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A NEW WAY OF SEEING THINGS

Ernst Troeltsch and the Theological Agenda

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A thesis presented to Deakin University in total fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

School of Humanities

December 1987
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CANDIDATE'S CERTIFICATE

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CONTENTS

PREFACE

SUMMARY

ABBREVIATIONS

INTRODUCTION

1. Life
2. Thought
3. Presuppositions
4. Aim

1. HISTORICAL THINKING AND THEOLOGICAL METHOD
   1.1 HISTORIOGRAPHY- the principles
   1.2 PROTESTANTISM AND PROGRESS- the cultural matrix
      (a) Why
      (b) The Contents
   1.3 DER HISTORISMUS UND SEINE PROBLEME- the philosophy

2. WHAT ABSOLUTENESS HAS CHRISTIANITY: THE PROBLEM OF OTHER RELIGIONS
   2.1 INTRODUCTION
   2.2 BACKGROUND
      (a) The Religionsgeschichtliche Schule
      (b) Harnack: Das Wesen des Christentum
   2.3 TROELTSCH'S RESPONSE
      (a) Essence
      (b) Europeanism
      (c) Absolutism

3. SOCIOLOGY AND THE GREAT REJECTION
   3.1 THE SOCIAL SCIENCES AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE
      Excursus I: Church and State
   3.2 THE ALTERNATIVES
      (a) Comte: Replacement
      (b) Marx: Rejection
      Hegel
      Feuerbach
      Marx's Criticism of Hegel
      (i) Materialism
      (ii) Alienation
      Marx's Criticism of Feuerbach
3.3 THE SOCIAL TEACHING

(a) Introduction 131
(b) The Agenda 132
   Rationality and Order 132
   Security 133
   Optimism 133
(c) Methodology 139
   (i) Results and suggestions 141
   (ii) Ideology and Conversations 144
   (iii) Working Models 149
      1. Compromise 154
      2. Natural Law 159

Excursus 2: Where do we go from here? 163
   3. Church/Sect Typology 169

Excursus 3: Liberation Theology 173

(a) Oppression 175

(b) Religion 179
   1. Tendenz or Kompromis 181
   2. The Function of God 182

(c) Hermeneutics 184
   1. Words 184
   2. Relevance 185
   3. Principles 186

CONCLUDING UNSCIENTIFIC POSTSCRIPT 205

The Unfinished Task 205
(a) Truth 208
(b) The Future 211
(c) Hermeneutics 214

BIBLIOGRAPHY 221
PREFACE

The following essay began as a suggestion of Professor Max Charlesworth that an investigation of Ernst Troeltsch as a forerunner of liberation theology, but whose thought also contained the seeds of a critique of it, might be a worthy thesis topic. The suggestion commended itself because of the (increasingly recognised) importance of Troeltsch, and because of the burgeoning importance of modern socio-political theology.

As often happens with theses though, reading and research led to a reshaping and defining of the original aim. I found myself adding two other areas which were of particular concern to Troeltsch and in which he made significant contributions: the philosophy of history and the history of religions. The title "A New Way of Seeing Things" comes from a sentence of Troeltsch in which he describes the influence of Max Weber on him. Weber's influence of course was with regard to social theory. But the words are also applicable to these other two areas. And, it might reasonably be said, the task of theology in the twentieth century is to investigate its subject matter in the light of these three disciplines and engage in dialogue with them.

Thus the focus of the essay shifts somewhat from Troeltsch and socio-political theology to Troeltsch and the theological agenda. The original aim may still be seen in that the third section dealing with social theory is much longer than the other two, and liberation theology is examined in an excursus. The aim will be stated more fully in the INTRODUCTION.

Though the three areas are dealt with in separate sections, the issues they pose should not be thought of as being in watertight compartments. For in spite of them being disparate disciplines there are certain ideas which run through them, e.g. openness, dialogue. I trust this will not appear too repetitious: it is, in a way, inevitable given the encyclopaedic and synthetic nature of Troeltsch's thought.

The final chapter does not present results but suggests what I think are the presuppositions which theology in the twentieth
century must operate with. The subtitle "The Unfinished Task" points both to the nature and function of these presuppositions, and to the abiding significance of Troeltsch's work. His contribution should be seen as a prelude to modern and further theological work; and the issues and themes he discerned and struggled with have a certain relevance and applicability that are not limited to one epoch, or discipline.

I am grateful to Professor Charlesworth for his original suggestion and his unfailing help and courtesy as this essay struggled into existence. I am grateful also to my friend Tony Endrey for his advice and encouragement, and to my wife Beth for putting up with Troeltsch and me. The defects in this essay are in no way due to them but are all my own work. I would be remiss if I did not express my appreciation to Mrs. Dorothy Hodgens for typing an illegible manuscript, and to the Deakin University Library for prompt and courteous attention.
SUMMARY

The aim of this thesis, as set out in the Introduction, is to assess the (seminal) significance of Troeltsch as one who set the agenda for twentieth century theology, particularly modern socio-political theology, and whose thought still has a special relevance.

The first main chapter deals with the implications of the philosophy of history for theology. The Protestant theological orthodoxy of Troeltsch's time was essential ahistorical: he thought this to be untenable. Theology had to come to terms with the historical method, which was "a leaven which transforms everything, and finally bursts all previous forms of theological method." This chapter discusses Troeltsch's work concerning

the principles

the cultural matrix, and

the philosophy of history.

The second main chapter examines another main concern of Troeltsch, namely, the status of Christianity vis-a-vis other religions. The background to this was the increasing awareness of the existence of other religions and the question of relativity and universality which this posed. Troeltsch's major response was Die Absolutheit des Christentums in which the ideas of

essence,

Europeanism, and

absolutism were discussed.

The third, and longest, chapter looks at the impact of social theory on theology. Sociology gave Troeltsch "a new way of seeing things", and this new perspective is to be seen pre-eminently in

The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches. Discussion of this centres on the three main concepts that Troeltsch delineated,

compromise,

natural law, and

church/sect typology.
The concluding chapter is entitled CONCLUDING UNSCIENTIFIC POSTSCRIPT. THE UNFINISHED TASK. It distills the three concepts which theology should work with in the twentieth century:

- truth
- the future
- hermeneutics.
ABBREVIATIONS


The above are abbreviations of works frequently referred to in the text. In the case of other works referred to more than once, in the second and succeeding references the footnotes will include the author's name and shortened title and page number.
INTRODUCTION

1. LIFE

2. THOUGHT

3. PRESUPPOSITIONS
   (a) The Enlightenment
   (b) Secularisation

4. AIM
INTRODUCTION

1. LIFE

The bare outline of Ernst Troeltsch's life is easily chronicled. He was born on 17th February 1865 near Augsburg in Bavaria. After a solid grounding in classical languages and literature at the Augsburg Gymnasium he studied Protestant (Lutheran) theology at Erlangen, Gottingen and Berlin. He became Privatdozent (lecturer) at Gottingen, extraordinary professor at Bonn (1892), ordinary (full) professor at Heidelberg (1894), and then professor at Berlin (1915). He died in 1923. His life was that of an academic but it was not remote from what we might call ordinary existence. For example his interest in social and political affairs extended to his being a member of the Baden Upper House while in Heidelberg, and a member of the Prussian Landtag (the provincial legislature) while in Berlin. He was also, for some years, Under Secretary of state for religious affairs. We might add, parenthetically, that it is a pity he did not write an autobiography, or leave much in the way of suitable material for a biographer to use. The closest he came was an autobiographical sketch Meine Bücher (My Books).

2. THOUGHT

However, it is his thought which is of particular interest still today. It was never purely abstract but was based on a wide range of historical and other data. Nor was it narrow. Troeltsch was an encyclopaedic thinker and writer. In his writings he showed astonishing erudition and ability, making significant contributions in the areas of ethics, the psychology and philosophy of religion, the philosophy of history, the history of religions, social theory, history and theology. It is his great contribution that he insisted on doing theology in the light of other disciplines. This concern was allied with the conviction that "theology is always something to be articulated in connection with the time in question. Theology always has to be the timely expression of the religious question."(1) Troeltsch's theology is an explication of these two fundamental ideas. In this he was
something of a prophet, and today, half a century after his death, theologians are again assessing his significance.

There is a sense in which Troeltsch's concern was not a new thing, for Christian theology has always had to give an account of itself. Indeed it might be said that its existence is never certain; it is of its nature to be provisional, and polemical. For theology does not inhabit a vacuum. Its universe of discourse overlaps those of other disciplines and ways of seeing things; and it has usually formulated its doctrines and explained itself in reaction to some challenge from without (philosophy) or within (heresy, or heterodoxy). The challenge from without has tended to concentrate on proving that what theology said was not true, or that it merely engaged in word games. For example, in this century, logical positivism and linguistic analysis took issue with theology, and did it a service by forcing it to look carefully at the way that it used language. Not infrequently the challenge from within arose from an attempt to come to terms with prevailing ways of thinking. This has always been so. In its early centuries, as it moved from a Palestinian to a wider Mediterranean milieu, theology found that it had to express itself in Hellenistic forms. In the middle ages the great schoolmen expressed themselves in Aristotelian and Platonic terms — they were the frames of thinking current then.

Over the last century a new challenge has appeared, social theory, which takes a different tack. D. Chadwick (2) refers to the cutting of social theory into the tradition of intellectual enquiry. The intellectual critique of religion has changed into a social critique. Moreover, this involves not just ideas but practice, or praxis. The argument is, so to speak, not so much that theology is not true but that it is practically irrelevant. Thus it is not so much a challenge to theology as a rejection of religion. Troeltsch took this challenge very seriously; and the sociological perspective is characteristic of his theology.

