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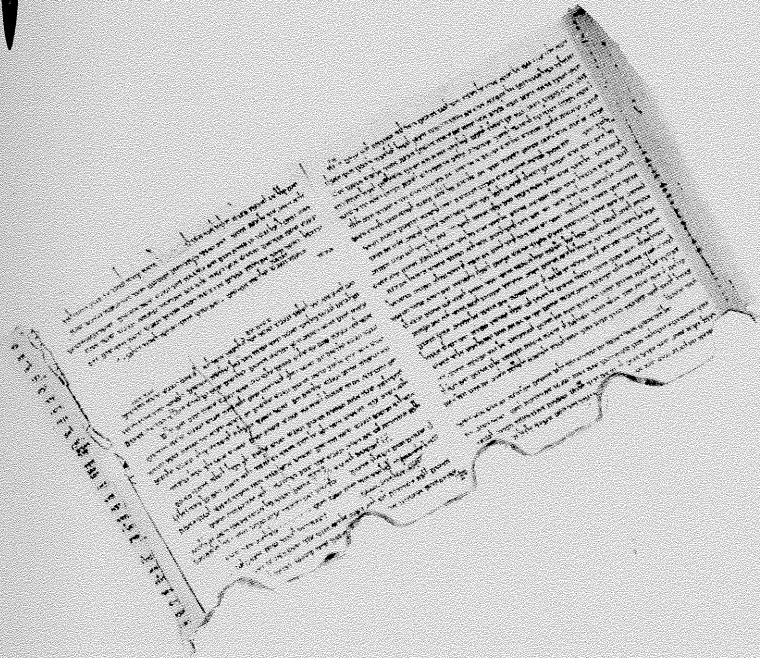
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Dr. J. W. Montgomery

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LUTHERANISM AND THE DEFENSE OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH*

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LECTURE I: SHOULD CHRISTIANITY BE DEFENDED?

My University of British Columbia lectures on the historical truth of the Christian faith¹ brought a number of appreciative letters, and two others. The two correspondents were both troubled by the same thing: my apparent endeavor to prove Christianity to the non-Christian. One of the students, from Göttingen University, Germany, wrote: "When one sets out to prove the validity of the Christian religion, there is no longer a place for faith. Faith is commitment, not to what can be made easy to swallow by sane arguments, but to that radical voice which calls directly to us, 'I am the resurrection and the life, whosoever lives and believes in me shall never die' (John 11: 25)."

In these words, the Göttingen student expresses a tension that Christians have felt in every age: the tension between reason and faith, between knowing and believing, between head knowledge and heart commitment. So important is this issue for Christians in our secular age, it warrants the most detailed analysis, Thus the present essay. First, I shall examine the most important negative criticisms frequently voiced against "defending the faith"; then I will suggest Biblical justification for the necessity of apologetics.

* The 1970 Reformation Lectures, at Bethany Lutheran College, Mankato, Minnesota.

Under Fire

Apologetics, that branch of theology concerned with the defense of the Christian truth, has fallen on hard times. Though traditionally considered one of the three major branches of systematic theology, it is hardly represented at all in seminary curricula today. In light of the conflicts among liberals, neo-orthodox and orthodox, one would expect that apologetics would have vociferous champions as well as opponents, but the surprising fact is that few theologians of any stripe show real interest. Quite the contrary. Across the theological spectrum apologetics is viewed with a distinctly jaundiced eye. A person like C. S. Lewis contrasts like the proverbial sore thumb with the numerous theologians who, though they have difficulty agreeing on much else, unite in their opposition to "proving Christianity." Let us examine briefly but critically the attitude of three major theological positions in this matter; after doing so, we will be in a good position to discover why so much of present-day Christendom finds it difficult to "give an answer to every man who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you" (I Peter 3:15).

Protestant Modernism

Liberalism's displeasure with efforts to defend Christianity was made explicit by Willard L. Sperry in his book, "Yes, But--": The Bankruptcy of Apologetics (1931). For Sperry and the modernism he represented, Christians who argued for Biblical truth over against scientific judgments were hopelessly deluded. When science spoke, theology was to listen; and in cases where Biblical statements seemed to be contradicted by scientific opinion, the former ought properly to be rejected or recast in scientifically accommodating terms.

Two basic assumptions underlay Sperry's argument. First, he held with modernism that Christianity is basically not a religion of propositional, objective truth, but a way of life focusing on subjective

feeling (Schleiermacher) and moral action (the "social gospel"). Thus the defense of doctrine was beside the point; science is the source of cognitive data about the world, and theology should bow to its judgments. Second, Sperry believed that Christianity was not qualitatively different from other religions of the world. Since all religious roads lead up the mountain of truth, one should not try to convince others of Christianity's special claims.

The fallacy of the modernist view of Christianity is now generally recognized in theological circles. The New Testament most definitely presents the Christian faith as a matter of concrete, cognitive truth. Whether one looks at Christ's demands ("Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father in me"-- John 14:10-11) or at the explicit creedal affirmations of the apostles ("I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures...and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures"-- I Cor. 15:1-4), one sees that Christianity is not primarily a matter of feeling or even of action, but a religion of factual belief--factual belief which, only because of its objective truth, yields genuine religious experience and meaningful social action. Moreover, contra liberalism, the Christianity of the New Testament is presented as qualitatively different from all other religions, past or future. "I am the way, the truth and the life: no man comes to the Father but by me," said Jesus (John 14:6); "there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved," His apostles preached (Acts 4:12).

Thus modernism's opposition to apologetics falls to the ground, for it is based on a misunderstanding of the nature of Christianity itself. A non-factual religion is of course not capable of factual defense; but Christianity, grounded in the fact of God's entrance into human history in the person of Christ, is the factual and defensible religion par excellence.

Barth and Bultmann

Though Karl Barth was largely responsible for the demise of modernism, his displeasure with attempts to defend Christianity was as great as that of the modernists. True, he firmly maintained the objective factual character of the saving events in Scripture (the incarnation, death, and resurrection of our Lord, etc.), and he proclaimed these events as unique and Christianity as the final religious truth.

But the impact of Barth's return to the Bible has been considerably weakened by his efforts to remove the key events of the plan of salvation from secular examination. Early in his career he asserted that the miraculous events of the gospel (virgin birth, resurrection, etc.) took place in a "meta-historical" or "suprahistorical" realm (Geschichte)--a realm not subject to the canons of ordinary historical (historische) investigation.² In his later writings he preferred not to make this distinction between realms of history, but he still affirmed that the miraculous events of Scripture cannot be validated apart from prior belief in them.³ Consistent with this approach, Barth held that neither the Bible itself nor the saving events recorded in it can be objects of "proof" to the unbeliever; it is only by faith that the Bible assumes its functions as God's Word in a man's life.

Rudolf Bultmann and his followers have removed Christian truth even farther from objective verification. For them, the essence of the Christian message does not lie in historical accounts of Christ's miraculous saving activity. (Biblical miracles are either denied outright or regarded as meaningless and therefore irrelevant to modern man.) The New Testament accounts of Christ are "demythologized" so as to yield their "true" core: the existential experience of salvation. Christianity then becomes the proclamation of existential experience of salvation in the present, not a defense of supposedly objective truth in the past. Truth is known only in "personal encounter"

with the Christ of faith, and efforts to shift attention to rational proofs are to be rejected as religiously and psychologically unrealistic.⁴

Both Barth and Bultmann unhappily share modernism's conviction that objective, factual investigation of the Bible will destroy traditional belief in its truthfulness. For Barth this has meant the walling off of salvation events from historical scrutiny; for Bultmann, the desertion of objective, historical truth for subjective, psychological conviction. But the Scripture asserts without qualification that "the Word became flesh" (John 1:14), that the factual character of the resurrection could convince even the faithless (John 20:24-29), and that "none of these things" (Christ's saving work and miracles) were hidden or done in a corner (Acts 26:26). In actual fact, it is not the defense of the gospel that makes God's truth irrelevant, but the refusal to defend it in the objective terms of the New Testament proclamation.⁵

Misguided Orthodoxy

Some Christians, though thoroughly opposed to contemporary dilutions of the gospel message, have joined the hew and cry against defending the faith. Two varieties of orthodox opposition to apologetics can be singled out: the presuppositionalist and the fideist. Doubtless our Göttingen student represents one or the other, if not both, of these viewpoints.

For the orthodox presuppositionalist, a radical break exists between the worlds of the Christian and the non-Christian--a cleavage so fundamental that the Christian cannot convince the non-Christian of Christian truth. Some presuppositionalists argue that non-Christians cannot even discover secular facts; others, that non-Christians, though they can determine secular facts apart from faith, cannot interpret them rightly; and still others, that the non-Christian, even if he can be led to revelational facts, will not interpret them properly when he does meet them. But all presuppositionalists, whether of a strict or mild variety,

are convinced that the non-Christian is incapable of arriving at a proper interpretation of saving truth. From this it follows that the Christian is attempting the impossible if he tries apologetically to persuade the non-Christian of the objective truthfulness of the gospel story. The non-Christian lives in his presuppositional world, and the Christian in his; and no amount of rational argument can break down the wall between.

The fideist goes even farther. He says: Not only is it intellectually impossible to convince the unbeliever of the truth of Christianity; it is unspiritual to try. Only God convinces men of Christianity's veracity, and you or I can do no more than to preach His gospel. To endeavor to argue with the unbeliever is to substitute human wisdom for the Spirit's working (I Corinthians 1), and thus misunderstand the depth of human depravity and of man's need to rely solely on God.

Our answer to these orthodox objections to apologetics will necessitate a discussion more detailed than that dealing with liberal and neo-orthodox theological positions. (Note how much deeper the "conservative" objections strike than do the anti-apologetic views of modernism, neo-orthodoxy and Bultmann's existentialism.) Immediately, however, we can point to essential difficulties in these "orthodox" views. The presuppositionalist finds it impossible for non-Christian and Christian to experience common ground in the matter of revelational fact and interpretation. But consider: In the realm of secular fact (e.g. the chemical composition of water, the historical crossing of the Rubicon by Caesar), both Christian and non-Christian are capable of discovering truth and interpreting it; all university life is predicated on this assumption, and advances in human knowledge are indisputable evidence that even unregenerate man can understand the factual nature of the world and rationally interpret the data of his experience.

