

of connecting link between the kingdoms in his thinking; but what precisely is the nature of the link?

Ernst Troeltsch (whom we have already met in passing as one of the sources of Elert and Pelikan's anti-apologetic view of Luther) is best known in Reformation studies for his negative views of Luther's social ethic.²⁶ Troeltsch claims that Luther's theology produced social quietism because Luther never connected the theological insights operative in his spiritual kingdom with the activities of the earthly kingdom. This allegation has been decisively refuted by George Forell, who shows that, in the first place, Luther's two kingdoms are connected as to origin, for "these two separate realms are ultimately both God's realms"; and, even more important, they are linked in practice by the individual Christian believer, who is a citizen of both simultaneously ("Luther explains that a point of contact between the secular realm and the spiritual realm exists in the person of the individual Christian").²⁷ A parallel vindication of Luther is needed epistemologically.

As the individual Christian unites the two kingdoms in his person, there by bridging the sociological gap between them, so the Incarnate Christ Himself links the two realms epistemologically. The incarnational center of Luther's theology eliminates entirely the possibility of making him an advocate of "two-fold truth"--a kind of 16th century Averroës. In the sharpest possible opposition to Platonic dualism--and to the related modern dichotomies of Kantianism and of Lessing's ditch between historical fact and absolute truth--Luther declares that Jesus Christ, in His own person, offers immediate access to the Divine. One begins with the earthly and finds the heavenly. Luther's words should be carefully pondered in the final version of his Galatians commentary:

Paul is in the habit of linking together Jesus Christ and God the Father so frequently: he wants to teach us the Christian

religion, which does not begin at the very top, as all other religions do, but at the very bottom. Paul commands us to ascend on the ladder of Jacob, at the top of which God Himself is resting, and the feet of which touch the earth next to the head of Jacob (Gen. 28:12f.). Therefore if you would think or treat of your salvation, you must stop speculating about the majesty of God; you must forget all thoughts of good works, tradition, philosophy, and even the divine Law. Hasten to the stable and the lap of the mother and apprehend this infant Son of the Virgin. Look at Him being born, nursed, and growing up, walking among men, teaching, dying returning from the dead and being exalted above all the heavens, in possession of power over all. In this way you can cause the sun to dispel the clouds and can avoid all fear and all errors too. And this view of God will keep you on the right path.²⁸

Luther insists that the search for God begin at the connecting link between earth and heaven which exists at the point of the incarnation. There we find a genuine human being ("nursed and growing up", "dying") but also Very God of Very God ("returning from the dead and being exalted above all the heavens"). "Philosophy," which starts elsewhere, must be forgotten; absolute truth is available only here. Why does Luther concentrate relatively little on traditional proofs for God's existence (even though he considered such argumentation valid)? Because for him it did not constitute the proper point of departure:

If you begin your study of God by trying to determine how He rules the world, how He burned Sodom and Gomorrah with infernal fire, whether He has elected this person or that, and thus begin with the works of the High Majesty, then you will presently break your neck and be hurled from heaven, suffering a

fall like Lucifer's. For such procedure amounts to beginning on top and building the roof before you have laid the foundation. Therefore, letting God do whatever He is doing, you must begin at the bottom and say: I do not want to know God until I have first known this Man; for so read the passages of Scripture: "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life"; again: "No man cometh unto the Father but by Me" (John 14: 6). And there are more passages to the same effect.²⁹

Luther is not anti-apologetic; he is, rather, exceedingly careful in his starting-point. The point de départ must be Christ; in methodology one must "begin at the bottom" with the Incarnation; and no reasoning (or anything else, for that matter!) can be legitimately regarded as ground for works-righteousness or self-justification.

Admittedly, Luther did not build a formal apologetic from this incarnational starting-point. His task was not to defend the soundness of the biblical history or of its picture of Christ. In the 16th century, no reputable theologians of any school of thought questioned the veracity of the scriptural text. The cold winds of rationalistic biblical criticism had not yet begun to blow. (To be sure, Renaissance humanists such as Lorenzo Valla would later be regarded as precursors of such criticism, but they constituted no negative apologetic threat to biblical authority in Luther's time.) Luther often said that he did his best work when angry, i.e., he recognized that his theological activities were determined in large part by the contemporary pressures upon him; these pressures came, not from unbelievers doubting the authority of the Word but from churchmen who misinterpreted it. Thus Luther's battles were necessarily hermeneutic rather than apologetic in character. Moreover, since he was especially confronted by the traditional Romanist on the right and the fanatic Schwärmer on the left, both of whom appealed to extra-

biblical miracles in their midst, Luther preferred to fight on the common ground of the Word, emphasizing the truth--which must never be forgotten apologetically in our contingent world!--that those who want to discount the clear evidence of God's miraculous dealings can always find some way (improbable though it may be) of doing so.

But the fundamental themes of Luther's theology were most definitely hospitable to a positive apologetic, and bore fruit apologetically when, not so many years later, the very authority of the Word came under fire. We have already stressed the central role the Incarnation played in Luther's thought--eliminating theological schizophrenia and offering a bridge from ordinary human experience to the divine truth of God's revelation. Related themes of great apologetic consequence in his theology include: his psychosomatic holism (Luther's refusal, in debate with Zwingli and others, to separate Christ's spirit from His body; he thereby avoided the trap of "spiritualist" theology which is in the last analysis unverifiable and indefensible--as was the claim of Reformed Modernists of our century that Christ rose from the dead "spiritually" but not necessarily in body)³⁰; Luther's constant epistemological insistence on the objectivity of Christian truth (his repeated assertions that to find the true meaning of the Gospel one must always go from "the outward to the inward" and that the Gospel lies entirely extra nos not only precluded subjectivism and auto-salvation, but also provided the foundation for the teaching of the orthodox Lutheran dogmatists that notitia--objective fact--must always ground fiducia--personal, subjective commitment--and that Christian heart conviction can be justified by external evidence)³¹; Luther's sacramental teaching (his firm maintenance of the finitum est capax infiniti principle places him most definitely outside the Platonist camp and opens the way to the widest variety of apologetic operations, since every fact in the world--to use Luther's own expression, "even the most insignificant leaf of a tree"--becomes a potential avenue to Christ)³²; and, finally, his inductive