It has become common among scholars to divide Troeltsch's work into different periods, each of which is supposedly dominated by different influences. W. E. Wyman refers to H. Richard Niebuhr's schema "1. a period of reaction to Ritschlianism, 1894-1903, 2. a neo-Kantian period, 1903-1912, and 3. a period devoted to the philosophy of history, 1913-1923" and to H. G. Drescher's, which
he prefers: 1892-1902, 1902-1914 and 1914-1923. (3) Wyman discusses the merits of subdividing Troeltsch's work and concentrates, for his purposes, mainly on the middle period. A similar concentration will be found in this essay in that the chapter on sociology, which will refer especially to his magnum opus The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches (1912), is much longer than the others. There are two reasons for this. First, this emphasis and preoccupation is found in Troeltsch; and second, the impact of social theory on theology today is both widespread and significant. Illustrative of this latter point is H. Peukert's Science, Action and Fundamental Theology: Toward a Theology of Communicative Action. Peukert examines the possibility of a theology based on contemporary conceptions of rationality, paying special attention to Jurgen Habermas' idea of a theory of communicative action.(4)

Drescher refers to Troeltsch's methodological principal "which to him also appears as the result of his enquiry. This is 'the dependence of the whole world of Christian ideas and dogmas on fundamental sociological factors and the social conception of the time.'"(5) His enquiry and methodology were prompted in no small way by Karl Marx. "Marxism interpreted religion, law, politics and ethics as ultimately functions of economic conditions and class structure; it could try to master the multiplicity of human problems by directing its attack on the economic institutions of society. Orthodoxy believed religious faith to be the basic element in human life and developed accordingly what social strategy it had." (6) Now Troeltsch felt that things were a bit more complex than both sides had allowed. He did not have much time for the "supernaturalist" approach of Protestant orthodoxy: which he saw as neither recognising nor doing justice to the reality and complexity of the non-theological factors in a Weltanschauung. On the other hand while he was impressed by Marx, he was not uncritical of him. (7) It will be the contention of this essay that we have in Troeltsch not only a positive response to Marx but also the methodological tools with which to offer a critique of modern political theologies, notably of course those that have been influenced by or are avowedly Marxist in their presuppositions and Weltanschauung.

Discussion of this must wait until the chapter on sociology, in particular the excursus on Liberation Theology. At this point it
remains to mention briefly the other two main areas of concern for the theological agenda of the twentieth century, as Troeltsch saw it. These are the nature of history and other religions. They, with the social sciences, form the context in which theology must be done in the twentieth century. In the following chapters I will investigate Troeltsch's theological perspective in the light of these disciplines, and then refer to his analysis of the role of socio-economic factors in Western theology. In all of this it must be emphasised that he did not so much react to ideas and thinkers of his time as interact with them. There is about his thought an openness and a synthetic rather than an analytic quality. This is why many have found his approach problematic. Is his approach to history/other religions/social theory a creative and viable one, or has it led to an impasse and the abandonment of theology? Karl Barth for example found something symbolic in Troeltsch's move to a chair of philosophy at Berlin in 1915.

I am not convinced though that Barth's reaction was entirely justified. It would be truer to say that Troeltsch was sensitive to the temper of the times and in his work helped set the agenda for theology in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. For it was in the nineteenth century that the philosophy of history was invented; there was a greater knowledge and awareness of other religions; and sociology gained increasing stature as a discipline in its own right. The time was past when theology could operate on the strength of some kind of divine right or autonomy. If it was not going to become a "theology of the gaps", that is, if it was not going to find its area of operation, and hence authority, steadily narrowed as these new disciplines steadily displaced it then theology was going to have to engage with them. (8) It was not just a matter of new topics being on the agenda, but a new way of doing theology that was called for.

Troeltsch was in the van in appropriating these new insights for the credibility of theology and for the use of the Church.

The concentration on a 'pure' theology based on the Bible which was provided by the first world war shattered the broad scientific lesson of influence and experience in academic theology. Unlike the theology of Barth, Bultmann and Gogarten, Troeltsch had an influence which went beyond
theology as a single university discipline, out to philosophy, the history of ideas and sociology. It is only today that these impulses are being taken up again and that links with other sciences are being formed. (9) (my emphasis)

It is hard to see how this can be avoided, and the words of Drescher just quoted are echoed by W. Pannenberg who says that Troeltsch has emerged "as the one who had formulated the truly fundamental questions and tasks for theology in the twentieth century." (10)

For theology does not inhabit a vacuum. Since the nineteenth century it has become increasingly evident that it must do its work in a world inhabited by historians, other religions, and sociologists. It would seem to be fairly obvious that theology should dialogue with these different areas of thought, but it has often failed to do this, and Pannenberg refers to the devastation that will occur for theology because of this failure when it "awakens from its kerygmatic dreaming". (11)

3. PRESUPPOSITIONS

It was not only the different perspectives just mentioned which governed Troeltsch's methodology; also basic to his thought were the two great presuppositions of the modern age that he came to grips with, namely, the Enlightenment and secularisation. These created the new situation within which theology had to work.

(a) The Enlightenment

The great ferment of intellectual, and practical, activity that characterised Troeltsch's contribution did not happen in a vacuum but should be seen as part of that great epoch of thought which we call the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment is an umbrella term, with all the limitations of such. It is conveniently used to refer to the intellectual and cultural epoch that held sway in Europe from the eighteenth century. It had a pre-history, and in many ways continues today. B. Ramm says that

One way to understand the mood of the Enlightenment is to
list those words and concepts that were given great approval and those which were regarded with distrust. The approved concepts were reason, freedom, nature, utility, happiness, rights, tolerance, deism, rational christianity, natural religion, social contract, autonomy, harmony, and optimism. The disapproved concepts were authority, antiquity, tradition, church, revelation, the supernatural, and theological explanations. (12)

There were other threads running through European thought in this period, such as the idea of progress; and there were reactions to Enlightenment emphases, such as the romantic movement. Here though, if another generalisation may be permitted, the point to be noted is that there was a concentration on man, and increasingly, man in society. There were other phenomena such as the industrial revolution which had a profound effect on Marx. There was the rise of nationalism and growth in populations. And there is what might be called "the democratic revolution." (13) These were factors which contributed to the politicisation of man and society in a new way. Men were given to expect that it was their right to have a say in the running of things.

This motivation and involvement is problematic for orthodox theology. For part of the atmosphere - and presupposition for many - of the Enlightenment background is the burgeoning secularisation that has so characterised Western thought since the eighteenth century.

(b) Secularisation

Secularisation is another umbrella term which one may criticise for its ambiguity, but happily use for its convenience. (14) It is a dominating tendency of Western thought which has as its starting point the belief that things can be explained without recourse to the supernatural. While this is a major characteristic of Western thought it must not be imagined that it was invented in, say, the eighteenth century and that some time before that was a "dream-time" when society was not secular, and that with the Enlightenment and the rise of science things went into a decline, or progressed, according to one's predilection to things theological. However, from the eighteenth century the tendency is definitely more marked in the way that men tried to
understand things, and themselves.

O. Chadwick makes some points that we might usefully take up. One of these is in his chapter "On Liberalism:" as a definition of "liberalism" he suggests the idea of "freedom from restraint". He says that "From the moment that European opinion decided for toleration, it decided for an eventual free market in opinion. (15) This he relates to the Reformation. The Reformation, he says, "In dividing Europe by religion asked for a toleration which hardly anyone at first thought right ... Christian conscience was the force which began to make Europe 'secular'; that is, to allow many religions or no religions in a state, and repudiate any kind of pressure upon the man who rejected the accepted and inherited axioms of society." (16) Religious toleration or religious diversity of course does not constitute a secularisation of the European mind. The suggestion has been made though that there is a nexus between Protestantism and secularisation. Chadwick quotes P. Berger: "Protestantism cut the umbilical cord between heaven and earth '... The argument is that the Reformation rested the sacred on the Bible alone instead of a breadth of sacramental universe. Then it only needed historical criticism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to shake the sacredness of the Bible, and we have arrived at the 'disenchantment of the world'... 'If the drama of the modern era is the decline of religion, then Protestantism can aptly be described as its dress rehearsal.'"(17) Berger, he said, appealed to Weber and Troeltsch for this line of thought.

This is a difficult thesis for the historian to test and for the proponent to defend. For his part though, we should note, Troeltsch propounded the notion that the Reformation was essentially mediæval and not responsible for the modern Weltanschauung. We will pick up again the question of the relationship of the Reformation to the modern world below in Chapter 1. The point about the liberal spirit, that is, understanding it as freedom from restraint, and the connection with Protestantism, is interesting in view of the troubled relationship that many liberation theologians have with the authority structures of the Roman Catholic church. This is of interest to us as Liberation Theology is the outstanding example of social theology in the twentieth century; and because not only Marx but also Troeltsch may be claimed as antecedents. See below
the Excursus at the end of Chapter 3.

4. AIM

Thus the aim of this essay is to assess the (seminal) significance of Troeltsch as one who set the agenda for twentieth century theology, particularly modern socio-political theology, and whose thought still has a special relevance. It must be said at the outset though, that Troeltsch's theological programme has not met with general approbation. H. Diem for example says that "Troeltsch marked a terminal point in the history of theology from which there could be no further progress in the same line of development." (18) To this statement we might add the argument of C. Lindbeck that theologians become culturally interesting only when, like Barth, they go about their business of "redescribing the world in biblical categories", rather than pursuing some sort of "apologetic conformity to an establishment or non-establishment advocacy of an anti-establishment." (19) Indeed, it is tempting to set Barth and Troeltsch against each other as the two great alternatives for doing theology in the twentieth century. This impression is underlined when we reflect that probably the main reason for Troeltsch's contribution resting in comparative obscurity was the rise and dominance of Barthianism, or neo-orthodoxy, after the First World War. However I think that we must be careful about seeing things so. It is much more complex than that. To say that there is renewed interest in Troeltsch is not to say that his way of doing theology has (largely) displaced Barth's. Interest in does not mean dominance of. Furthermore, even if we allow that modern political theology is of more than ephemeral significance, and recognise the importance of Troeltsch as a forerunner (20), it will be argued that his thought also contains a critique of modern political theology.
NOTES


6. H.R. Niebuhr "Introduction" in Troeltsch's The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1981 vol 1, p.10. On p.8 Niebuhr said that "Troeltsch began (his) enquiry of which a substantial part is set forth in the present work, with certain interests and in the presence of certain challenges issuing from his own historical and social situation. He was a complex man and lived in a complex time ... His practical, moral concern in the presence of a pluralistic, centrifugal modern civilisation is evident throughout his total work."

7. For example of D.E. Miller, "Troeltsch's Critique of Karl Marx", Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion vol. 1, 1961, p.113. "One of the most perceptive and illuminating analyses of the theories of Karl Marx available in any language is to be found in Troeltsch's Der Historismus und seine Probleme. Troeltsch's criticism is not simply negative in its force. It is a broadly constructed, analytical study of Marxism which intends to draw out Marx's potential contribution to Western thought and at the same time to set aside the dogmatic and propagandist elements. Troeltsch's own conception of sociological and historical development was profoundly influenced by Marx."