Now if we say that the events of Christ's life

(or the Biblical events in general) are not subject to comparable treatment, then whether we like it or not we are actually divorcing "Christian facts" from secular, non-religious facts. Yet this is precisely what the incarnation denies! In Christ God truly entered the human sphere; and if this is the case, the human events of His life objectively display His deity and are not adequately explainable apart from it. Such factual and interpretive conclusions will certainly arise when Jesus' life is subjected to the investigative techniques applied to other historical events--provided, of course, that unempirical bias (e.g. against the possibility of the miraculous) is not allowed to distort the documentary picture. Thus Christ's resurrection is capable of examination by non-Christians as well as by Christians, and its factual character, when considered in light of the claims of the One raised from the dead, points not to a multiplicity of equally possible interpretations, but to a single "best" interpretation (i.e. to an interpretation most consistent with the data), namely the deity of Christ (John 2:18-22).

Of course, sinful self-interest may tempt the non-Christian to avoid the weight of evidence, just as self-interest has so frequently corrupted investigation in other, purely secular matters; but selfish perversions of data or interpretation can be made plain in the area of revelational fact no less than in the non-revelational sphere. For Christian revelation occurred in time--in the secular world. To miss this point is to miss the character of the incarnation. God came to earth and by manifold proofs showed Himself to men. We do Him and our fellowmen a disservice when we imply that His presence among us was a docetic phantasm, open only to the subjective eye of faith and not to objective examination by every seeker for truth.

Yet are we not unspiritually arrogating to human reason a work that only God's Word and Holy Spirit can perform? Hardly, when it is God's word that records the historical facts and offers the soundest

historical interpretations relating to Christ's gospel. As for the Spirit, He works through that very Word to convince men of God's truth, so in reality we bring men under His convicting aegis as we point them to the Biblical evidences for Christ's truth. More, however, needs to be said by way of a specific examination of the scriptural mandates for defending the faith.

Truth and the New Testament

In the deepest sense, the Bible identifies truth with the person of Jesus Christ, the God-man who came to earth to die for the sins of the world (John 14:6). Thus, knowing the truth ultimately depends on one's personal relationship to Christ: "If you continue in my (Christ's) word, then you are indeed my disciples, and you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31-32).

But the question immediately arises, What of those who hesitate to enter into such a personal relationship because they doubt the validity of Jesus' claims? Are they to be regarded as dishonest persons endeavoring to hide willful opposition to Christ under the cloak of alleged intellectual doubts? If so, we would expect them to receive short shrift in the New Testament. Like the hypocritical Pharisees, they ought to be condemned as "whited sepulchres" in order that they might be brought to their senses and to a recognition of their moral perversity.

But this is not the case. Let's consider the key example of Thomas, whose confrontation with the risen Christ forms a climactic event in John's Gospel.⁶ In 20:24-29, just prior to John's summing up of his purpose for writing his book, Thomas is presented as one who would not believe the other disciples' testimony that they had seen the resurrected Christ. From this the conclusion is inescapable that Thomas, in spite of his contact with Jesus during His earthly ministry, had not yet become a Christian, since belief in the resurrection is an essential element in the gospel (Romans 4:23-25; I Corinthians 15). Thomas

demanded concrete, empirical proof of Jesus' claim to rise again after three days. He would not be convinced, he said, unless he could put his finger into Jesus' nailprints and thrust his hand into the wound made when Jesus' side was pierced.

And what did Jesus do? Did He reject Thomas' demand for objective proof on the ground (so often used by opponents of apologetics) that such demands are really sinful cover-ups for willful refusal to believe? Not at all. Jesus appeared to Thomas and provided him with exactly the empirical evidence that he needed to become convinced of His deity. Thomas' cry, "My Lord and my God," is perhaps the strongest confession of Jesus' divinity in the entire Bible; and it was spoken because our Lord was willing, in His grace, specifically to satisfy Thomas' need for concrete evidence that He had risen from the dead.

Though Christ told Thomas that it would have been better for him to have believed without seeing (i.e., that he should have believed the testimony of his fellow disciples who had already seen the Lord), this rebuke was not given as a substitute for the proof Thomas needed. Rather, it followed both Jesus' appearance to Thomas and Thomas' affirmation of Jesus' deity. Only after Jesus brought Thomas to faith through graciously giving him evidence of His resurrection did He point out to him where his faith had been lacking.

Paul's Areopagus address in Acts 17 gives another clear example that in the New Testament the honest intellectual problems of unbelievers are respected and dealt with on their own ground. At Athens the apostle confronted Epicurean and Stoic philosophers. The cynical and self-indulgent Epicureans, whom E. M. Blaiklock has called the Sadducees among the Greeks,⁷ were not Paul's focus of attention; it is noteworthy that Paul's divine Master also had little patience with the intellectually dishonest Sadducees of Israel (cf. Matthew 22:29, 34). But with the ethically sensitive Stoics it was different. In order to witness

effectively to them Paul began where they were--with their superstitious belief in an unknown god--and through an appeal to truths expressed by their own poets (Paul quotes Stoic sentiments found in Cleanthes, Aratus, and Epimenides), he called for repentance and proclaimed judgment of the world "in righteousness by that man (Jesus) whom God has ordained, whereof he has given assurance to all men, in that he has raised him from the dead" (Acts 17:31).

Here we have one of the best New Testament examples of missionary and apologetic skill. "He who as a missionary will test the various elements in this speech will find that they all produce their effect," wrote missions specialist Warneck.⁸ Indeed, as Richard Longenecker has emphasized, Paul's concern to be "all things to all men" in order to bring them to a saving knowledge of Christ (I Corinthians 9:22) is the key to his entire ministry, and "from the days of the Fathers, Paul's Athenian experience as recorded in Acts 17 has been cited as the illustration of the 'all things to all men' principle as it worked out in the Gentile situation."⁹ Like his Lord, Paul was willing to operate on the unbeliever's own ground. He did not position himself outside of the unbeliever's frame of reference and preach at him (Paul Tillich would say, "throw stones at his head"); rather, he literally became all things to all honest seekers, whether Jews or Greeks, so as to bring them to the light of Christ.¹⁰

How can Jesus and Paul take such an attitude toward truth, an attitude which encourages the believer to enter the non-Christian's frame of reference and convince him that the gospel is veracious? The New Testament does this primarily because, unlike much of contemporary theology, it sees the full implications of the incarnation. If, as we stressed earlier, God really became man in Jesus Christ, then His entrance into the human sphere is open to examination by non-Christian and Christian alike, and the honest doubter will find compelling evidence in support of Christ's

claims. This is why the New Testament makes so much of the eyewitness contact the early church had with its Lord (cf. I John 1:1-4). The church of the New Testament is not an esoteric, occult, gnostic sect whose teachings are demonstrable only to initiates; it is the religion of the incarnate God, at whose death the veil of the temple was rent from top to bottom, opening holy truth to all who would seek it.

Apologetic Need

The world of the twentieth century, growing steadily smaller as communication revolutions succeed each other, displays a religious pluralism experientially unknown to our grandfathers, and remarkably similar to the heterogenous religious situation in the Roman Empire in the first century. Sects and cults proliferate; philosophies of life, explicit and implicit, vie for our attention; and older, previously dormant religions, such as Buddhism and Islam,¹¹ are engaged in vigorous proselytizing. All about us ultimate concerns spring up, each claiming to be more ultimate, more worthy of our total commitment, than the other. In the university world the pluralistic cacophony is louder than perhaps anywhere else: materialism, idealism, pragmatism, communism, hedonism, mysticism, existentialism, and a hundred other options present themselves to the college student in classroom, bull-session, student organization, political rally, and social activity.

What is the non-Christian to do, when amid this din he hears the Christian message? Are we Christians so naive as to think that he will automatically, ex opere operato, accept Christianity as true and put away world views contradicting it? And if we call out to him, "Just try Christianity and you will find that it proves itself experientially," do we really think that he will not at the same time hear precisely the same subjective-pragmatic appeal from numerous other quarters?

What is he to do? Alphabetize the "ultimate

concerns" and try them serially? If so, he must at least try agnosticism, atheism, Baha'i, and Buddhism (Mahayana and Hinayana!) before coming to Christianity, and as Arthur Koestler and others who have extricated themselves painfully from Marxist commitment will tell us, movement from one ultimate concern to another is a psychologically devastating experience. There is every chance that by the time the non-Christian comes to try Christianity, he will be so jaded psychologically that he will be incapable of recognizing ultimate truth when he actually meets it.

Evidently, what is necessary for effective Christian witness in a pluralistic world is an objective apologetic--a "reason for the hope that is in you" that will give the non-Christian clear ground for experientially trying the Christian faith before all other options. Absolute proof of the truth of Christ's claims is available only in personal relationship with Him; but contemporary man has every right to expect us to offer solid reasons for making such a total commitment. The apologetic task is justified not as a rational substitute for faith, but as a ground for faith; not as a replacement for the Spirit's working, but as a means by which the objective truth of God's Word can be made clear so that men will heed it as the vehicle of the Spirit who convicts the world through its message.

The analytical philosopher Antony Flew, in developing a parable from a tale told him by John Wisdom, illustrates how meaningless to the non-Christian are religious assertions incapable of being tested objectively:

Once upon a time two explorers came upon a clearing in the jungle. In the clearing were growing many flowers and many weeds. One explorer says, "Some gardener must tend this plot." The other disagrees, "There is no gardener." So they pitch their tents and set a watch. No gardener is ever seen. "But perhaps he is an

invisible gardener." So they set up a barbed-wire fence. They electrify it. They patrol with bloodhounds. (For they remember how H. G. Wells' The Invisible Man could be both smelt and touched though he could not be seen.) But no shrieks ever suggest that some intruder has received a shock. No movements of the wire ever betray an invisible climber. The bloodhounds never give cry. Yet still the Believer is not convinced. "But there is a gardener, invisible, insensible to electric shocks, a gardener who has no scent and makes no sound, a gardener who comes secretly to look after the garden which he loves." At last the Sceptic despairs, "But what remains of your original assertion? Just how does what you call an invisible, intangible, eternally elusive gardener differ from an imaginary gardener or even from no gardener at all?"¹²

This parable is a damning judgment on all religious truth-claims save that of the Christian faith.¹³ For in Christianity we do not have merely an allegation that the garden of this world is tended by a loving Gardener; we have the actual, empirical entrance of the Gardener into the human scene in the person of Christ (cf. John 20:14-15), and this entrance is verifiable by way of His resurrection.

