⁵ The absolute realities, e. g., the kingdom of God, he said, "lie outside all history. In history itself, there are only relative victories."¹⁰⁶ History, like nature, terms which he can use interchangeably, is a nemesis which must be dammed up and controlled, mastered and subdued.¹⁰⁷ The absolutes of the world of Spirit, because they "transcend history, cannot limit or shape history."¹⁰⁸

Therefore even if man should seek to apply his own small share in the absolute, his own *Geist*, to history, he cannot hope to overcome the threat. At best he can for

¹⁰⁴ Troeltsch, *Christian Thought*, p. 167.

¹⁰⁵ See Hans-Georg Drescher, "Das Problem der Geschichte bei Ernst Troeltsch," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, LVII (1960), 186 to 230.

¹⁰⁶ Troeltsch, *Christian Thought*, p. 129.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 93, 128.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

a time impede its speed or modify its direction. So finally the flight from history is also a flight from ethics. Although the Christian is sent back into the world to care for the "divine and the good in it," he "finally grows up away from this world, since in his worldly work he is only seeking that which leads him beyond the world back to the world's own ground, God Himself."¹⁰⁹

Ethics is the bridge by which Troeltsch sought synthesis with the modern world, since traditional dogmatics (and even updated dogmatics) were incapable of the task. Yet even ethics offers no absolute, unless that absolute is man himself. In seeking to work out a modern synthesis wherein the *Absolutheit des Christentums* might be expressed without necessary recourse to the *Absolutheit Christi*, the end product is a "transformation of Christianity into a profoundly Christianized religion of humanity."¹¹⁰

CONCLUSION

The understanding of history is crucial in each of the three theologies we have surveyed. Elert's Lutheranism with its focus on the Second Article operates throughout with the notion of God at work in, with, and under historical existence, especially in the time of the life and ministry of Jesus and continually so in the life and ministry of the church that develops genetically from His history. Of the three models, Elert's Lutheranism allows for the most positive evaluation of history. History is the place where dogmatics is focused; God's actual work of salvation took

place *in* the history of Jesus of Nazareth. History is also the place where ethics is focused; the Christian as a member of the new historical Christ-community actually lives the "divine" life in his own personal biography. God's own "quality" of life lives within him. Thus "incarnation" is Elert's focus, not only with reference to Christ, but in all of history where the divine verdicts are operative as both Law and Gospel. The church's special ethos is that the life of God incarnate in Christ is continued in Christ's church. Christ's incarnation is the subject matter of dogmatics, the *incarnatio continua* of the church is the subject matter of ethics.

The Reformed tradition in Barth's theology emphasizes the First Article and seeks to interpret the rest of Christian theology from that vantage point. This is reflected in Barth's words about dogmatics and ethics. The deity of the Creator and the creatureliness of man are the parameters into which Barth's theology is sketched. History is one facet of the creaturely world. The Creator, by definition "wholly Other" than His creation, cannot be *fully* present and at work within creation and history. The concern for the majesty and deity of God renders the role of human historical life negligible. Thus there is no place within Christian theology for ethics, ethics means serious attention to human historical life. Such serious concentration on man the creature is dangerously near to idolatry, a turning away from total concentration on the Creator. Every theologically legitimate enterprise comes under the rubric of dogmatics, the science devoted to studying the congruence of the word and work of man with the word and work of God. The theologian's apologetic

¹⁰⁹ RGG¹, II, col. 486.

¹¹⁰ Bodenstein, pp. 51ff.

task is to see to it that God's rights are not infringed upon anywhere in the process. Whereas for Elert the theologian must be on guard to see to it that the Second Article (*Christus manet mediator*) does not suffer distortion, Barth's theologian is determined to let God be God and to keep the creature being the creature. Whatever commerce there may be between God and His creatures by virtue of His initiation, this First-Article distinction sketches the ontological boundaries within which it must remain.

The left-wing tradition presented by Troeltsch is a form of absolutizing the Third Article, the doctrine of Spirit. Although it takes on idealistic contours, this pneumatism incorporates and subordinates the First and Second Articles into itself, reducing them to some intellectual or ontological relationship with the eternal spirit. Thus although Troeltsch is, so to speak, at the other end of the creed from Barth, the consequences of both of their theologies merge at important points, e. g., in their attitude toward history. Troeltsch's radicalized Third-Article theology is a radicalized eschatology wherein all history is relativized even though it continues to exist. Theologically all history is hell, the nemesis to the life of the Spirit. But it is a conquered hell, having no absolute power over the life of the Spirit, although it may cause trouble, e. g., guilt feelings, in given individual spirits. Therefore everything in

Christian theology coalesces into ethics. Dogmatics has no place or function since the eschaton is already present in the Spirit-existence of every man. The completion of redemption is all that is lacking. Only a third Article is needed, an ethics to help men pick their way like Dante in the *Divine Comedy* through the world back to the *paradiso* where they all already now belong.

Whereas Troeltsch's spiritualized Christianity recurs to a spiritualized eschatology of the Third Article, Barth's depreciation of history comes via his focus on predestinarian protology, a spiritualized First Article. Just as Troeltsch ultimately seeks to be operating already beyond the Third Article, so Barth's theological starting point is actually before the First Article. Both operate primarily outside of history. Although Barth draws the conclusion that dogmatics is everything, and Troeltsch that ethics is everything, the internal opposition between them is not at all as great as the initial difference suggests.

If the *Absolutheit* of Christianity does indeed reside in whatever claim to *Absolutheit* Christ himself made, then letting the Second Article set the parameters, as Elert does, would appear closer to the heart of the matter than any absolutizing of the First or Third Article before treating the Second.

Valparaiso, Ind.