8. cf. H-G. Drescher, ETFI, p.31. "To take up contemporary
questions and allow them to influence his thinking was normal for Troeltsch, while the conservation of old viewpoints was not normal for him. There is a profound reason for this, namely that for him theology is always something to be articulated in connection with the time in question. Theology always has to be the timely expression of the religious questions. But if theology was not something isolated, not a science which could make objective statements without regard to the time and the society in which it was carried on, then one should ask about the conditions in which Troeltsch found himself in the time of the first world war and thereafter. In that depressing time, when the downfall of the west forecast by Spengler seemed no longer to be a distant possibility, Troeltsch himself did not lose hope. Even when the Zeitgeist ran contrary and theological and other critics like Gertrud von Le Fort (who turned catholic) could not or would not see it, Troeltsch spoke repeatedly of boldness and courage, of spontaneity and creative power." (my emphasis).


   cf. the following chapter by R. Morgan "Ernst Troeltsch and the dialectical theology" pp.33-77.


11. W. Pannenberg, Basic Questions, p.67


   On p.4 Ramm writes "Historian Henry F. May has written that only Christians are still worried about the Enlightenment. That is right: The Enlightenment sent shock waves through Christian theology as nothing did before or after .. Theology has never been the same since the Enlightenment. And therefore each and every theology ... must assess its relationship to the Enlightenment."

Ramm's book is essentially an extended essay on Karl Barth. One of his main points is that Barth, though a child of the Enlightenment, was also a severe critic of it. Though, apparently, not in a negative or dismissive way. On p.vii Ramm
claims that Barth's theology is the most thorough of all in coming to terms with the Enlightenment and offers, to evangelical theology, an instructive paradigm. At different points below it will be useful to compare Barth's and Troeltsch's approaches.


(a) the great increase in population.
(b) the condition of labour.
(c) the transformation of property.
(d) urbanization.
(e) technology.
(f) the factory system.
(g) the development of political masses.

14. The secularisation hypothesis has come in for a good deal of questioning over the last few years. I think though that it is still a useful concept to use or refer to, at least as a working model if not a lemma. And Troeltsch ended his *ST* with the eighteenth century because, he said, after that Europe could not longer be called Christian. Secularisation began a long time before the Reformation of course. Troeltsch said that the post-Constantinian Church had "little idea of social reform because the reasons for holding aloof from social life had disappeared and the existing Imperial system seemed as immutable as ever. The process of secularization was in full swing, but it would not be right to regard this process simply as a mere participation in the life of the world and fusion with its spirit. Practically, of course, that was what it did mean for the masses, but genuine Christians and the religious leaders still regarded the world with all its institutions of property, labour, force, violence, and law as the result of sin. In participating in the life of the world the Christian submits to the consequence of sin ..." *ST* vol 1, p.126.


1. HISTORICAL THINKING AND THEOLOGICAL METHOD

1.1 HISTORIOGRAPHY - the principles

1.2 PROTESTANTISM AND PROGRESS - the cultural matrix

   (a) Why

   (b) The Contents

1.3 DER HISTORISMUS UND SEINE PROBLEME - the philosophy
1. HISTORICAL THINKING AND THEOLOGICAL METHOD

Troeltsch was essentially a historian in his approach to things, but never simply a historian. All his life he wrestled with the philosophical issue of what presuppositions ought to determine the historian's approach and the conclusions he reaches. The aim of this chapter then is to critically examine Troeltsch's understanding of history, and the significance of this for his social theology. As already mentioned above, two things should be borne in mind: 1. Troeltsch was a synthetic rather than an analytic thinker, and 2. his method is of greater interest to us than his results.

The Protestant orthodoxy of Troeltsch's time was characterized by a concern for dogma and normativeness. And it was essentially ahistorical. In both of these instances it was heir to the Reformation. Troeltsch, however, considered this to be untenable. All his thinking was filled with the awareness that the omnipresence in modern cultural life of the sense of history or of the historical consciousness constituted the most important difference from other ages. He therefore became preoccupied with questions about the nature of history and of historical knowledge and their importance for the right understanding of religion and its place in human life. (1)

Thus Troeltsch would not allow theology to go on its normative and ahistorical way: it had to come to terms with history, which was descriptive in purpose. Furthermore, as Wyman points out,

The historical thinker treats all religions on the same footing, rather than distinguishing at the outset between one revealed religion and other, natural religions. Thus Troeltsch called the historical method 'a leaven which transforms everything, and finally bursts all previous forms of theological method.' For historical thinking, the dogmatic method has become simply impracticable. (2)

It was not just a matter of using certain critical tools, there was a whole world view which lay behind the historical-critical method and which had to be introduced into theology.

In the nineteenth century there was a sense of crisis for theology. This was caused by the rise of science, or more
correctly, the application of the scientific method - both in the
natural and in the human sciences. The natural sciences do not
concern us here but what are sometimes called the human sciences,
especially history, do. There had been a lot of history written
before the nineteenth century of course, but it is really only
then that historians and philosophers began to address themselves
to the meaning of history; and so the philosophy of history was
invented.(3)

As might be expected there was more than one school of historical
thought. The dominant one in Germany, and some other European
countries, is referred to as historicism. This is of importance
to us as Troeltsch is often/usually spoken of as being a
historiast. But before we determine whether this is so we must
define historicism. This is particularly necessary as there are
diverse understandings of the term. One interpretation is that
frequently associated with D. F. Strauss: namely, that there are
laws operating in history along the lines of the natural sciences.
History becomes a closed system of cause and effect which, of
course, puts paid to the notion of the divine operating within or
irrupting into history.(4) If we understand historicism in this,
rational, way then it might be defined as historical positivism.
Troeltsch was not a historiast in this sense. He was very aware
that there was more to the course and relationship of historical
events than rational laws. In his article "Contingency" he said,
"The term contingentia is applied to that which is actual and
accidental in contrast to that which is logically necessary and in
accordance with law. Even if we assume the existence of a
universal rational order, yet we must admit that every single
concrete phenomenon found in this network of rationality has a
certain individual content, i.e. it cannot be fully explained by
universal laws".(5)

To ascertain the meaning of history one must, according to
Troeltsch, consider the future as well as the past. There has
been an influential stream of historical thought which has, on the
basis of the rationally understood course of the past, held that
the future can be predicted. This notion is particularly
associated with Hegel and Marx, and has been labelled
"historicism" by Karl Popper who savagely attacked it in his
The Open Society and its Enemies Vol.11 The High Tide of Prophecy:
Hegel, Marx and the Aftermath(6) Popper's use of the term though
was an individual one and we need not dwell on it save to note that while Troeltsch was influenced by Marx, this was not to the extent of accepting uncritically what he had to say.

This brings us to another, more usual, way of understanding historicism, and one which has affinities with Troeltsch's way of seeing things. This historicism may be understood as being, in part, a reaction to the Enlightenment with its stress on the notion of progress and of reason being the measure of all things. D. Bebbington draws attention to its two main strands. The first involves understanding that cultures are moulded by history; so that the way that people think is going to be very much determined by the environment in which they have grown up. "Historicists placed stress on the nation as the ground where particular values take root" (7). This embraces other factors, such as common language as a unifying factor, and certain inherent values: all this of course has obvious political implications. No nation or group though inhabits the world by itself, and the second strand involves how we appreciate groups other than our own. The differences are overcome by using the faculty of intuition, often called understanding (Verstehen). Thus if the eighteenth century philosophers were wont to scorn the students of previous generations as superstitious and barbaric this was because they lacked a sense of history. Each age has its own worth: this idea is the context of von Ranke's dictum "Every epoch is immediate to God ..."(8)

This kind of historicism gave some needed insights into the nature and significance of the historical process, and was a necessary reaction to some of the ahistorical thinking of the Enlightenment. The recognition of the importance of social and intellectual conditions, and of intuition (or understanding or "consciousness") of other groups or ages would seem to be basic to historical thinking. However, certain caveats may be raised about it. Bebbington offers four criticisms - 1. That groups are moulded by history is undeniable, but this would seem to deny any constancy in man. 2. Intuition/understanding is fine but offers no objective criterion. 3. The concentration on the nation has already shown itself to be politically catastrophic. 4. There is a lack of foundations.(9) It is fine to point to history itself but that is to point to a mixture of attitudes and values. How can we say which of these are right and which wrong? In summary
then, we may appreciate historicism's attempt to come to terms with the realities of social existence, but at the same time we may have to ask if it has not led us into a maze of relativism. (10) Is it true then that Troeltsch as a historicist sold his theological heritage for a mess of relativistic pottage? And, is there a future for a theology that realistically relates itself to the human sciences? The rest of this chapter and the next will deal with the first of these questions, and Chapter 3 will deal with the second.

What then did Troeltsch have to say about history? I will confine myself to discussing what he had to say about the principles, the cultural matrix, and the philosophy of history. (11)
1.1 **HISTORIOGRAPHY - the principles**

This might be subtitled "How we should write history"; for in it Troeltsch outlines the methods and principles that underlie the work of the historian. He begins, significantly, by referring to the profound changes in modern thought and practice which have assailed the traditional Christian view of the world. It is not these changes in themselves but the implications they have for Christianity that primarily concerns Troeltsch. He lists four:

(a) the modern conception of nature;

(b) the new conception of history;

(c) the modern ethics of humanity, "which, besides the unworldly virtues of love to God and one's neighbour, has emphasized the intrinsic excellencies of artistic and scientific culture ... and has also recognised the positive ethical imperatives involved in political, social economical and industrial problems."(4) (my emphasis)

(d) "the new conditions of life on its economical and industrial sides, and the sociological mode of thought issuing from them".(12)

Troeltsch's article deals only with (b) but it is typical, and quite proper, of him to refer to the others, clearly recognising "the manifold interrelation and interaction between them."

With regard to (b), i.e. the principles which guide the historian, and not infrequently determine the conclusions, Troeltsch refers to criticism, analogy, and correlation. He had previously discussed these principles in his 1898 essay *Über historische und dogmatische Methode in der Theologie*. (13) V. Harvey describes these principles thus:

1. The principle of criticism, by which he meant that our judgments about the past cannot simply be classified as true or false but must be seen as claiming only a greater or a lesser degree of probability and as always open to revision;

2. The principle of analogy, by which he meant that we are able to make such judgments of probability only if we presuppose that our own present experience is not radically dissimilar to the experience of past persons; and

3. The principle of correlation, by which he meant that the phenomena of man's historical life are so related and interdependent that no radical change can take place at any one point in the historical nexus without effecting a change
in all that immediately surrounds it. Historical explanation, therefore, necessarily takes the form of understanding an event in terms of its antecedents and consequences, and no event can be isolated from its historically conditioned time and space.\(^{(14)}\)

There can be no doubt that Troeltsch's work on the historical-critical method posed devastating problems for traditional belief and theology. Indeed some might want to see him as being in company with D. F. Strauss (cf. n. 4 above). J. Macquarrie says "Thus when Troeltsch's principles are applied to it, Christianity emerges deprived of certainty in its historical basis, shorn of its supernatural element, and denied any final or absolute character."\(^{(15)}\)

When it is so put it would seem that Troeltsch (and he fully realised the implications of his work) reads as though he were a sceptic either well on his way to unbelief or clearing the ground in preparation for re-interpreting Christianity in a non-theistic or non-supernatural way. I think though that this would be a premature judgment, one which has not taken into account his later writings, nor noticed certain statements in the "Historiography" article.