We must present clear testimony to the Thomases and to the Stoics of our day that God did indeed come in the flesh and "showed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs" (Acts 1:3). Under no circumstances should we retreat into a presuppositionalism or a fideism which would rob our fellow men of the opportunity to consider the Christian faith seriously with head as well as heart. Our apologetic task is not fulfilled until we remove the intellectual offenses that allow so many non-Christians to reject the gospel with scarcely a hearing. We must bring them to the only legitimate offense: the offense of

the cross. We must make clear to them beyond a shadow of doubt that if they reject the Lord of glory, it will be by reason of willful refusal to accept His grace, not because His Word is incapable of withstanding the most searching intellectual examination.

When the Greeks of our day come seeking Jesus (John 12:20-21), let us make certain that they find Him.

NOTES

1. Published as chaps. 2 and 3 in the author's Where Is History Going? (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1969), pp. 37-74.
2. See Montgomery, "Karl Barth and Contemporary Theology of History," ibid., pp. 100-117.
3. Cf. my remarks in "Faith, History, and the Resurrection," ibid., pp. 225-39.
4. On Bultmann's existential philosophy of history, see Montgomery, The Shape of the Past ("History in Christian Perspective," Vol. I; Ann Arbor, Mich.: Edwards Brothers, 1963), pp. 120-22.
5. Cf. my report of Barth's lectures at the University of Chicago in 1962: "Barth in Chicago: Kerygmatic Strength and Epistemological Weakness," Dialog: A Journal of Theology, I (Autumn, 1962), pp. 56-57.
6. Cf. Montgomery, "The Fourth Gospel Yesterday and Today," Concordia Theological Monthly, XXXIV (April, 1963), 197-222.
7. Blaiklock, who is professor and chairman of the department of classics at the University of Auckland, New Zealand, made this point in delivering the Annual Wheaton College Graduate School Lectures, October 21-22, 1964.

8. J. Warneck, Paulus im Lichte der heutigen Heidenmission (1914), pp. 73-74. Cf. Olaf Moe, The Apostle Paul: His Life and Work, trans. L. A. Vigness (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1950), pp. 279-97.
9. Longenecker, Paul, Apostle of Liberty (New York: Harper, 1964), p. 230.
10. On the relation of the Areopagus address to I Corinthians 1, F. F. Bruce rightly says: "The popular idea that his [Paul's] determination, when he arrived in Corinth, to know nothing there 'save Jesus Christ, and him crucified,' was the result of disillusionment with the line of approach he had attempted at Athens, has little to commend it" (Commentary on the Book of Acts "New International Commentary on the New Testament"; Grand Rapids, Mich.; Eerdmans, 1954, p. 365). See also N. B. Stonehouse, Paul before the Areopagus (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1957), where this point is made in extenso.
11. Cf. Montgomery, "The Apologetic Approach of Muhammed Ali and Its Implications for Christian Apologetics," Muslim World, LI (April, 1961), 111-22; and author's "Corrigendum" in the July, 1961 Muslim World.
12. Antony Flew, "Theology and Falsification," in New Essays in Philosophical Theology, ed. Flew and MacIntyre (London: SCM Press, 1955), p. 96.
13. On the issue of theological verification, cf. Montgomery, "Inspiration and Inerrancy: A New Departure," in his Crisis in Lutheran Theology 2 vols.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1967), I, 15-44.

LECTURE II: THE APOLOGETIC THRUST OF LUTHERAN THEOLOGY

Strange Bedfellows

Can the truth of Christianity be "proven" to an unbeliever? Ought the Christian try to "demonstrate" the veracity of the Gospel to the non-Christian? Should one attempt to "establish evidentially" the Bible's claim to be the very Word of God? Here are two representative contemporary Lutheran judgments on these questions:

The certainty of Christian faith is not dependent upon the demonstrable character of divine revelation. The idea that scientific studies and investigations should provide a solid foundation for faith and give it certainty is contrary to the nature of both science and faith. If this were indeed possible, it would mean that science, within the empirical reality which is the object of its study, could discover something of that revelation of which faith speaks. The discoveries of science would in that case verify faith. But this would obviously be to ask something of science which it cannot give without ceasing to be scientific. Whether it be a question of a scientific investigation of nature or history, such a study cannot penetrate to that which is decisive for faith--the revelation of God.¹

Christian theology is the ability to exhibit, or preach, the Gospel, but not to prove it true by human arguments of reason or philosophy. As the Christian theologian proclaims the truth, he wins souls for Christ, but not as he endeavors to prove true the mysteries of faith by principles of human reason. This also is the meaning of the axiom: "The best apology of the Christian religion is its proclamation." Let the Gospel be made known, and it will of

itself prove its divine character. Christian apologetics has therefore only one function: it is to show the unreasonableness of unbelief. Never can it demonstrate the truth with "enticing words of man's wisdom."²

Only the presence of biblical citations in the second quotation and the absence of them in the first might suggest a difference in apologetic viewpoint on the part of these two theologians. The first statement derives from Gustav Aulén, the renowned spokesman for Lundsian theology, who categorically set himself against "Biblicism" (the verbal inspiration and infallible authority of Holy Scripture)³ and depreciated the substitutionary ("Latin," "Anselmian") doctrine of Christ's Atonement.⁴ The second affirmation expresses the viewpoint of J. Theodore Mueller, the great Missouri Synod dogmatician, who throughout his long career stood fast for the inerrancy of Scripture and the christology of the historic church, and vigorously opposed Lundsian theology as a Lutheran variant of reformed Neo-orthodoxy.

Yet the apologetic stance of these two Lutheran thinkers is virtually indistinguishable! Both claim that Christian revelation stands beyond proof and beyond demonstration--and that any attempt to offer an apologetic to establish its validity is to misunderstand the nature of the Christian gospel. As I have pointed out elsewhere, very much the same antipathy to positive apologetic argument is displayed throughout contemporary Protestantism: it has been equally characteristic of the old Modernism, of the Barthian "crisis theology" that reacted against Modernism, of Bultmannian existentialism, and of the orthodox Calvinism and pietistic fundamentalism which have fought the errors of liberalism, neo-orthodoxy, and Bultmannianism.⁵

The question we wish to pose in this essay is the difficult but exceedingly important one concerning the proper relation between Lutheran faith and the apologetic task: Ought the confessional Lutheran to feel

the same antipathy toward the positive defense of the faith as is experienced by liberal Lutherans and non-Lutherans like? Or does Lutheran theology demand an apologetic for the Word as aggressive as its proclamation of the Word. Should orthodox Lutheranism share the anti-apologetic bed with contemporary theology, or have we inadvertently picked up the wrong room key altogether?

An Existential Luther with Aristotelian Followers

We are told that, as those who go by Luther's name, we should be the last to approach Christianity apologetically. Jaroslav Pelikan, in his influential little monograph, From Luther to Kierkegaard, maintains that the young Luther had little interest in "natural theology"--in the knowledge of God or of divine truth which can be attained by the sinner in his unregenerate state--and that even as an old man when he did deal with the question, he orientated it "around the concept of dread."⁶ In other words, Luther's fundamental approach was not objective, cognitive, factual, but rather existential: he approached truth questions as Kierkegaard would later, in terms of dynamic, personal experience. Kierkegaard's aphorism that "truth is subjectivity" strikes closer to Luther's world-view than any kind of objective arguments for Christianity's validity. Was Kierkegaard not expressing the spirit of Luther's position when he said that to question or defend the truth of Christ is like a husband seriously asking himself whether he could love another woman--even to ask such a question labels his love as unreal?

Pelikan's sketch of the history of theological ideas between Luther and Kierkegaard presents essentially an arid territory of orthodox Lutheran dogmaticians who, while rejecting Aristotelian adulterations of the content of Christian theology, unwittingly incorporate Aristotelian philosophical methodology into their labors, thereby eventually corrupting Luther's existential insights and paving the way for the victory of Rationalism. The stress on proofs for God's

existence in such later orthodox dogmaticians as Hollaz is clear evidence that Luther's disinterest in "natural theology" did not long remain among his followers.

One of the chief sources of Pelikan's interpretation, as evidenced by his own bibliographical notes, was the brief section on Natural Theology at the outset of Werner Elert's Morphologie des Luthertums. There Elert--who himself relies heavily on Ernst Troeltsch's Vernunft und Offenbarung bei Joh. Gerhard und Melanchthon (1891)--claims that Melanchthon inconsistently maintained in his Apology to the Augsburg Confession that "God can be known in no other way than through the Word," yet he "already accepted the essential elements of the later 'natural theology'" and "demonstrates the natural proofs of the existence of God."⁷ From this point things went from bad to worse, both in Melanchthon himself and in the orthodox theologians of the next century and a half: Chemnitz, Gerhard, Calov, Hollaz, Baier. (Only Flacius deserves real praise, for he unqualifiedly condemned sinful man's ratio.) Tragically, dogmaticians such as these set forth positive apologetic arguments for biblical truth, and the Lutheran astronomer-mathematician Kepler actually endeavored to harmonize scientific discoveries with the Word of God! "How far away from Luther we now are!" cries Elert, and concludes:

The development of "natural theology" is the march of history from Luther's primal experience (Urerlebnis) up to the Enlightenment. It ended with the ominous error that Christian faith in God and "natural knowledge of God" are essentially identical. For the naive apologists, for many a dogmatician, even for many a politician who wanted to "preserve religion for the people," this was a comfort and a satisfaction. For the church Philistine, as Tholuck addressed him, it was reason for no longer knowing of an anguished conscience. But then came Ludwig Feuerbach. Then came Karl Marx and Nietzsche. They showed that the knowledge of "natural" man

arrives at a totally different result. And when it came to the great test of the revelation of God's goodness, faithfulness, and mercy on land, at sea, and in the air--which Zöckler and many others taught--the result was decidedly negative. Was it surprising that the generation of the war and the collapse declared the Christian belief in God to be a delusion because it had been refuted by the terrors and the fate that they had experienced?⁸

The Bultmannian and post-Bultmannian Lutherans of our day carry this line of argument even farther. Does Bultmann tear away all objective grounding for faith by declaring that the ostensibly historical descriptions of our Lord's miraculous acts are really the mythological garb in which the primitive church clothed its existential experience of "authentic self-understanding"? Fine! In this "one sees in unmistakable outlines the shadow of Luther,"⁹ for Bultmann is removing the objective, intellectual props by which modern man may attempt to "justify himself," even as Luther removed the props of moral works-righteousness from 16th century man. Bultmann thus continues Luther's task of stripping away all the externals from faith--leaving it as it really is, a naked leap which can never be aided, much less established, by objective evidence or factual demonstration. This viewpoint has been expressed with particular forcefulness by such post-Bultmannian advocates of the New Hermeneutic as Ernst Käsemann:

Neither miracle nor the canon nor the Jesus of history is able to give security to our faith. For our faith there can be no objectivity in this sense. That is the finding which New Testament scholarship has made plain in its own fashion. But this finding is only the obverse of that acknowledgment which Luther's exposition of the third article of the Creed expresses.¹⁰

In sum: Luther's central conviction that a man is justified by grace through faith and his concomitant refusal to confuse law with gospel supposedly eliminated for him, if not objective grounds for faith, at least all uses of objective evidences in "defending" the faith. Luther's immediate followers, however, allegedly returned like the dog to its Aristotelian vomit in endeavoring to establish the truth of faith and to convince others of its veracity by objective argument. Such argumentation is foreign to true Lutheran belief, we are told, and must be excised as a cancer.