Harvey \(^{(16)}\) refers to "many theologians" who conclude that Troeltsch simply reflected the antisupernaturalistic and positivistic bias of the nineteenth century, as though he (Troeltsch) were a non-believer. I do not think that such an assessment is adequate. Troeltsch certainly was not happy with the way that traditional Christianity persisted in adhering to some form of supernaturalism. But this must be seen in its proper perspective, namely, his profound conviction, which he often reiterated, that "in the modern world all human life has become historicized, that is, that all human decisions, undertakings, and conditions are determined by historical factors so that everything human appears to be set in changing historical relations."\(^{(17)}\) The older ahistorical theological ways of thinking and speaking were not appropriate to modern culture: times had changed.

Certain points should be made with regard to Troeltsch's alleged positivistic bias. As mentioned above, historicism is sometimes understood as a kind of historical positivism. However, Troeltsch
should not be thought of endorsing that point of view. He certainly referred to history as a science: for example, in referring to the rise of criticism, he speaks of "the full development of modern historical reflexion, which, notwithstanding all misgivings as to its conclusions, consists precisely like the modern conception of Nature, in a purely scientific attitude to facts."(18) And the second section of the article he entitles "The purely scientific character of historiography."

But in the third section, "The nature of historical causality," he refers to "what is really our main problem, viz. that of relating to the nature of historical causation. Here we find ourselves in the sphere of the logic or epistemology of history ... (this is different) to the logic of natural science". (19) On the following page he underlines this difference: "the method of natural science is determined by the interest of selecting that aspect of experience in which it manifests itself as absolutely determined by universal laws, and, accordingly, the method in question abstracts from all that is qualitative and individual. The method of historical science on the other hand, is determined by the object of selecting from the flux of phenomena that which is qualitatively and uniquely individual, whether on a larger or on a smaller scale, and of making this intelligible in its concrete and specific relations."

Certain things follow from the nature of the historical method. Macquarrie refers to Christianity being deprived of certainty when Troeltsh's principles are applied to it. It is hard to see how things could be otherwise. Half a century before Kierkegaard said in his Philosophical Fragments,

It is well known that Christianity is the only historical phenomenon which in spite of the historical, say precisely by means of the historical, has offered itself to the individual as a point of departure for his eternal consciousness, has assumed to interest him in another sense than the merely historical, has proposed to base his eternal happiness on his relationship to something historical.(20)

The point is that history is, at best, a matter of probabilities. To the sceptic/positivist who hankers after certainty two things may be said. First, when the materials are there it is possible to know what happened in the past with a reasonable measure of
surety. Second, we must not imagine that truth and certainty are
the preserve of the scientist. G. R. Elton in pleading the
historian's case pungently remarks:
The natural sciences have, it would seem, virtually abandoned
the concepts of truth and falsehood; phenomena once regarded
as objectively true are now seen to be only a statistical
abstraction from random variables, and the accusing finger of
the uncertainty principle further insists that, since
observation alters a phenomenon, nothing is capable of being
studied except after it is changed from the state in which it
was meant to be investigated. Practising scientists have
therefore permitted the philosopher to remove the word 'true'
from their vocabulary and to substitute some such phrase as
'more probable', 'more accurately descriptive', 'more
aesthetically or intellectually satisfying'.(21)

To this must be added that Troeltsch was a believer, and for him
faith is an important part of the theological enterprise. The
fact that the historical method would now have to replace the
cognitive did not mean that faith was to be replaced by knowledge.
Rather it underlined the true nature of faith. Faith has past,
present and future aspects to it. It involves a living out of the
implications of that belief - this is the present aspect. It also
looks to the future, both for fulfilment and verification. In all
of this a kind of parallel can be drawn with the meaning of
history. Both the believer and the philosopher of history, and
the theologian too for that matter, need to maintain an openness
to the future. Certainty is postponed to the end. Thus Troeltsch
included a fourth section, "The relation of historiography to the
philosophy of history." In his concluding remarks he says

... every epoch has a relative justification, though it must,
at the same time, be judged in the light of an absolute end.
This shows the necessary relativity of the philosophy of
history, and yet makes it possible that the relative shall
appear to be included in the movement towards the absolute.
The absolute in the relative, yet not fully and finally in
it, but always pressing towards fresh forms of self-
expression, and so effecting the mutual criticism of its
relative individualisations - such is the last word of the
philosophy of history.(22)
1.2 PROTESTANTISM AND PROGRESS - the cultural matrix.

(a) Why

Part of the fascination of Troeltsch is that he did not confine himself to one area but adopted what we might today call an interdisciplinary approach. This made for a certain complexity which he did not try to avoid but which did make the task of constructing a coherent synthesis very difficult. So while he was engaged with finding meaning in history, or trying to do theology in an age when everything had been historicised, he was also preoccupied with the philosophy of culture. This was part of the historicist tradition to which he was heir. The overriding historical question was: how is the correlation between religion and culture to be explained?(23) He referred to this in the beginning of his "Historiography" article (p.19f above). I now want to pick up this aspect of his historical thought by looking at the way he deals with it in his Protestantism and Progress. It will be useful to set PP in its context, so to speak, by mentioning briefly its antecedents, the point being that Troeltsch's involvement with the idea of culture and civilisation was not an isolated thing but fundamental to and representative of his way of thinking.

As early in 1891, in his thesis Reason and Revelation In Johann Gerhard and Melanchthon (24), which qualified him as a lecturer in Gottingen, his combining of philosophical and historical interests in theological thinking is evident. Troeltsch said that in spite of Luther's rediscovery of the gospel, with everything that followed from that, the thought of the German Lutherans remained essentially mediaeval. The new Protestant churches "found it necessary to continue the apologetic task of relating Christian belief to the philosophical background of the time in constructing a Christian culture."(25) This was continued by the dogmaticians of the sixteenth century and seventeenth century. (26) Christianity/theology has always, necessarily, attempted to relate itself positively to the knowledge of the day, and its culture. However, Troeltsch's argument tended to run counter to the generally held prevailing opinion that the Reformation marked the beginning, or contained the seeds of, the modern age. The great watershed between the mediaeval and modern worlds was not the Reformation but the eighteenth century Enlightenment. "Today we
stand on different ground - 'insofar as we have any ground under our feet at all'." (27)

Troeltsch developed his idea in his *Protestant Christianity and Ecclesiasticism in the Modern Age (1906)* (28). In this he discussed not just the origins of modern civilisation but explained how Protestantism fitted into this. The three main, typical, themes were (a) the recognition of the development of Protestantism, (b) the progressive emancipation of Western civilisation from the church, i.e. the secularisation of Western culture with (c) special attention paid to the relations between Protestantism and civilisation. The same year he presented his ideas to the 9th congress of German historians in a paper entitled "Die Bedeutung des Protestantismus für die Entstehung der modernen Welt." This paper formed the basis for his well known book of the same title. The English translation, based on the second German edition of 1911, was called *Protestantism and Progress*. The subtitle more accurately describes the contents and intent; *A Historical Study of the Relation of Protestantism to the Modern World*. Thus the aim of this chapter/section is to spell out that aspect of Troeltsch's thought which emphasized the cultural matrix of Christianity, and which saw religion as a cultural phenomenon.

(b) The Contents

We can clearly see this by considering the contents of *PP*. Following the consequence of his research in *Revelation and Reason* which saw the Enlightenment as the watershed between the mediaeval and the modern, Troeltsch began *PP* by discussing the "Modern World". Previously European culture had been dominated and permeated by Christianity: it took its rise from the great period of Church-civilisation based on the belief in an absolute and immediate Divine revelation and the embodiment of this revelation in the Church as the organ of redemption and moral discipline (29)... (This was) above all things a civilisation of authority" (30). The modern age though has seen the dethroning, or ignoring, of theology as the objective and authoritative arbiter of ethics and society.

In its place the scientific mode of thought seemed to offer itself as the only alternative to provide objective standards and fixed
points of reference lest things dissolve into subjective caprice. It is not without interest to note that the concepts of individualism and autonomy which are part of the Enlightenment reaction to the authority of a church dominated civilisation, have produced their own reaction(s). However, the more modern politico-economic counter-movement, whether of the right or left, ought not to be identified as being a "Church" reaction. This is not a simple pendulum theory. Troeltsch unhesitatingly points out the weakness of Christianity in the modern world. It is "no longer capable of producing or sustaining a Church-directed civilisation." (31) He goes on to briefly mention other characteristics which militate against this, viz. the phenomenon of giant states; the development of modern capitalism; the growth of applied science; population increase and contact with the non-Christian world; world politics and new social classes which have been created.

It should be noted, especially in the light of a readiness by some to see Troeltsch as capitulating to the modern Weltanschauung and unbelief, that he encourages his readers not "to be deceived by all the hostility to the Churches and to Christianity .. The present-day world does not live by consistency, any more than any other; spiritual forces can exercise a dominant influence even where they are avowedly opposed."(32). Troeltsch's optimism bursts through when he enjoins (a) a wider vision of the modern age, (b) a condition of economic life which opens up new possibilities, (c) the wealth of knowledge that the modern world is heir to, (d) the individualism of the modern world is of much more deeply and strongly rooted metaphysical character (33). But can optimism and a positive attitude add up to a new way of doing theology? Before we answer that question we need to ask, what does Troeltsch mean by Protestantism?

As a German Lutheran Troeltsch was primarily concerned with Protestantism; and after discussing the "Modern World" he goes on to describe "The Meaning of Protestantism" (ch.2) and "Protestantism and the Modern World: Points of Contrast" (ch.3). There are two things in particular that need to be kept in mind. The first is that Troeltsch distinguished between what he called early Protestantism and modern Protestantism. The second, which follows on from the first, is that Troeltsch refused to absolutise any part of the tradition. Both of these are part of his
historical approach. By his refusal to absolutise early Protestantism he ran foul of those conservatives who valued the classical doctrine, ethics and spirituality as a viable option for the modern world. By the same token though we do not find Troeltsch absolutising either modern Protestantism or modern culture. Thus it will not do to label him a nineteenth century liberal Protestant and think that that is all there is to it.

This point should be borne in mind: as mentioned above it is part of the argument of this essay that, as well as setting the agenda for twentieth century theology, Troeltsch's thought also contains the seeds of a critique of it.

By way of comparison his theological opposite, Barth, criticised "culture Protestantism" because it failed to bring the critical edge of the Gospel to play against a civilisation ripe for judgment.\(^{(34)}\) R.J. Palma says of Barth:

> Because of the strength of his own theological position and posture vis-a-vis culture, Barth was free to let various cultural phenomena exist in their own right, and free to let them be. He felt no compulsion, unlike those who could be termed more secular and less Biblical theologians of culture, to exploit cultural products and lay on the latter an interpretation whereby he could confirm his own theological and ideological predilections.\(^{(35)}\)

Leaving to one side the question as to the strength of Barth's theological position and whether he took culture seriously enough, Troeltsch is not to be termed a "more secular and less Biblical theologian of culture." While he insisted on recognising the influence of the cultural matrix of Christianity, he did not identify the two. Rather, what should be recognised is that the interaction is complex. Morgan quotes from \textit{GS} vol.II p.100, indicating what more truly represents Troeltsch's viewpoint:

> the greatness of religion consists precisely in its opposition to culture, in its difference from science and utilitarian social ethics, its proclaiming supramundane and superhuman powers, its unfolding of the imagination and pointing to what lies beyond the world of sense. A religion reconciled with culture is usually nothing but bad science, and superficial morals; it has lost its religious salt.\(^{(36)}\)

Thus we might foreshadow the question which will be asked below of modern social-theology, namely, what part of the tradition or
culture it has absolutised as its fixed point of reference?

As far as these chapters on Protestantism are concerned then, they show not simply a historian, nor even a historian of doctrine, but a historian who was trying to use the insights of sociology. When Troeltsch gave his 1906 lecture he had already come under the influence of the great sociologist Max Weber (37). Prior to this his thinking on the philosophy of history had been influenced by Hegel and Dilthey. He came, however, to see that things were more complicated than what these thinkers made them appear to be. Sociology offered some useful insights and paradigms, and Troeltsch turned his attention to them. He was naturally a "complexifier" and in this he and Weber complemented each other. Neither was simply a specialist: both had a wide range of interests over the whole of civilisation. There are two points in particular where Weber's influence is to be seen in FP.

As a sociologist Weber had proposed that the Christian Church was best thought of as being comprised of three separate types or models. These are (a) the **church type**. This is conservative, accepts the social order and sees itself as being part of it. Thus it seeks to dominate civilisation. (b) The **sect type**. This is characterised by a small group attitude which aims at personal perfection and personal fellowship. In distinction from the church type it emphasises separation from the state: some sects are hostile to the state, others are neutral. We might add the Weber used "sect type" in a neutral way, without the pejorative connotations it often has. To these Troeltsch added a third type, (c) **mysticism**. This might be seen as an extension of the individualism of the sect type. The basic characteristic is an emphasis on direct personal relationship with the divine. It differs from the sect type primarily in its commitment to individualism; whereas the sect type also emphasises commitment to the group. These "types" are to be understood as ideal models: in practice the edges are often blurred.(38)

Troeltsch took over this analysis from Weber, with modifications, and it forms an important part of the framework of his thought. Protestantism, he said, belongs to the church type: and by Protestantism he meant Lutheranism and Calvinism. As far as early Protestantism was concerned it was "in spite of its anti-Catholic doctrine of salvation, entirely a church civilisation like that of
the middle ages. It claims to regulate State and society, science and education, law, commerce and industry, according to the supernatural standpoint of revelation." Since the Enlightenment European civilisation has changed dramatically, and so has modern Protestantism. Since the seventeenth century it has everywhere accepted the principle of the State's recognising religious equality, or even remaining religiously indifferent, and has in principle handed over religious organisation and the formation of religious associations to voluntary effort and personal conviction, recognising in principle the possibility of a plurality of different religious convictions and religious societies existing alongside one another. It has further, in principle, recognised alongside itself a completely untrammeled secular life, which it no longer attempts to control, either directly or indirectly, through the agency of the State. (39)

This is the new situation that modern Protestantism has to come to terms with. It is a 'church type' and thus has the perceived role of being in some way coterminous with the State, or of trying to dominate the State, both of which are of some dubiety given the pluralist nature of modern Western civilisation. Further to this, those things which are part of civilisation - education, health and welfare, both ethical and spiritual - that the church traditionally initiated and maintained, have been taken over by the State. With this "separation of civilisation from the Church, while the civilising functions are retained by the State, there arises the modern idea of the State as the organ of civilisation."(40) In early Protestantism the modern problem of the separation of church and state did not exist.(41) Then it was a case of the church hierarchy giving its directives to civil authority. It was never that simple and clear of course. The history of mediaeval and Reformation times is full of examples of church and state shamelessly manoeuvring for advantage and using each other whenever they could. To put it baldly, the general feeling was that the state needed the blessing, or at least the acquiescence, of the church to substantiate its authority; and the church needed the support of the state if its moral power was going to be effective.

In the modern age, when civilisation is no longer church directed, the theologian's task takes on a different aspect. He still has
to manoeuvre for advantage but the ground is no longer his and different rules are operative. It has always been difficult to explain or bring about an harmonious combination of the spiritual and the secular. In a secular age any modus vivendi must be a tenuous one. And it could be realistically argued that so long as the church absolutised a past section of its tradition it is an impossible one. But if the modern ground can be made a common ground then perhaps a way forward may be found. Troeltsch's positive estimate/approach to modern civilisation should be seen in this light.

In seeking common ground for dialogue theology needs to come out of its ghetto. This poses a number of dilemmas, chief among them being that the church can suddenly find itself as one among many pressure groups. The obvious question poses itself: at the philosophical level, is the end of all this a kind of democratic relativism? Or, at a more practical level, is the church going to wither away as its influence gradually wanes? Troeltsch was under no illusions as to the secular nature of the modern world, nor as to the antipathy shown to Christianity.

With regard to the question of relativism, while it might seem that this was a logical consequence of the rigorous application of the historico-critical method, Troeltsch did not see it in quite this way. As with most things one's presuppositions play an important part, and Troeltsch's programme did not involve a methodological atheism.

His view 'combats historical relativism, which is the consequence of the historical method only within an atheistic or religiously skeptical framework. (It) seeks to overcome this relativism through the conception of history as a disclosure of the divine reason'.

One can see here the influence of Hegel, which Troeltsch happily acknowledged, though adding that the Hegelian doctrine needs to be freed of its metaphysic of the absolute, its dialectic of opposites, and its specifically logical conception of religion.

For Troeltsch the important thing was to take everything into account. Thus while the historical method relativises everything it does not do so in the sense that it eliminates every standard of judgment and necessarily ends in nihilistic scepticism, but rather in
the sense that every historical structure and moment can be understood only in relationship with others and ultimately with the total context, and that standards of values cannot be derived from isolated events but only from an overview of the historical totality. (42)

The historical totality of course involves the future as well as the past and present; thus standards and value judgments must be recognised as provisional.

The other question - that of the demise of Christianity - might also seem to suggest a bleak prospect for the church. However, Troeltsch would not acquiesce in this. There is the conviction that Christianity was not a spent force. In the penultimate chapter, "Protestantism and Economic Organisation, Social Developments, Science and Art", he discusses the influence of Protestantism in those areas of civilisation mentioned in the title. He again shows his indebtedness to Weber in his discussion of the notion of calling, and the relation of Calvinism and capitalism (43). His basic criticism of capitalism is that it has become loosened from its ethical foundation. This is a danger of any economic/social system and it gives an insight into Troeltsch's method. He is not merely describing the complex interaction of religion and culture but also stating that religion has a prescriptive role to play. In referring to social life and social stratification he says that the influence of Protestantism is mainly indirect and unconscious. He adds that this is important for his conception of social theology.

This is not to be wondered at in a movement which is in essence religious, and it is true of Christianity in general. But it is a different matter when we turn to the theoretical and metaphysical conception of society, and of the relation between the community and the individual, organisation and freedom. This is the proper sphere of the social significance of a religious movement, and here there are in fact important influences of Protestantism to be traced. (44)

I think this is a significant pointer as to how we may positively think of Troeltsch. He does not see that the relativism that seems to be the lot of modern civilisation means the replacement of Christianity. There is to be sure the enormous difficulty of constructing a coherent synthesis. Any attempt must face
squarely, as he did, the problems of complexity and paradox. It can hardly be otherwise. One might well look for consistency but full consistency is only to be found in logic. This was Troeltsch's main caveat apropos Hegel: his effort was too rational and not historical enough. Another fault Troeltsch found in Hegel's system was its defective sense of cultural synthesis.

Hegel's vast system .... was oriented in the wrong direction, that is, it pointed from the present towards the past instead of from the present towards the future. In Troeltsch's opinion, a genuine philosophy of history must have what he called a contemporary cultural synthesis (gegenwartige Kultursynthese), whereby 'the strictness, versality, and devotion employed in investigating the past (die Erforschung des Gewesenen) must be combined with handling a future oriented inclination'.(45)

If we are to resist the temptation to absolutise a part of the present or past tradition then such an openness to the future is essential. In the final chapter "Modern Religious Teaching" Troeltsch underlines his attachment to Protestantism. His assumption is that without a metaphysic and an ethic a strong self consistent spirit of civilisation cannot exist. Furthermore, even in modern, secular, Western culture the Christian foundations are still there.
1.3 DER HISTORISMUS UND SEINE PROBLEMEN - the philosophy.

In section 1 of this chapter I discussed the principles that Troeltsch operated with, primarily as he expressed them in his 1911 article "Historiography" and his 1898 essay Über Historische und Dogmatische Methode in der Theologie. Then in section 2 I drew attention to Troeltsch's pioneering work in expounding the formative influence and interaction of the cultural matrix on Christianity, especially as he expressed it in his PP. Now the consequences of his approach thus far would seem to confront him with the problem of -

(a) relativity, which is really the problem of the philosophy of history, and
(b) the provisional character of all historical study.

Troeltsch was not unaware of this and in the two works mentioned in the section subtitle above attempted to overcome these problems.

Historically, and theologically, the context in which Troeltsch's creative work was done was at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. Thus he lived through the heyday and the decline of classical Liberal Protestantism.

Generally speaking, Troeltsch belonged to this tradition: one of his main teachers was the great theologian Albrecht Ritschl. Now the Liberal Protestant tradition adopted and endorsed the critico-historical method of studying the biblical writings which had arisen in the nineteenth century.