Luther and the Classical Dogmaticians Revisited

Energy, existential or otherwise, need not be expended here in refuting the contention that Luther had no objective grounding for his faith. Merely his affirmation at Worms--"I am bound by the Scriptures that I have adduced, and my conscience has been taken captive by the Word of God"--should be enough to show that for Luther truth was hardly "subjectivity." For those interested in a detailed analysis of this issue, a previous essay of mine should prove useful.¹¹ Our task here is the more specialized one of determining to what extent Luther's theology allows for and encourages the apologetic use of Christianity's factual character in setting the faith before an unbelieving world. Granted that for Luther God's Word was objectively true; does it follow that its truth can be established and defended in the marketplace of ideas, or is the sinful character of the human situation an absolute barrier to such an operation? This is the question before us--and we shall now take it up (not forgetting, however, the sobering consideration that the strongest opponents of a Lutheran apologetic are those who base their anti-apologetic stance on the conviction that Christianity is, after all, non-objective!).

Even the reading of Pelikan leaves us a bit shaky as to the dichotomy between an allegedly existential Luther and his Aristotelian-apologetic

followers. In Luther, admits Pelikan, "we do have at least one passage in which he expounds what virtually amounts to an argument [for God's existence] from the analogy of being. The detailed commentary on Genesis, our chief source for the old Luther, deals with natural theology several times."¹² But this apologetic emphasis is attributed to "the old Luther"--not to the Reformer in his theological prime.

We could answer with Plass that Luther's Genesis commentary comprises the "longest and, in many respects, the maturest of his lectures."¹³ However, this line of approach is unnecessary, for, as such Luther scholars as Philip S. Watson have shown, the Reformer's concern with natural theology was by no means limited to his later years. As early as 1525, Luther is expressly teaching in The Bondage of the Will that "the knowledge of predestination and of God's prescience has been left in the world [after the Fall] no less certainly than the notion of the Godhead itself."¹⁴ In his Galatians commentary (1531)--considered by many to be the greatest of all Luther's writings--he condemns all attempts by the sinner to justify himself on the basis of the natural knowledge of God, while at the same time stoutly defending the existence of such natural knowledge and encouraging the Christian to dispute intelligently with unbelievers on the basis of it:

When you are to dispute with Jews, Turks, Papists, Heretics, etc., concerning the power, wisdom, and majesty of God, employ all your intelligence and industry to that end, and be as profound and as subtle a disputer as you can.¹⁵

Such arguments [arguments for divine truth based on human and earthly analogy] are good when they are grounded upon the ordinance of God. But when they are taken from men's corrupt affections, they are naught.¹⁶

Though all efforts at self-salvation through natural theology must be unqualifiedly condemned, Luther sees the natural knowledge of God and of His law inscribed on every man's heart as the point of contact--the common ground--which makes the evangelistic task possible.

If the natural law were not written and given in the heart by God, one would have to preach to an ass, horse, ox, or cow for a hundred thousand years before they accepted the law, although they have ears, eyes and heart as a man. They too can hear it, but it does not enter their heart. Why? What is wrong? Their soul is not so formed and fashioned that such a thing might enter it. But a man, when the law is set before him, soon says: Yes, it is so, he cannot deny it. He could not be so quickly convinced, were it not written in his heart before.¹⁷

Watson summarizes the case in the best traditions of dry Oxbridge humor:

He [Luther] had, after all, read his Testament; and the first two chapters of the Epistle to the Romans, along with other passages dear to the natural theologians, could not escape his notice. He had, furthermore, too much reverence for the sacred text to ignore such passages, or to dismiss them as unimportant.¹⁸

However, retorts the anti-apologetic Lutheran, does this really penetrate to the heart of Luther's position? Granted that he held to natural knowledge of God; he nonetheless refuses to allow such knowledge a place in salvation. As specialists on Luther's view of "reason" have pointed out (one thinks especially of B. A. Gerrish¹⁹ and Robert H. Fischer²⁰), Luther indeed encourages rational operations in the secular realm (the earthly kingdom) but categorically rejects reason as a normative rule in the realm of salvation

(the spiritual kingdom). Reason must never be allowed to operate magisterially in relation to God's Word; where this occurs, reason becomes Frau Hulda and Madam Jezebel--the Devil's Whore.

The Kingdom of Reason embraces such human activities as caring for a family, building a home, serving as a magistrate, and (as Rörer's MS. adds) looking after cows. All that can be demanded of me by God in such a sphere of activity is that I should 'do my best'. The important thing not to overlook is that this Kingdom has its boundaries; the error of the sophists is that they carry the saying 'to do one's best' (facere quod in se est) over into the regnum spirituale, in which a man is able to do nothing but sin. In outward affairs or in the affairs of the body man is master: 'He is hardly', as Luther drily remarks, 'the cow's servant.' But in spiritual affairs he is a servant or slave, 'sold under sin'. "For the Kingdom of Human Reason must be separated as far as possible from the Spiritual Kingdom."²¹

And what possible good can an apologetic do when, in Luther's thinking, natural knowledge of God offers no substitute whatever for the Word of God in Jesus Christ? Knowledge of the Deus absconditus can only impart terror; the Deus revelatus--God in Christ--offers the sole avenue to peace and salvation, and He is accessible, not to reason and demonstration, but to the eyes of faith. Thus even Christ's miracles did not convince those who would not accept His Word: "When miracles are performed, they are appreciated only by the pious."²² One must come in faith to the lowly Christ of the manger and there, paradoxically, one will meet the divine Savior. Luther's theology calls for proclamation of this truth, not for an impossible defense of it which invariably appeals to the "natural man" desiring to justify himself.²³

Here we arrive at the core of the matter. Luther

very definitely distinguished two kingdoms, the earthly and the spiritual, and in fact considered this distinction to be one of the most valuable aspects of his theology.²⁴ But does this distinction dichotomize the world into a secular realm where reason and proof operate, and a spiritual realm where evidence has no place? This is precisely the impression given by virtually all modern interpreters of Luther. Especially revealing is Robert Fischer's declaration that for Luther "such insights ["reason, experience, common sense"] operate in what would later be called the phenomenal realm; they do not penetrate the noumenal."²⁵ The use of the terms "noumenal" and "phenomenal" (borrowed from the Kantian critical philosophy, which is itself dependent upon a Platonic separation of the realm of "ideas" or "ideals" from the phenomenal world of sense experience) is most significant: Luther is painlessly being absorbed into the idealistic-dualistic frame of reference characteristic of virtually all contemporary Protestant thought. Why can neo-orthodox and other varieties of current theology confidently hold to their "theological insights" while simultaneously accepting the most destructive judgments of biblical critics regarding alleged factual errors in the biblical material and the supposed historical unreliability of the scriptural accounts of our Lord's life? Simply because the (noumenal) truth of theological statements, we are told, is in no way dependent on the phenomenal, secular issues connected with biblical history. After all, the Bible conveys religious, not scientific or historical truth! "The Bible is not a textbook of science"; etc.

Is Luther to be assimilated to the Platonic-Kantian perspective? The answer will depend squarely on what kind of connection Luther saw between the two kingdoms. If he in fact kept them in water-tight compartments, then a positive apologetic originating in the secular realm could not in principle justify truths lying in the salvatory sphere. The mere fact of Luther's belief in a natural theology, in the sense previously shown, strongly suggests some kind

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 dogmaticians 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

methodology (Luther's requirement that one discover what Scripture is actually saying and not force it into alien categories--e.g., Zwingli's metaphysical speculations about the nature of "bodies"--made possible the defense of the faith in a world about to recognize the necessity of open, inductive, scientific procedure in the discovery of truth; those who followed Luther's hermeneutic, as opposed to the deductive model of Ramist Calvinism, were thus--as in the case of Brahe and Kepler--at the forefront of both scientific advance and the apologetic reconciliation of Scripture and scientific discovery).³³

Though not himself an apologist in the strict sense, Luther provided, through such theological insights, the basic orientation necessary for the apologetic emphases of the classical Lutheran dogmaticians. Elert finds it especially galling to admit that in regard to the efforts of the dogmaticians and Lutheran scientists such as Kepler to harmonize science and Scripture, "Luther had led the way with related interpretations of Genesis."³⁴ But is it not far more reasonable to see a positive relationship between the apologetic activity of the great Lutheran theologians following Luther and the work of Luther himself, rather than to claim that somehow all of these theologians--who were evidently trying to be faithful to the great Reformer--somehow managed to pervert his theology by latching on to peripheral aberrations in his thought?

Even Elert and Pelikan have to admit that hardly a great name in Lutheran dogmatics from Luther's time to the 18th century disregarded "natural theology" and the objective defense of Christian truth. The following concise apologetic bio-bibliography should offer sufficiently intimidating evidence in this regard; the citations, taken together, constitute a veritable catalog of apologetic argumentation by the 16th and 17th century Lutheran fathers:

Chemnitz (1522-1586): Loci theologici
(Frankfurt & Wittenberg, 1653), Pt. 1,

pp. 19ff. ("De notitia Dei"); Examen Concilii Tridentini, ed. Preuss (Leipzig, 1915), pp. 6ff. ("De Sacra Scripture").