Exegesis became more a matter of relating the scriptural sayings to their historical background and less a matter of asking about their truth as revelation. This latter question was left to the dogmatic theologian ... (and) one of the characteristic features of the Liberal Protestant era was the gap which had opened between the biblical exegete and the theologian.(46)

The pressing problem was to overcome this. The main alternatives seemed to be a theology of existence or a theology of the word. Though both really developed after his death it would be difficult to imagine Troeltsch countenancing either. He resolutely stuck to history. Furthermore, one hesitates to suggest that his alternative might be referred to as a theology of history. That expression carries with it too much suggestion of the later
Heilsgeschichte movement with its dogmatic implications, namely, that sacred history is somehow different to profane history to the extent that it is not accessible to critical historical methods.

Troeltsch was happier with the notion of a philosophy of history; though, as we shall see later, there are certain points of convergence with what we might call a (non-dogmatic) theology of history. After he moved to Berlin he continued with his programme of relating theology to historical categories of thought, and he wrestled with the consequences of the historicisation of existence. History is the basic category of Christian thought. It is this fundamental truth that determined his (complex) programme. As a historian and philosopher of history he was "primarily concerned with clarifying the meaning and significance of the methods and conclusions of historical-critical research."(47) (my emphasis) It is important to bear in mind that Troeltsch was concerned not only to overcome (dogmatic) theology with history but also, as he was fond of saying, to "overcome history by history". That is, "one must come to know one’s heritage, accept it, and then shape it into a living possibility in the present and for the future."(48) In what follows I hope to show that the estimates of Troeltsch by Harvey and Macquarrie (see pp.19-21 above) are inadequate.

In carrying out his aim Troeltsch intended to write a two volume study on the nature of history. The first volume dealt with the formal logic of history and was published in 1922 as Der Historismus and seine Probleme: Erstes Buch, Das Logische Problem der Geschichtsphilosophie (see n.11 above). It was later reprinted as vol.III of his GS. In this he examined the nature of history, historiography, and the philosophy of history, and their mutual relationships with one another. The second volume was to be a material philosophy of history, typically involving a cultural synthesis. Unfortunately he died before this part, to be based on lectures he prepared to be delivered in England, of the project could be carried out. H-G. Drescher says that "their German title, Der Historismus und seine Überwindung, is misleading in that it suggests that historicism is overcome."(49) That is true enough, though it should always be borne in mind that Troeltsch did not live to complete this second part of his work. The lectures are really no substitute for what remained to be done and any assessment of Troeltsch should recognise the
incompleteness of his work. Of course, whether he or anyone else could have completed the task, given its complexity, is also an open question. I will therefore concentrate on the former work.

In this he tackles the fundamental question of the nature of history by isolating the central concepts, those of *individuality* and *development*. (50) As mentioned above on page 18 Troeltsch, as a historian belonging to the historicist stream, can be read as reacting in part to the rationalist approach to things which characterised the Enlightenment. This is to be seen especially in his insistence that these two concepts determine the nature of history. By *individual* Troeltsch did not mean simply an individual person. Rather he had in mind units of different sorts which existed in history, and which thus had a unique, individual and unrepeatable character. A unit for example might be a class grouping, a religious community, a nation, even something as comprehensive as Western civilisation. (51) There are two things in particular that this emphasis on individuality means. The first, as has been noted above, is that history is not amenable to a positivist scheme. There have been, and are, historians who wear a positivist label; for instance Bebbington quotes Henry Buckle, the writer of a *History of Civilisation in England* (1857-61), who was convinced that history could be a science on the Newtonian model:

> Whoever is at all acquainted with what has been done during the last two centuries must be aware that every generation demonstrates some events to be regular and predictable, which the preceding generation had declared to be irregular and unpredictable; so that the marked tendency of advancing civilization is to strengthen our belief in the universality of order, or method and of law. (52)

In our own time the positivist approach to history has taken as its model the social sciences which have modelled themselves on the natural sciences. In 1961 E.H. Carr gave the Trevelyan lectures at Cambridge, later published under the title *What is History?* (53) In them Carr argued that history should be understood and studied using sociological methods. G.R. Elton replied in his *The Practice of History*, arguing that the two disciplines are intrinsically different.

> History may fairly concern itself with past social relationships, and the historian may often be well advised to
count heads; but it should always be recognised that, since history must analyse and relate the story of past change and must concern itself with particular people as well as categories, historical studies derived from sociological influence can never be more than a small part of the whole enterprise. (54)

Even though Troeltsch made significant contributions to sociology, and was insistent upon the interaction with and the importance of the cultural matrix for the study of history, he was not a positivist in this latter (E.H. Carr) sense either. One wonders if those "many theologians" that Harvey refers to (see p.20 above) have really read him carefully or understood him.

The second thing we must draw attention to, with regard to individuality, is that the individualities are not so totally unique that the historian has no categories with which to study or compare them. This is where Troeltsch's principle of analogy is significant (see above p.19). The historian can study the events or individuals of the past or present comparing them with similar events or individuals, thus assessing them. The thing to note, however, about the concept of analogy is that it does not involve a one to one relationship but includes the idea of dissimilarity as well.

The other concept, development, has affinities with the general idea of progress that was a characteristic of the nineteenth century. In this Troeltsch was influenced to a degree by Hegel, but with significant differences. By development Troeltsch meant that the individual units in history exist in a state of becoming. They manifest themselves in fluidity, movement, change, process. The characteristic of history is change, but not "necessary" change as in a Hegelian understanding of things. Nor is this change a matter of continuous progress. Ogletree says that "Troeltsch describes the idea of progress as a secularization of Christian eschatology."(55) However, by development Troeltsch meant to point out that the movement and interconnection and fluidity of history included decline and decay as well as growth and expansion.

Now all this would seem to imply a certain insecurity with regard to the meaning and future of theology. I want to suggest though
that there is a positive aspect to all this. Drescher refers to Troeltsch's "generous ability to hold theological thinking widely open, without losing an eye for radical questions and doubts."(56) Could it be that this is the road that theology must now travel? H. Zahrnt quotes F. Overbeck, "The only possible new basis for theology is audacity."(57) It may fairly be doubted that the generation following Troeltsch took up his challenge. Too much seemed at stake (cf again Macquarrie's statement that "when Troeltsch's principles are applied to it, Christianity emerges deprived of certainty in its historical basis, shorn of its supernatural element, and denied any final or absolute character.") To pick up again the phrase "certainty in its historical basis" (cf above p.20) the impression is conveyed that it is Troeltsch's historical method that brings this about, as though another method could provide that certainty. However, this issue involves not simply Troeltsch's historiography but the nature of history itself.

Long before Troeltsch, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing posed the dictum "accidental truths of history can never become the proof of necessary truths of reason": and this dictum might almost be said to have set the agenda for subsequent theology. Lessing is usually regarded as an opponent of Christianity who was mounting a blatant rationalist attack on it. Actually, in his way he felt somewhat kindly towards the Lutheran Church, and felt "qualified to offer it some good advice." This was Lessing's desire in the dispute of the Fragments: "he wanted from the lofty watchtower of the wise man of the Enlightenment, of the true freemason, to give the church, Christianity and Christian theology some good advice."(58) This good advice meant disengaging faith from history and giving it a more certain basis.

The nature of history involves coming to terms with the possibility of a philosophy of history. The philosophy of history is the attempt to find meaning and order in history. At first this might seem to be a reasonable sort of quest which could reasonably expect to attain to positive results. But not necessarily so. However, before we assess the positive perspective we first refer to the negative. The argument for this view runs that meaning usually has to be imported into the material first by way of hermeneutic or presupposition. This may be true enough, but if the hermeneutic or presupposition is one
which suits the nature of the material, then all it is doing is giving us a different and truer perspective than that we would otherwise have, given our proximity to the material. (59) Second, the notion that there is no meaning in history seems to run against our grain. Why is it that we are so constructed as to expect there to be order and meaning? Everything we do is predicated on this: that there ought to be order and meaning in reality corresponding to this expectation we have. Third, even though we cannot/have not/might not be able to read meaning out of history without, so to speak, reading it in first, that might not always be the case. The possibility must always be allowed that one day we will be able to.

However, this possibility must remain a possibility: it is not necessarily so. The fact that so many, sometimes contradictory, philosophies of history have been propounded seems to suggest that one by itself is not possible, that they cancel each other out in some way. Against this objection, however, it can be said again, this is not necessarily so. We are, after all, talking about possibilities. We have not yet got ultimate hindsight, all the evidence is not yet in and assessed. It might just be that all the different philosophies of history turn out to be ultimately complementary, and the whole thing just more complex than we realise. Then again, if one were discovered that ever managed to satisfy all the criteria, something could still happen in the future which would confound things. Thus Drescher's words quoted above (p.36f) would suggest that Troeltsch's approach, far from resulting in a meaningless relativity, is a realistic one; indeed, perhaps more realistic than those of some of his theological colleagues.

But even if our best hope is for a working hypothesis, this is not all loss. Some kind of rational/positivist model would have satisfied the criterion of necessity, and provided certainty and security. But it would have been simply a description of the way that things are and would have prejudiced even more whatever meaning there is in history. For along with the expectation that there ought to be/is meaning in history is the feeling of dissatisfaction with the way that things actually are. (60) This dissatisfaction is a theme perennially explored in literature, theology and philosophy. A rationalist/positivist model also precludes the notion of God acting in history (cf. Deism).
To reject such a model, as Troeltsch certainly did, is to admit the uncertainty factor: and this plays havoc with the notion of a philosophy of history. The whole theological enterprise must come to terms with this, and there have always been critics keen to say why this is so. In our own century in particular a vigorous attack was made on metaphysics and theology, and a great deal of ethics into the bargain, by the logical positivist movement in philosophy. (61) The logical positivists advocated a scientific approach to the problem of knowledge. Their main weapon was the verification principle: any statement had to be verifiable to be meaningful. (62) For too long, they contended, because people had used correct grammar they assumed their statements must mean something. For example, if I say "I spoke to God this morning", what I am saying is grammatically correct. However, if I have to verify it, and by "verification" the logical positivists mean verification according to the way that scientific statements are shown to be true, then I am in trouble. I cannot specify how 'I spoke to God this morning' could be shown to be true. Thus my religious statement is meaningless. Because we use words people have fallen into the trap of assuming that there must be some reality corresponding to them.

The difficulty with logical positivism however is that it not only involves the rejection of religious or metaphysical statements as meaningless, it also involves the rejection of ethical statements. Again, as has been noted, the principle of verification is not itself verifiable.