Heerbrand (1521-1600): Compendium theologiae (Leipzig, 1585), pp. 33ff.

A. Hunnius (1550-1603): Tractatus de sacrosancta maiestate, autoritate, fide ac certitudine Sacrae Scripturae (Frankfurt, 1591), passim.

Hafenreffer (1561-1619): Loci theologici (3d ed.; Tübingen, 1603), pp. 30ff.

Gerhard (1582-1637): Loci theologici, I, ed. Frank (Leipzig, 1885), pp. 266ff. (on the question of God's existence), pp. 25ff. (on the authority, canonicity, and reliability of the biblical books).³⁵

J. V. Andreae (1586-1654): Sol veritatis sive religionis christianae certitudo, in his Rei christianae & literariae subsidia (Tübingen, 1642), pp. 1-120. (The Sol veritatis is an abridgement of Hugo Grotius' De veritate religionis christianae: "commonly held to be the pioneer work in modern apologetics."³⁶

Calov (1612-1686): Systema locorum theologicorum (Wittenberg, 1655-1677), loci on God (e.g., II, pp. 61-86) and Holy Scripture.

Quenstedt (1617-1688): Theologia didactico-polemica, I (Wittenberg, 1685), pp. 97-102 ("An per alia $\kappa\rho\iota\tau\eta\rho\iota\alpha$ persuaderi possit Sac. Scripturae autoritas?"), 250ff. ("De Deo, ejusque naturali notitia").

Baier (1647-1695): Compendium theologiae positivae, ed. Walther, I (St. Louis, Mo., 1879), pp. 121-31 (catalog of arguments

leading to fides humana, with references to apologetic arguments in still other dogmaticians of classical Lutheran orthodoxy--not included here for want of space--e.g., Huelsemann and Dannhauer).

Hollaz (1648-1713): Examen theologicum acroamaticum (Stockholm [Holmiae] & Leipzig, 1750), pp. 106ff. (the external evidences of the divine origin of Holy Writ), 188ff. (the natural knowledge of God).³⁷

It will be noted that these citations range across the entire period of Lutheran orthodoxy, beginning with the generation of Luther's and Melanchthon's own students. Moreover, the list could be readily extended by the addition of the names of exegetes such as Chytraeus (of whom Elert says sarcastically that he finds "in every chapter of the First Book of Moses the proof for one or more loci of dogmatics"³⁸) and authors of works defending the Bible against charges of contradiction and error (e.g., Andreas Althamer, whose Conciliationes locorum Scripturae of 1527 went through at least sixteen editions).

But did these Lutheran apologists not inevitably weaken the biblical picture of man's total depravity, deemphasize the scriptural teaching concerning the Holy Spirit's work in salvation, and introduce a subtle synergism into the preaching of the gospel of divine grace? Not at all. They recognized (though Elert seemed to have difficulty in doing so) that the Flacian alternative to the view that man retained his thinking and reasoning processes after the Fall is nothing less than heresy; for if original sin meant the loss of the very image of God in man (including the loss of his rational faculty), man would have ceased to be man, no subsequent revelation could even in principle have been communicated to man, and Christ could not even have become man without becoming an irrational sinner! In retaining Luther's view of the Incarnation as the center of theology, the orthodox dogmaticians rightly opposed any Flacian attempt to

dehumanize man by a concept of the Fall that would lead to a loss of man's ability to distinguish truth from falsehood in matters secular or (which is the same thing) to distinguish true from false claims that God was in fact incarnate in the secular sphere.

Nor did this apologetic approach produce a "de-pneumatized" theology. The dogmaticians rightly maintained that the fides humana or "historical faith" could not in itself save. Notitia is possessed by the devils also, who tremble but are not saved because of it. There must be the personal commitment--the commitment of the whole person--to Christ for salvation, and that is brought about solely by the Spirit's work. At the same time, however, the orthodox theologians correctly refused to say (as the modern neo-orthodox do) that this personal commitment through the work of the Holy Spirit somehow "produces" the notitia or offers the only evidence of its reality. Hardly! The facts of God's existence and of His incarnate revelation in Jesus Christ stand as objectively true and evidentially compelling wholly apart from belief in them; faith in no sense creates their facticity. They stand over against man, judging him by their sheer veracity and compelling force--and unless he volitionally refuses to believe, and goes against all sound reasoning in so doing, they will move him to a Spirit-produced conversion and living relationship with Jesus Christ.

"Synergism"? Hardly, for everything is done by God, not by man. The evidential facts are God's work, and the sinner's personal acceptance of them--and of the Person on whom they center--is entirely the product of the Holy Spirit. To argue that the Lutheran dogmaticians fell into synergism because they defended the faith and expected a rational response from the sinner would require our condemning their preaching as well (and, indeed, all Christian preaching), on the ground that it presupposes a responsible decision on the sinner's part. But the same Paul who asserted unqualifiedly that men are saved by grace alone (Eph. 2:8-9, etc.) told the Philippian jailer

to "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ"--and defended God's truth in philosophical terms on the Areopagus and cited historical evidence for Christ's resurrection in conjunction with his very statement of the nature of the gospel (I Cor. 15:1ff.). All appeals to the sinner whether in evangelistic preaching, or in evidential argument, must assume the existence of rational faculties to permit communication at all; synergism exists only when, following conversion, the justified man is led to believe that in any way whatever (rational, moral, volitional) he contributed to his own salvation. Lutheran theology particularly--in comparison with other theological traditions--keeps the knife-edge of this mystery sharp, thereby making possible a most aggressive apologetic combined with a most salutary theocentrism.

Agony in Search of Ecstasy:
the 20th Century Mission Field

And yet--and yet--our anti-apologetic Lutheran offers his final counter: Surely the "defense" of Christianity violates the most fundamental aspect of Lutheran theology: the Law-Gospel principle! When arguments are offered for the truth of the Word, sinners are led, even when the apologist does not intend it, to rely upon themselves (the misuse of the Law) rather than, in realization that lex semper accusat, to come to God solely on the ground of His free grace (the Gospel).

Let me suggest, however, that the situation is the exact reverse of this--that the neglect of apologetics is the surest way to confuse Law and Gospel, particularly in our day.

If we go back to the beginning of this essay, we find a strange phenomenon: the orthodox Mueller and the Lundensian Aulén occupying the same anti-apologetic bed. Both argue that "proof" is incapable of being marshalled to justify their positions. One bases his beliefs on an inerrant Scripture, the other

upon an erring Scripture and undefined elements in the church's heritage of faith. Note that, under these conditions, an individual standing outside these two commitments has no way of "testing the spirits" to see which view, if either, is worthy of his commitment. "Begin with inerrant Scripture!" cries Mueller. "Begin with my understanding of 'the faith of the Christian Church!'" cries Aulén. In the absence of an apology that will make sense to the uncommitted, it is impossible, even in principle, to decide between these views. But if this is where the religious question is left, then the non-Christian will make an arbitrary decision--which will be dependent on himself alone (not on evidence outside himself)--and his commitment (even if to the true position) will be man-centered and therefore legalistic. The neglect of an apologetic for Christian truth thus inevitably confuses Law with Gospel by turning Gospel into arbitrary, self-centered Law. Only a genuine apologetic based on external, objective fact as presented in general and special revelation preserves religious decision from arbitrariness, keeps the gospel truly Gospel and (to use Watson's felicitous phrase) "lets God be God."

Moreover, let us note well that the options before the unbeliever today are by no means limited to a Mueller and to an Aulén. Ours is an age of religious cacaphony, as was the Roman Empire of Christ's time. From agnosticism to Hegelianism, from devil-worship to scientific rationalism, from theosophical cults to philosophies of process: virtually any world-view conceivable is offered to modern man in the pluralistic marketplace of ideas.³⁹ Our age is indeed in ideological and societal agony--grasping at anything and everything that can conceivably offer the ecstasy of a cosmic relationship or of a comprehensive Weltanschauung. Will we, as Lutherans having perhaps the strongest theological and apologetic resources in Christendom, continue to hide behind our traditions and our ecclesiastical structures, fearing the world of intellectual unbelief, or will we yield to the Holy Spirit--the Spirit of truth--who

can overcome our inertia and bring us into the agoras of our time, there to establish by "many infallible proofs" the true character and message of the Unknown God?

NOTES

1. G. Aulén, The Faith of the Christian Church, tr. Wahlstrom and Arden (Philadelphia, 1948), p. 107; cf. pp. 95-96.
2. J. T. Mueller, Christian Dogmatics (St. Louis, Mo., 1934), p. 71.
3. Aulén, op. cit., pp. 81-85.
4. G. Aulén, Christus Victor (New York, 1956), passim, For a critique see J. W. Montgomery (ed.), Chytraeus on Sacrifice (St. Louis, Mo., 1962), pp. 139ff.
5. J. W. Montgomery, "The Place of Reason," His, Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship, XXVI (February, 1966), pp. 8-12; (March, 1966), pp. 13-16, 21; also forthcoming in Montgomery, Christianity for the Tough-Minded (Minneapolis, 1971).
6. J. Pelikan, From Luther to Kierkegaard (St. Louis, Mo., 1950), p. 23.
7. W. Elert, The Structure of Lutheranism, I, tr. Hansen (St. Louis, Mo., 1962), p. 51. The English tr. is preceded by revealing commendatory introductions by Pelikan and ALC theologian Robert C. Schultz.
8. Ibid., pp. 53, 57-58.
9. R. Scharlemann, "Shadow on the Tomb;" Dialog, 1 (Spring, 1962), pp. 22-29.
10. E. Käsemann, Exegetische Versuche und Besinnungen,

I (2d ed.; Göttingen, 1960), p. 236.

11. J. W. Montgomery, "Luther's Hermeneutic vs. the New Hermeneutic," in his In Defense of Martin Luther (Milwaukee, 1970), pp. 40-85. For other publications of this essay in English, and for published versions in German and French, see the "Acknowledgments," ibid., p. 10.
12. Pelikan, op. cit., p. 22. The Genesis commentary references are to be found in WA XLII, 291-92, 374.
13. E. M. Plass (ed.), What Luther Says (St. Louis, Mo., 1959), III, p. 1618.
14. WA, XVIII, 618.
15. Luther's comment on Gal. 1:3.
16. Comment on Gal. 3:15. Cf. Luther's Tischreden assertion that he found Cicero's teleological argument for God's existence very moving.
17. WA, XVI, 447.
18. P. S. Watson, Let God Be God! (London, 1947), p. 84. See also Paul Althaus, Die Theologie Martin Luthers (2d ed.; Gütersloh, 1963), chap. 3.
19. B. A. Gerrish, Grace and Reason (Oxford, 1962).
20. R. H. Fischer, "A Reasonable Luther," in Reformation Studies: Essays in Honor of Roland H. Bainton, ed. F. H. Littell (Richmond, Va., 1962), pp. 30-45.
21. Gerrish, op. cit., pp. 72-73.
22. WA, XXV, 240 (a comment on Is. 37:30).
23. So Regin Preter interprets Luther in Spiritus Creator (2d ed.; Copenhagen, 1946), especially

chaps. 2 and 3. Ratio and lex are presented as "belonging together"; faith is "in contrast to all sensus" (i.e., to all "experience which relies on that which can be observed in the visible world"); God's revelation in flesh as the Christ "is placed in absolute opposition to our human sensus and ratio"; "theological epistemology" consists of the transformatio sensus by the Creator Spirit.

24. WA, XXXVIII, 102 ("Defense against Duke George." 1533).
25. Fischer, op. cit., p. 39.
26. Expressed in his Social Teaching of the Christian Churches (the section dealing with "Protestantism"). Cf. K. Penzel, "Ernst Troeltsch on Luther," in Interpreters of Luther: Essays in Honor of Wilhelm Pauck, ed. Pelikan (Philadelphia, 1968), pp. 275-303.
27. G. W. Forell, Faith Active in Love (Minneapolis, 1959), pp. 121, 149.
28. WA, XL, Pt. 1, 79f. (published 1535 and 1538).
29. WA, XXXVI, 61f. (sermon of 6 Jan. 1532, on Micah 5:1).
30. See J. W. Montgomery, "Inspiration and Inerrancy: A New Departure," in his Crisis in Lutheran Theology, I (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1967), pp. 15-44.
31. See J. W. Montgomery, "The Theologian's Craft," Concordia Theological Monthly, XXXVII (February, 1966), pp. 67-98; reprinted in his Suicide of Christian Theology (Minneapolis, 1970), Pt. III, chap. 2.
32. See J. W. Montgomery, "Cross Constellation, and Crucible," in his In Defense of Martin Luther

- (op. cit.), pp. 87-94.
33. Ibid., pp. 94-113.
34. Elert, op. cit., p. 57.
35. An examination of these section of Gerhard's Loci will reveal how wide of the mark is Robert Scharlemann's attempt, in his book, Thomas Aquinas and John Gerhard (New Haven, Conn., 1964), to relate Gerhard to Kant's critical philosophy, modern German existentialism, and Bultmannian theology by finding in him a dualistic separation between an alleged finite realm of formal, conceptual, objective knowledge and the realm of faith where only the "dialectical word" and "acoustic knowledge" hold sway (see especially pp. 28-37).
36. J. H. Crehan, "Apologetics," in A Catholic Dictionary of Theology, I (London, 1962), p. 117. On Andreae and his interest in Grotius' apologetic, see J. W. Montgomery, Cross and Crucible: Johann Valentin Andreae (1586-1654), Phoenix of the Theologians, I (The Hague, 1971), pp. 42, 90-91.
37. Cf. J. Pelikan, "Natural Theology in David Hollaz," Concordia Theological Monthly, XVII (1947), pp. 253-63.
38. Elert, loc. cit.
39. I have developed this point, over against the Reformed presuppositionalists Gordon Clark and Cornelius Van Til, in my essays "Clark's Philosophy of History," in The Philosophy of Gordon Clark, ed. by Ronald H. Nash (Philadelphia, 1968), and "Once Upon an A Priori . . .", forthcoming in a Festschrift for Cornelius Van Til, to be published by Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co. and Craig Press, Philadelphia.

LECTURE III: HOW TO VALIDATE GOSPEL TRUTH IN OUR TIME:
AN ILLUSTRATION

IS MAN HIS OWN GOD?*

Currently making the rounds on American college campuses is the question, "How are you going to recognize God when you get to Heaven?" Answer: "By the big 'G' on his sweatshirt." This litany has more metaphysical profundity than meets the eye, for it reflects the contemporary philosophical dilemma as to the meaningfulness of God-language--a dilemma to which we shall be addressing ourselves shortly. But it is essential to make one basic point at the very outset: in the philosophy of life of every person without exception, someone or something is invested with the sweatshirt lettered "G." There are no atheists; everyone has his god. In the language of Paul Tillich (who was ironically called an atheist by some of his less perceptive critics), all of us have our "ultimate concerns," and the sad thing is that so few of them are truly ultimate or worthy of worship. As one of William James' "twice-born" (having come to Christian belief as an adult), I am especially concerned that idols be properly identified and the true owner of the cosmic sweatshirt wear it. As a modest contribution to that end, we shall first consider how much ultimacy ought to be attributed to three prominent alternatives to biblical theism, and then devote ourselves to the crucial arguments in behalf of the Christian view of God.

* An invitational presentation at DePaul University, Chicago, February 5, 1969, in debate with humanist Julian J. Steen, dean of the Chicago School for Adults. The debate was sponsored by DePaul's theology department; Professor Robert Campbell, O. P. served as moderator. This same essay was also presented at Harvard University on February 14, 1969 as one of a series of "Christian Contemporary Thought Lectures."

THE UNREALITY OF MAJOR NON-THEISTIC POSITIONS

Pantheism à la Spinoza

I recall but one occasion when my old Greek professor at Cornell was drawn into a religious discussion, and--in a state of obvious discomfort--he defended his unorthodoxy somewhat as follows: "But do not conclude that I am an atheist. Far from it. For me the universe as a whole, with all its mystery, is God, and I reverence it." This viewpoint (which can, of course, be stated in many different ways) has perhaps best been set forth and defended by Spinoza. In Part One of his Ethics, the philosopher endeavors to show that the universe is a single, all-embracing unity and that that unity is God. This is proved by the fact that the universe obviously consists of some thing--Spinoza calls it Substance--and this Substance "is in itself and is conceived through itself"; now since God is properly defined as "a being absolutely infinite" and Substance is infinite and unique, it follows that Substance is God.

The fallacy in this piece of geometrically-modeled legerdemain has been well stated by C. E. M. Joad in his Guide to Philosophy: "If we assume that Substance in the original definition means simply 'all that there is,' then the initial definition contains within itself the conclusion. Such a conclusion is not worth proving. It is, indeed, merely a tautology--that is to say, an asserting of the same thing in two different ways." Pantheism, in other words (and this applies equally to all forms of it, whether derived from Spinoza or not), is neither true nor false; it is something much worse, viz., entirely trivial. We had little doubt that the universe was here anyway; by giving it a new name ("God") we explain nothing. We actually commit the venerable intellectual sin of Word Magic, wherein the naming of something is supposed to give added power either to the thing named or to the semantic magician himself.

Humanism

If the universe cannot be meaningfully deified, why not man himself? Can we not regard as strictly literal the question posed in the title of this presentation, "Is Man His Own God?" and answer it affirmatively? For the humanist, man is himself the proper "ultimate concern," and human values are the only eternal verities.

But which "human values" do we mean? Anthropologists such as Ruth Benedict have discovered a most bewildering variety of human value systems, styles of life, and ethical norms. And what is worse, these morals and mores are often entirely incompatible. Some peoples reverence their parents and others eat them. Among cannibals it is doubtless both good ethics and good table manners to clean your plate.

How is the humanist going to decide among these competing value systems? He has no absolute vantage point from which to view the ethical battle in the human arena. He is in the arena himself; or, to use beatnik poet Kerouac's expression, he is "on the road"--not in a house by the side of the road where he can watch the world go by and arbitrate it. All value systems that arise from within the human context are necessarily conditioned by it and are therefore relative. Out of flux, nothing but flux. As Wittgenstein correctly observed in the Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus: "If there is any value that does have value, it must lie outside the whole sphere of what happens and is the case Ethics is transcendental."

Yet a transcendental perspective is exactly what the humanist does not have. He is therefore left to consensus gentium (majority values), cultural totalitarianism (the values of one's own society) or sheer authoritarianism (my values, not yours). But, sad to say, fifty million Frenchmen can be wrong; the ethical perspective of an entire society can be cruelly immoral; and the individual who considers himself the

true barometer to moral worth may simply be suffering from overactive glands or an advanced stage of messianic complex.

To establish absolute ethical values for human action is both logically and practically impossible apart from transcendence. To move the world Archimedes rightly noted that he would need a fulcrum outside the world. The assassination of biblical revelation in the 18th century left man without a clear conception of or confidence in God, and God's resultant death in the 19th century (in the work of Nietzsche and others) set the stage for the dehumanization of man in the 20th. Nietzsche recognized full well that apart from God only man remains to establish his own value; and the stronger has every right under such conditions to impose his self-centered value system on the weaker--and eliminate him if he does not learn his lessons well. The anti-Semitism of the deists of the 18th century Enlightenment (as definitively researched by Arthur Hertzberg in his 1968 publication, The French Enlightenment and the Jews), the Nietaschean transvaluation of values, will-to-power, and anti-christic treatment of the weak, and the National Socialist extermination of racial and political minorities demonstrate only too clearly what happens when man becomes the measure of all things. It is curious that humanists presently (and commendably) striving for racial equality in this country do not ask themselves why, in any absolute sense, their goals are more justifiable than the genocide practiced by an equally passionate and idealistic generation of young people in the Germany of the 1930s and 1940s. As for me, I'm for absolute racial justice, and I'm willing to see it--or any comparable value--left at the mercy of relativistic humanism. If man is his own god, then religion is really in trouble. Personally, I'd be willing to join a Man-is-dead movement!

Agnosticism

High on the popularity poll of non-theistic ultimate concerns today is agnosticism. What is seldom

recognized, however, be either its advocates or its opponents, is that the term agnosticism embraces two very different positions. The first might be called "hard-boiled" agnosticism: "I know that I am unable to know that there is a God"; the second, "soft-boiled" agnosticism: "I am not sure whether knowledge of God is possible."