Earlier, in the nineteenth century, a vigorous protest was voiced by F. Nietzsche against the preoccupation that philosophy had with the scientific way of doing things. Writing on Nietzsche’s philosophy R.J. Hollingdale comments that scientific statements are statements only of fact (or alleged fact) and never judgmental, value and meaning being outside the sphere of science - so that one effect of the substitution of scientific truth for other kinds of truth is to deprive the world of meaning. Science answers the question Why? only as if it mean 'from what cause': when it means 'to what end?' the question Why? now remains unanswered. (63)

In any case what the logical positivists sought for and claimed
was not to be had. Just as it seemed poised to sweep all before it, including the "pseudo questions" of metaphysics and theology into oblivion, certain distinctions were recognised. The leading British exponent A.J. Ayer admitted that we have to distinguish between practical verifiability and verifiability in principle. There were many things which were meaningful but had not been absolutely verified. For example, at the time when Ayer was writing there were no means of knowing whether there were mountains on the other side of the moon. But the question whether or not there were any still made sense. One day means might be devised of finding out.(64)

Then there was the question of scientific laws themselves which, after all, were generalisations. And the rise of modern physics with the uncertainty principle made things more shaky: the clockwork model of science was no longer adequate. In any event as far as historical statements are concerned they simply do not lend themselves to analysis and testing the way that scientific ones do. Different criteria are needed. Ayer preferred though to adopt what he called the "weak" sense of verification. "A Proposition is said to be verifiable, in the strong sense of the term, if, and only if, its truth could be conclusively established in experience. But it is verifiable, in the weak sense, if it is possible for experience to render it probable."(65) This looks suspiciously like the beginning of what has been called "the death of a thousand qualifications".

But if logical positivism was not a resounding success it served a valuable purpose in making theologians, and philosophers, look carefully at the language they used and how they used it. The meaning of statements must be assessed and found to be consistent according to the criteria most suitable for their category.

This is not just a matter of language but hermeneutics, and Troeltsch may be seen as struggling with the same issues that later scholars such as Bultmann, Wittgenstein and Gadamer concerned themselves with. A useful way of getting the modern hermeneutic tradition in focus is to pick up Gadamer's phrase "the two horizons". By it he meant we can no longer talk about understanding an ancient text or tradition as though that was all the interpreter had to do. For the interpreter as well as the text stands in a historical tradition. With the rise of
historical consciousness has come the realisation that the interpreter needs to understand - the notion of verstehen is central - his own historical context as well as that of the text, and to bring about a fusion of the two horizons. This means that the interpreter is less concerned with passing value judgments on his text than with entering into dialogue with it. This idea (of ongoing dialogue with and between present and past traditions) will be a trajectory that runs through this essay. (66)

This also, as it were, keeps things open, for simply to say there is no meaning is to trivialise existence. We might add that this openness makes an objective wertfrei history impossible. (67) It allows the possibility of God acting in history. H. Thielicke puts it thus,

... a closed interpretation of the world is impossible. We are confronted by the openness of venture and by constant surprise ... Faith bears witness here that God cannot be imprisoned in a world view in which everything is easy. We can only believe in him whose thoughts are higher than ours; we cannot put these thoughts into systems. We are thus liberated from all systems. We are not imprisoned in a Christian world view or in Christian ideologies. We are summoned to openness and to ventures of a higher order.

This is why there can be no Christian philosophy of history. God is the Lord of History. He has disclosed his purpose for mankind. This has lead some people to speculate on the possibility of a Christian interpretation of history. A mark of what faith says about history, however, is that it is never about history as a whole, just as a mark of what it says about creation is that it is not about the whole universe. Statements of this kind deal with details rather than the whole. (68)

In the light of this, Troeltsch's programme and methodology can be seen not as failure but as setting the lead for subsequent theology to take up. It did not of course. Following World War I "crisis theology" dominated the theological scene. Today, however, there are indications that Troeltsch's "generous ability to hold theological thinking wide open, without losing an eye for radical questions and doubts," (69) is being much more appreciated.
In particular, Troeltsch's insistence on individuality and development does not have as its corollary a relativism which means the devaluation of all values. Rather the open-endedness which is part of history confronts us with the openness of venture and constant surprise ... The question of theodicy lurks everywhere at all times. The question why God permits this or does that, or whether he exists at all, shows that faith thrusts us out into open country. It challenges the definiteness of constructed principles."(70)

This open-endedness might leave us wondering about predictability and certainty, but perhaps they are not to be had anyway. This does not mean, however, that we cannot expect to find meaning in history; it just means that meaning is not necessarily tied to a deterministic model of existence. It will not do to say that things are simply the way they are, for there always seems to be dissatisfaction with the way things are - a longing for something better. With this belongs the conviction that there is indeed something that corresponds to this longing: that there is meaning, or a purpose, to history. Furthermore, history is not only open-ended but teleological. We have to wait to know this for sure of course, and when the devastating question, "How do you know?" is asked, it must be admitted that there is no final proof. But there is an explanation available, in the form of a working model, or hypothesis. As a working model it has to do with faith.

Faith does not determine meaning but discerns it. It is not a matter of naive assent, nor a bare attitude or Blik. It is a complex thing involving, not least, an interpretative aspect. It arises from "interpreting in a new way what was already before us. It is epistemologically comparable, not to the discovery of a man behind a screen, or of inferred electrons underlying the observed behaviour of matter, but to what Wittgenstein called 'seeing as'."(71) It is this awareness of another level that is necessary to discern, and understand, meaning. One must have a certain "feeling" to apprehend this other level. As with meaning in history there is an elusiveness about it; it is not obvious and it maintains an openness to the future, to when it will become sight. It is no accident that Paul more than once links faith with hope. Above all it has as its referent the living God who is described in verbal rather than substantive terms (cf Exodus 3:14
"I am who I am" or "I will be who I will be."
NOTES


The new historical thinking had, for example, a profound impact on biblical studies. The biblical writings began as never before to be studied as ancient literature which had a cultural and religious milieu, and which purported to tell of historical events, rather than as quarries for theological proof texts. Many conservatives found difficulty adjusting to this new scene. In England in 1866 H.P. Liddon delivered his Bampton lectures, which were published as *The Divinity of Our Lord*, Rivington, London, 1866. O. Chadwick *The Victoria Church* Part II, A. & C. Black, London, 1972, p.75, refers to them as the finest Bamptons of the century. Liddon, aware of the widespread unsettlement of religious belief, saw the problem not as one of what parts of the Bible could be safely jettisoned but one of Christology. All the way through he kept posing the great Either-Or: either you accepted the orthodox formulation of the person and work of Christ or followed the logic of your reasoning ... The work was popular, going through 15 editions and being translated into German. But it was essentially pre-critical. Liddon had read Strauss and Bauer and Renan but spent most of his time reasserting without qualification the doctrinal position of the ancient church.

4. Strauss' classic work is his *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined* recently republished by SCM, London, 1973. In his "Editor's Introduction" pxxix P.C. Hodgson refers to Van Harvey: "Strauss' criteria are 'a common operational assumption of almost all modern critical historiography'." On Strauss see H. Harris, *David Friedrich Strauss and his Theology*, Cambridge University


7. D. Bebbington, Patterns in History, IVP, Leicester, 1979, p.93.

8. Quoted by D. Bebbington Patterns, p.94.


10. N. Lash A Matter of Hope, p.64 refers to historicism "in the sense of a thorough going historical relativism."

11. These ideas are discussed mainly in the following works:
the principles - "Historiography" in Hastings vol. VI, pp.716-723. Troeltsch had discussed the issues that the historical method posed for theology in his 1890 essay Über historische und dogmatische Methode in der Theologie: the text is in GS II, pp.729-753. See M. Pye "Ernst Troeltsch and the end of the problem about 'other' religions", ETTF p.176f. Reference will be limited to Troeltsch's later work.


the philosophy of history - Der Historismus und seine Probleme: Erstes Buch, Das Logische Problem der Geschichtsphilosophie,
Tübingen, J.C.B. Mohr, 1922.


16. V. Harvey, Historian, p.15.

17. W. Pauck Harnack and Troeltsch p.85. The words are Pauck's. cf p.62f "All his thinking was filled with the awareness that the omnipresence in modern cultural life of the sense of history or of the historical consciousness constituted the most important difference from other ages. He therefore became preoccupied with questions about the nature of history and of historical knowledge and their importance for the right understanding of religion and its place in human life."


23. "Troeltsch's historical interpretation and appreciation of the tradition in which he stands presents a clear model of how a theology rooted in critical historical study can proceed. It consists in a constant interaction between the tradition and contemporary experience. The tradition is studied historically and offers models and structures for interpreting
experience; but at the same time is subject to the critical judgement of the autonomous listener." R. Morgan "Introduction", p.25 in Ernst Troeltsch Writings on Theology and Religion, translated and edited by R. Morgan and M. Pye, Duckworth, London, 1977.


25. R. Morgan and M. Pye, ET Writings, p.3.

26. cf W. Pannenberg, Theology and the Philosophy of Science, Darton Longman and Todd, London, 1976, p.404. "The concept of systematic theology came into theology in the seventeenth century." N. Lash, Theology on the Way to Emmaus, SCM, London, 1986, p.14, after referring to Pannenberg says that this "reflects the particular problems and perspectives of the circumstances in which it arose. It is far from obvious that "systematic" usefully describes the way in which it would be best for us, in the late twentieth century, to try to meet certain (perennial) requirements which, three centuries ago, the term may appropriately have named."

27. R. Morgan, ET Writings, p.6.


29. PP p.11.


32. PP, p.38.

33. PP, pp.30-35.


36. R. Morgan, *ET Writings*, p.4. That is a fine statement: it is doubtful though, whether Troeltsch achieved his aim. Morgan goes on to say, "Nevertheless, it is difficult to find in Troeltsch's work a satisfactory explanation of why or how religion can stand out against contemporary fashions or proclaim Christ's judgment. It requires a more real Lord than Troeltsch can offer to say, 'Thus saith the Lord'." In fairness to Troeltsch though, his early death prevented further development and conclusions. And there is the all important fact that it was his method rather than his results which are really significant. If his method(s) involves a certain suspension of judgement, then his way of theologising may well be the lot of theology in a historical age which insists on openness to the future. Till the eschaton perhaps theology must operate on the strength of hypotheses and working models rather than dogmatic axioms.

37. W. Pauck *Harnack and Troeltsch*, pp.69ff describes their friendship and Weber's influence.


41. Though its beginnings may be seen in the Anabaptist and enthusiast movements in the Reformation.

42. R. Morgan *ET Writings*, pp.10-11, quoting from *GS* vol II, pp.737, 747.


44. *PP*, p.149.