Little time should be spent on hard-boiled agnosticism, since it is tantamount to traditional atheism, and suffers from its basic fallacy: it presumes that one can (apart from any revelation of God, to be sure!) know the universe so well that one can assert the non-existence of God or the non-existence of compelling evidence for his existence. But such comprehensive knowledge of the universe would require either (a) revelation, which is excluded on principle, or (b) divine powers of observation on the part of the atheist or hard-boiled agnostic. In the latter case, atheism and the extreme agnostic position become self-defeating, since the unbeliever perforce creates a god by deifying himself.

As for soft-boiled agnosticism, it is highly commendable if actually practiced (which is very seldom). A genuine agnostic of this school will of course bend every effort to see whether in fact evidence does exist in behalf of theistic claims. His view of the universe is open-ended; he is a passionate seeker for truth; and he recognizes that his best energies must be put to this quest, since one's happiness in this world, to say nothing about one's eternal destiny in the next, is directly at stake if God in fact exists and makes demands on his creatures. The true agnostic, then, might be thought of as a person in this room who was not sure whether or not to believe a report that a bomb was planted in the building and would go off in two hours. Because of the cruciality of the possibility, he would not sit here in blase indifference (the usual agnostic posture), but would clear the room and engage in a most diligent search of the premises to determine whether concrete evidence supported the claim or not.

It is now our task to perform a brief, but hopefully constructive, check of the universal premises to see if divine power is there revealed.

THE REALITY OF THE BIBLICAL GOD

Where to look for the footprints of Deity? Virtually anywhere but in the arguments of some modern theologians, clerics, and mystics, of whom it might well be said: "With friends like that God doesn't need any enemies." I refer, for example, to those Anglican canons who parachuted from the top of St. Paul's Cathedral, to "bring the young people back to the church" (eliciting the remark in Esquire magazine: "If God isn't dead, maybe he wishes he were"); or the Protestant-Roman Catholic-Jewish death-of-God school; or Aldous Huxley's World Controller, who declared in Brave New World that God now "manifests himself as an absence; as though he weren't there at all." Once having stated this small caveat, however, not even the sky is the evidential limit. As Jacques Maritain so well expressed it in Approaches to God: "There is not just one way to God, as there is to an oasis across the desert or to a new mathematical idea across the breadth of the science of number. For man there are as many ways of approach to God as there are wanderings on the earth or paths to his own heart." We shall consider four such pathways.

God and the World

In his famous 1948 BBC debate with Bertrand Russell, the great historian of philosophy F. C. Copleston succinctly stated the fundamental "argument from contingency" for God's existence:

First of all, I should say, we know that there are at least some beings in the world which do not contain in themselves the reason for their existence. For example, I depend on my parents, and now on the air, and on food, and so on. Now, secondly, the world is simply the real or imagined totality

or aggregate of individual objects, none of which contain in themselves alone the reason for their existence. There isn't any world distinct from the objects which form it, any more than the human race is something apart from the members. Therefore, I should say, since objects or events exist, and since no object of experience contains within itself the reason of its existence, this reason, the totality of objects, must have a reason external to itself. That reason must be an existent being. Well, this being is either itself the reason for its own existence, or it is not. If it is, well and good. If it is not, then we must proceed farther. But if we proceed to infinity in that sense, then there's no explanation of existence at all. So, I should say, in order to explain existence, that is to say, which cannot not-exist.

This argument is not only regarded by most philosophical advocates of theism as the keystone of the so-called "classic proofs" of God's existence; it is today reinforced by a most impressive battery of evidence from the physical sciences. For example (one may on the point consult the engineering publications of University of Michigan professor Gordon J. Van Wylen), the second law of thermodynamics states that for irreversible processes in any closed system left to itself, the entropy (loss of available heat energy) will increase with time; thus the universe, viewed as such a system, is moving to the condition of maximum entropy (heat death); but (and this is the significant aspect of the matter for our purposes) if the irreversible process had begun an infinite time ago--if, in other words, the universe were uncreated and eternal--the earth would already have reached maximum entropy; and since this is not the case, we are driven to the conclusion that the universe is indeed contingent and finite, and requires a creative force from the outside to have brought it into existence.

It should be carefully noted that this a posteriori

argument from contingency is empirically grounded in testable experience; it is neither a disguised form of the highly questionable ontological argument, which asserts a priori that God's essence establishes his existence, nor an attempt at allegedly "synthetic a priori" reasoning. And unlike the "causal argument," it does not gratuitously presuppose an unalterable cause-and-effect structure in the universe (a very doubtful assumption in light of Einsteinian physics and the Heisenberg uncertainty principle which requires us to give serious consideration to all event-claims, even those "miraculously uncaused").

But what about the standard rebuttal: "You just beg the question; now tell us why God exists"? Though this question evidently started Bertrand Russell on the downhill slide into intellectual anticlericalism at an early age, it is not especially profound. We have just seen some of the evidence for the contingency of the universe we live in; to regard this world as eternal is out of the question. But to regard its creator as likewise contingent ("Who created him?") would beg the question, for it would force us to pose the very same query again--and again. Only by stopping with a God who is the final answer to the series do we avoid begging the question--and only then do we offer any adequate account for the contingent universe with which we began. Moreover, the "why God?" question suffers an acute case both of artificiality and of absurdity, as philosopher Plantinga has shown in his essay on "Necessary Being" (in his Faith and Philosophy [1964]):

We should note that the question "Why does God exist?" never does, in fact, arise. Those who do not believe that God exists will not, of course, ask why He exists. But neither do believers ask that question. Outside of theism, so to speak, the question is nonsensical, and inside of theism, the question is never asked. . . .

Now it becomes clear that it is absurd to

ask why God exists. To ask that question is to presuppose that God does exist; but it is a necessary truth that if He does, He has no cause. And it is also a necessary truth that if He has no cause, then there is no answer to a question asking for His causal conditions. The question "Why does God exist?" is, therefore, an absurdity.

God and Personhood

Robert Benchley tells of the disastrous college biology course in which he spent the term meticulously drawing in his lab manual the image of his own eyelash as it fell across the microscopic field. The catastrophe occurred because he lost track of the necessary distinction between himself as subject (his subjectivity) and the external object to be observed (the objectivity of the outside world). Such results and others no less dire are inevitable when one engages in what Whitehead well termed "extreme objectivism"--an objectivism which even objectifies the subject. A person is an "irreducible I": he can never be fully comprehended as an object. No matter how complete a list you make of your own characteristics--or of the characteristics of that stunning coed you are dating--you and the coed transcend the list. Persons are grounded in the clay of the contingent world we discussed above, but at the same time they transcend it; human personhood warrants the designation "semi-transcendent." This semi-transcendent, irreducible character of the human person is the quality that has escaped (and logically must escape) the behaviorist who always treats his subjects as objects; it is to the credit of contemporary psychological (especially psychoanalytic) thought that efforts are now made to get beyond such hyper-objectivism. Indeed, in those cases where human subjectivity and freewill are consistently denied, the deterministic objectivist loses all right to claim volitional action and purpose as an experimenter. His refusal to recognize the "semi-transcendent I" finally results in his own epistemological evaporation.

Now, as philosophical theologians such as Ian Ramsey have shown in considerable detail in recent years, the partial transcendence of the human subject establishes both the possibility of metaphysical assertions and the legitimacy of God-language. We cannot meaningfully talk about the universe around us without presupposing our own subjectivity, and the partial transcendence we possess demands an unqualifiedly transcendent integrating subjectivity to make it meaningful. As Ramsey puts it in an essay in his Prospect for Metaphysics (1961): "Just as 'I' acts as an integrator word for all kinds of scientific and other descriptive assertions about myself, 'I exist' being a sort of conceptual presupposition for them all, so also may 'God' be regarded as a contextual presupposition for the Universe."

This perspective sheds considerable light on two fundamental problems raised by theistic belief: the existence of evil and the question of meaningful God-talk (the problem of the "sweatshirt," as alluded to at the outset of this presentation). Opponents of theism have perennially argued that the natural and moral evils in the universe make the idea of an omnipotent and perfectly good God irrational. But if subjectivity (and its correlative, freewill) must be presupposed on the level of human action, and if God's character as fully transcendent divine Subject serves to make human volition meaningful, then the existence of freewill in itself provides a legitimate explanation of evil. To create personalities without genuine freewill would not have been to create persons at all; and freewill means the genuine possibility of wrong decision, i.e., the creation of evil by God's creatures (whether wide-ranging natural and moral evil by fallen angels or limited chaos on earth by fallen mankind). As for the argument that a good God should have created only those beings he would foresee as choosing the right--or that he could certainly eliminate the effects of his creatures' evil decisions, the obvious answer is (as Plantinga develops it with great logical rigor in his God and Other Minds [1967]) that this would be tantamount to not giving freewill at all. To

create only those who "must" (in any sense) choose good is to create automata; and to whisk away evil effects as they are produced is to whisk away evil itself, for an act and its consequences are bound together. C. S. Lewis has noted that God's love enters into this issue as well, since the biblical God created man out of love, and genuine human love is impossible without freewill--without the free possibility of accepting love or rejecting it. Just as a boy who offers himself and his love to a girl must count on the real possibility of rejection, so when God originated a creative work that made genuine love possible, it by definition entailed the concomitant possibility of the evil rejection of his love by his creatures.

By the "sweatshirt" problem we refer to an objection to theism posed by such analytical philosophers as Kai Nielsen and Antony Flew, who claim that God's very uniqueness makes it irrational to say anything about him: since, in the absence of any perfect analogy, he must always be described in negativities, God-talk becomes totally meaningless. The sweatshirt with the big "G," we are told, is necessarily empty. But again note how the understanding of God as transcendent integrating Subject in relation to semi-transcendent human subjects clears the air. Human persons are likewise unique--no person is just like another, and the very meaning of "subject" and individual "freewill" entails this irreducible uniqueness. To call God-talk meaningless, then, is at the same time to render man-talk nonsensical! Conversely, if we once accept what is involved in the concept of human subjective existence (and how can we avoid it?) then we simultaneously open the gate to meaningful God-talk. As Ramsey neatly suggests, "We might perhaps then say that we are as certain of God as we are of ourselves."

However, it would be conceding far too much if we were to allow that talk about God involves only negatives--the so-called "death by a thousand qualifications." Here we find ourselves immediately drawn

into discussion of

God in Christ

The following parable, formulated by philosophers Flew and Wisdom, is a good statement of the view that God-claims are too vague to be sensible and offer no adequate empirical evidence in their behalf:

Once upon a time two explorers came upon a clearing in the jungle. In the clearing were growing many flowers and many weeds. One explorer says, "Some gardener must tend this plot". The other disagrees, "There is no gardener". So they pitch their tents and set a watch. No gardener is ever seen. "But perhaps he is an invisible gardener." So they set up a barbed-wire fence. They electrify it. They patrol with bloodhounds. (For they remember how H. G. Wells's The Invisible Man could be both smelt and touched though he could not be seen.) But no shrieks ever suggest that some intruder has received a shock. No movements of the wire ever betray an invisible climber. The bloodhounds never give cry. Yet still the Believer is not convinced. "But there is a gardener, invisible, intangible, insensible to electric shocks, a gardener who has no scent and makes no sound, a gardener who comes secretly to look after the garden which he loves." At last the Sceptic despairs, "But what remains of your original assertion? Just how does what you call an invisible, intangible, eternally elusive gardener differ from an imaginary gardener or even from no gardener at all?"

This parable may echo the religious claims of many sincere people, but it has little to do with the Christian affirmation of God. Why? Because central to the Christian position is the historically grounded assertion that the Gardener entered the garden: God actually appeared in the empirical world in Jesus

Christ and fully manifested his deity through miraculous acts in general and his resurrection from the dead in particular. Christian talk about God therefore becomes in the most rigorous sense affirmative, for when asked to "define God" or "tell us what he looks like," the Christian simply points to Christ. Dr. Jowett was supposed to have been asked by an effusive young lady, "Do tell me--what do you think about God?" and his reply was: "That, my dear young lady, is a very unimportant question; the only thing that signifies is what he thinks about me." The Christian knows what God thinks about him--and the human race; he knows what God's eternal value system is (and how desperately the human race needs that knowledge, as we saw in our discussion of humanism!); and he knows that in spite of man's self-centered trampling of God's values, God's love has reached down to earth. How does he know this? Because God tells him this in Christ.

Now it cannot be stressed too strongly that this claim to divine intervention in history is solidly grounded in historical evidence. The textual case for the New Testament documents which record Christ's divine utterances and acts is so excellent that Sir Fredric G. Kenyon, director and principal librarian of the British Museum, could write in 1940 in The Bible and Archaeology: "Both the authenticity and the general integrity of the books of the New Testament may be regarded as finally established" (Kenyon's italics). The world's foremost living biblical archeologist, W. F. Albright of Johns Hopkins University, has identified the New Testament materials as primary source documents for the life of Jesus, dating all of them (including John's Gospel) "between the forties and the eighties of the first century A.D. (very probably sometime between about 50 and 75 A.D.)" (interview in Christianity Today, January 18, 1963). The New Testament writers claim eyewitness contact with the events of Jesus' career, and describe his death and post-resurrection appearances in minute detail. In A.D. 56, for example, Paul wrote (I Cor. 15) that over five hundred people had seen the risen Jesus and

that most were still alive. The New Testament writers explicitly affirm that they are presenting historical facts, not religious fables; writes Peter (II Pet. 1: 16): "We have not followed cunningly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty." And if deception and fabrication were here involved, why didn't the numerous religious enemies of the early Christians blast the whole business? F. F. Bruce of the University of Manchester has shrewdly observed in his book, The New Testament Documents (5th ed., 1960), that if the early proclaimers of Christ's deity had had any tendency to depart from the facts, the presence of hostile witnesses in the audience would have served as a most powerful corrective.

The central attestation for Jesus' deity is his resurrection, and to deny its facticity isn't easy. To oppose it on historical grounds is so difficult that, if one succeeds, the victory is entirely Pyrrhic: any argument that will impugn the New Testament documents will at the same time remove confidence from virtually all other ancient, and numerous modern, historical sources; the result, then, is a general (and entirely unacceptable) historiographical solipsism. To oppose the resurrection on the ground that miracles do not occur is, as we have noted earlier, both philosophically and scientifically irresponsible: philosophically, because no one below the status of a god could know the universe so well as to eliminate miracles a priori; and scientifically, because in the age of Einsteinian physics (so different from the world of Newtonian absolutes in which Hume formulated his classic anti-miraculous argument) the universe has opened up to all possibilities, "any attempt to state a 'universal law of causation' must prove futile" (logician Max Black), and only a careful consideration of the empirical testimony for a miraculous event can determine whether in fact it has or has not occurred.

Success in opposing the evidence for Christ's resurrection is so hard to come by that some objectors to Christian theism (e.g. humanist Corliss Lamont) are

reduced to arguing that the event is trivial. "Even if Christ rose from the dead, would that prove his claims? And would it necessarily mean anything for us?" In a recent public discussion following a lecture I delivered at Roosevelt University, I was informed by a philosophy professor that Christ's conquest of death was no more significant qualitatively than a medical victory over pattern baldness. To which I offered the inevitable reply: "A knock comes at the door. It's the faculty secretary with the message that your wife and children have just been killed in a traffic accident. Your comment would of course be: 'Oh well, what's death? Just like pattern baldness'." In point of fact, we all recognize the overarching significance of death, and a very large proportion of our individual and societal energies are expended in trying to postpone it (medicine), indirectly overcome it (familial, vocational, and artistic achievement), ignore it (escapist entertainment), or kid ourselves about it (funeral practices). Whether we look to anthropological evidence, psychoanalytic studies (E. Herzog's Psyche and Death [1967]), philosophical treatments (Jacques Choron's Death and Western Thought [1963]), or literary expressions of the human dilemma (Camus' La Peste), the reality of the problem of death for all mankind is displayed with appalling clarity. If Christ did in fact conquer this most basic of all human enemies and claimed on the basis of it to be God incarnate, able to give eternal life to those who believe in him, it would be sheer madness not to take with full seriousness the biblical affirmation that "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself."

God and Human Experience

Contemplation of the centrality of death and man's quest for immortality vis-à-vis the God question leads us quite naturally to a striking new book which treats the existence of God from the standpoint of man's sociological experience. I refer to A Rumor of Angels: Modern Society and the Rediscovery of the Supernatural (1969) by Peter Berger, a professor of sociology at

the New School for Social Research. Berger argues that such human experiences as hope in the face of death and the conviction that there must be a retribution transcending inadequate human justice for the commission of monstrous evil in this life are most sensibly explained in terms of God's existence. Other analogous empirical pointers to the existence of the transcendent are man's affirmation of societal ordering (cf. Voegelin's Order and History) and unshakable conviction that such ordering extends to the universe as a whole (cf. the reassurance given by mothers to their frightened children since the world began, "Everything is all right"); man's humor, reflecting his basic awareness that a radical discrepancy exists between life as he lives it (in finitude) and life as it ought to be (in transcendent rightness); and man's play experiences--his brief transmigrations out of time into realms where finitude is momentarily transcended:

Some little girls are playing hopscotch in the park. They are completely intent on their game, closed to the world outside it, happy in their concentration. Time had stood still for them--or, more accurately, it has been collapsed into the movements of the game. The outside world has, for the duration of the game, ceased to exist. And, by implication (since the little girls may not be very conscious of this), pain and death, which are the law of that world, have also ceased to exist. Even the adult observer of this scene, who is perhaps all too conscious of pain and death, is momentarily drawn into the beatific immunity.

In the playing of adults, at least on certain occasions, the suspension of time and of the "serious" world in which people suffer and die becomes explicit. Just before the Soviet troops occupied Vienna in 1945, the Vienna Philharmonic gave one of its scheduled concerts. There was fighting in the immediate proximity of the city, and the concertgoers could hear

the rumbling of the guns in the distance. . . . It was . . . an affirmation of the ultimate triumph of all human gestures of creative beauty over the gestures of destruction, and even over the ugliness of war and death. . . .

All men have experienced the deathlessness of childhood and we may assume that, even if only once or twice, all men have experienced transcendent joy in adulthood. Under the aspect of inductive faith, religion is the final vindication of childhood and of joy, and of all gestures that replicate these.

Professor Berger's arguments carry us from the lowlands of sociology to the heights of philosophical ontology, for they conjoin with a very important passage in Norman Malcolm's classic essay on Anselm's ontological proof of God's existence (Philosophical Review, January, 1960). Asks Malcolm: Why have human beings formed the concept of "a being a greater than which cannot be conceived"? This is his suggested answer, based, as are Berger's arguments, on "an understanding of the phenomena of human life":

There is the phenomenon of feeling guilt for something that one has done or thought or felt or for a disposition that one has. One wants to be free of this guilt. But sometimes the guilt is felt to be so great that one is sure that nothing one could do oneself, nor any forgiveness by another human being, would remove it. One feels a guilt that is beyond all measure, a guilt "a greater than which cannot be conceived." Paradoxically, it would seem, one nevertheless has an intense desire to have this incomparable guilt removed. One requires a forgiveness that is beyond all measure, a forgiveness "a greater than which cannot be conceived." Out of such a storm in the soul, I am suggesting, there arises the conception

of a forgiving mercy that is limitless,
beyond all measure.

The experiences of death, judgment, order, humor, play, and guilt point beyond themselves--as does the very "I" who is conscious of them--and the direction of the signpost is to a Cross where the transcendent God offered "forgiving mercy that is limitless, beyond all measure." In the words of the Apostle (Rom. 4:25), he was "delivered for our offences and was raised again for our justification." Is man his own God? No, for man could never attain such limitless mercy. But God became man to offer that mercy, which no one could buy at any price, as a free gift. The evidence of God's existence and of his gift is more than compelling, but those who insist that they have no need of him or it will always find ways to discount the offer. As Pascal trenchantly observed (Pensees, No. 430): "Il y a assez de lumiere pour qui ne desirent que de voir, et assez d'obscurite pour ceux qui ont une disposition contraire." This statement is, of course, but a corollary of Jesus' words (Mt. 9:13; 18:3): "I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. Except you be converted and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."

ANNOUNCEMENT: Arrangements are being made to have Dr. Hans Kirsten, of the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church of Germany, deliver the 1971 Reformation Lectures. He is being asked to make Lutheranism's Answer to the Problems of Today the subject of his presentation.