49. H. G. Drescher, *EFT*, p.27.

50. Of C. G. Rand, "The Meanings of Historicism in the Writings of Dilthey, Troeltsch and Meinecke", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol 25, 1964, p.507f, "The methodological concepts of a specific historical way of thinking (i.e. historicist) can be summed up as individuality, development, and relatedness. Following in the Rankian tradition Dilthey, Troeltsch, and Meinecke hold these concepts and the principles resulting from them the most pervasive and indispensable in any historical consideration."

Also of H-G. Drescher, *EFT*, p.28f. M. Pye in the same volume says on p.179: "In the section on the 'formal logic of history' he defines the basic category of history to be that of 'the individual complex' (die individuelle Totalität) ... The term Totalität (actually historische Totalitäten) is given in brackets in Troeltsch's article on 'Historiography' in Hastings' *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* (1913), vii, 720b, for the English 'historical aggregates'. Later the article uses the rather hopeless word 'totality'. Troeltsch's meaning can now be easily conveyed by the term 'complex', as one may satisfactorily speak of a complex of facts or events. His precise meaning must in any case be drawn from his argument at length."

51. See T.W. Ogletree, *Christian Faith*, p.22. In n.13 Ogletree says that "Troeltsch points out that the logic of his position pushes him finally to the last frontier: humanity. G.S.111, 72. But under present circumstances we cannot go so far, for the real interconnections of life at this most universal level are still too tenuous and fragmentary. Therefore, the broadest circle which
the historian can properly treat as a unit is Western civilisation. cf. pp.689 and 703ff."

52. D. Bebbington, Patterns, p.87.


54. G. R. Elton, Practice, p.43.


58. K. Barth, Protestant Theology, p.248. Also, on p.26, Barth says that "Lessing gave the Lutheran Church advice from this watchtower of the philosopher of history."

The Fragments (Fragmente eines Unkenannter [Fragments of an Unknown]) were extracts from the work Apology for Rational Worshippers of God by a Hamburg professor of Oriental languages, H.S. Reimarus. Of the relationship between Reimarus and Lessing A. Schweitzer, The Quest for the Historical Jesus, Macmillan, New York, 1968, p.15, says that "(Lessing's) idea of revelation, and his conception of the person of Jesus, were much deeper than those of the Fragmentist. He was a thinker; Reimarus only a historian. But this was the first time that a really historical mind, thoroughly conversant with the sources had undertaken the criticism of the tradition. It was Lessing's greatness that he grasped the significance of this criticism, and felt that it must lead either to the destruction or to the recasting of the idea of revelation. He recognised that the introduction of the historical element would transform and deepen rationalism." (my emphasis.)

59. See C.G. Rand "Meanings of Historicism". This was what Troeltsch tried to do with the principles and methodology he applied to the study of history.

60. W. Pauck Harnack and Troeltsch, p.91 says that "At the end of his life Troeltsch was clearly filled with a certain pessimism. He was not sure whether Western civilisation could still bring
forth creative, reconstructive forces. His mind was filled with
dark forebodings: He feared the outbreak of a new world conflict,
and the behaviour of certain radical nationalist groups in Germany
led him to conclude that possibly Germany might fall victim to a
new barbarism. (cf. his Spektatobriefe). He was greatly
impressed by Oswald Spengler's *Decline of the West.*

61. The two roots of the logical positivist movement were a group
of students and teachers at the University of Vienna, which became
known as the Vienna Circle, and the British empirical tradition.
Many of the Vienna Circle were scientists and were critical of the
Idealism that had established itself as a philosophical orthodoxy
at the German universities.
For an able critique of the logical positivists' attempted
demolition of theology and metaphysics see E.L. Mascall, *Words and

Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1966, p.393 writes: "In general terms
then logical positivism has marched in two different directions
... what has been discarded in both cases is the conception of a
kind of empirical knowledge which is wholly trustworthy, free of
any risk of error. Reichenbach once wrote of Cornap that 'his
theory may be regarded, after a fashion, as a modern fulfilment of
Descartes' quest for an absolutely certain base of science." (my
emphasis).

63. R.J. Hollingdale, *A Nietzsche Reader,* Penguin, Harmondsworth,
1977, p.10. See also, with particular reference to history, R.
"He argues that an 'historical sense' is indispensable for the
philosopher if he is to achieve any real understanding of the
nature and significance of the phenomena whose present structures
are thus described. And an 'historical sense' he considers most
philosophers to have lacked completely ... For Nietzsche, on the
other hand, it is 'becoming' rather than 'being' which ought to be
foremost in the minds of philosophers ... he thus maintains that a
break with the traditional manner of philosophising - which sets
its sights on 'being' and in doing so gave short shrift to
'becoming' - is imperative; and that *historical philosophizing*
is henceforth necessary." cf. pp.85, 373.
Troeltsch said the same thing about theology.

65. *Language, Truth and Logic*, 2nd ed., Gollancz, London, 1946, p.37; quoted by C. Brown *Philosophy*, p.171. E. L. Mascall, *Words and Images*, pp.6-12 offers four damaging criticisms of Ayer's theory as it particularly applies to metaphysical and theological statements. On p.13 he says "that the fundamental criterion of meaningfulness is not sense-verifiability but intelligibility, that is to say that in order to know whether a statement has meaning you should see whether it is possible to understand it."

66. See especially A.C. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons* Paternoster, Exeter, 1980. On pp.69-74 he discusses the role of Troeltsch in modern hermeneutics. It is not irrelevant to point out that Kierkegaard had ventilated the whole question with his famous dictum "Truth is subjective"* Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, p.178. What he meant was that he was not concerned with knowing something, whether it was true or not, but, rather that truth is concerned with my relationship to what is known.


2. WHAT ABSOLUTENESS HAS CHRISTIANITY: 
THE PROBLEM OF OTHER RELIGIONS

2.1 INTRODUCTION

2.2 BACKGROUND

(a) The Religionsgeschichtliche Schule

(b) Harnack

2.3 TROELTSCH'S RESPONSE

(a) Essence

(b) Europeanism

(c) Absolutism
2. WHAT ABSOLUTENESS OF CHRISTIANITY: THE PROBLEM OF OTHER RELIGIONS.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this chapter is to examine another major concern of Troeltsch, namely the status of Christianity vis-a-vis other religions. This has to do with the question of relativity and universality and should not be seen in isolation from the preceding and following chapters, but as being coterminous with them. Any overall discussion of Troeltsch must take this topic into consideration as it was part of his whole programme: his study of this question does not belong to a particular period of his life but was something that he pursued throughout his life. It should be seen as an example of the complexifying nature of Troeltsch's thought. After some introductory remarks the immediate background to Troeltsch's contribution will be referred to, namely, the religionsgeschichtliche Schule and Adolf von Harnack's *Das Wesen des Christentum*. Then will follow a critical discussion of Troeltsch's reaction, with particular reference to his *Die Absolutheit des Christentums und die Religionsgeschichte* (1). This discussion will involve an assessment of Troeltsch in the light of the increasing religious pluralism that is beginning to characterise the society of Western countries that once would have been lumped together as being part of Christendom.

In the beginning of this essay it was said that the study of Troeltsch was of more than academic interest. He himself had an active interest and involvement in politics and society; and his thought has this quality about it too. Today half a century later, the questions he struggled with have assumed a higher and more urgent profile. For example, every clergyman or scripture teacher has had some secondary school student ask the devastating question, "But how do you know?!!" (2) Once upon a time it might have been sufficient to say something like, "Because the Bible says so." or "Because this is what the church has always believed." And that would have more or less closed the discussion. But those dream times have passed. It was Troeltsch's contention that in the modern, post-Enlightenment world the authoritative or dogmatic method was no longer appropriate for theology. This is so not just because society is
more secular than it used to be - see the preceding chapter - but also because it is, religiously, more pluralist.

Here in Victoria the 1973 Russell Report on religious education in government schools addressed itself to this situation, "it advocated major reform of ideas and practices which had prevailed with little change for over a century." (3) No doubt part of the background to such opinions is that of Australia gradually becoming a more multicultural society. More and more migrants are from other than European countries. Not only is their culture and language different but also their religious beliefs. It is an open question whether, if Australia had adhered strictly to some form of the White Australia Policy, the Russell Report might not have been significantly different.

However, things being what they are, in such a situation, the question poses itself, "how can Christianity speak with an authoritative voice? And what of its claim to normativity and universality?" Christianity no longer has the stage to itself. It never had of course. It is just that in the past, particularly with the western domination of the world, the need to dialogue with, rather than evangelise, other races with their religions did not seem to be important. Things are somewhat different now. Since the nineteenth century there has come a new global awareness, non-western races and religions have become more visible. This has reasserted the need for Christian theology to ask questions of itself and to listen to the questions that other religions, and secular disciplines, put to it. This new situation has not gone unrecognised by the mainline churches. For example in 1984/5 the Anglican Archbishop of Melbourne, Dr. David Penman appointed a Commission of Review into the Multicultural Ministry and Mission of the Diocese of Melbourne.(4)

It is hard to see how theology in a "western" country such as Australia can avoid facing the questions posed by multiculturalism and its attendant religious pluralism if it is going to escape the charge of having a ghetto mentality. The dogmatic method which formerly characterised the theological enterprise is obviously unsuited to this new situation. N. Lash, referring to the Christian encounter with Marxism, pertinently remarks,

The apologist sets out to teach rather than learn, to prove or refute rather than to enquire, to give rather than to
receive. Academic theology, on the other hand, as I understand it, is — or should be — fundamentally interrogative in character ... It is not the theologian's business to tell other people what, or how, to believe. His responsibilities are critical, interpretive or clarificatory, rather than declaratory. And theological discourse is never more threatened than when corrupted by its own misconceived autonomy. It follows that a theology whose basic mood has shifted, under pressure from apologetic concerns, from enquiry to assertion, is exposed to the dangerous illusion ... that it possesses the truth.(5)

At the end of the nineteenth century and beginning the the twentieth century a number of biblical scholars addressed themselves to the problem of other religions, with particular reference to the milieu which formed the context of the Old Testament and the New Testament (see below). And in the twentieth century there has been an ongoing debate as the missiologists struggled with the problem.(6) Now the time has come for the theologians to cast their nets wider. And it is with reference to this that Troeltsch is being referred to with a new respect. It might be said that in a way he spoke with a prophetic voice. It was not only his important work in relating theology to history and culture that is of relevance, but also adding the complicating factor of other religions. This factor gives added urgency for the Church to come to grips with social theology.

Lash's words, quoted above, echo the concern and programme of Troeltsch. Theology has always been faced with the task of relating to contemporary thought forms; and it is the contention of this essay that it is Troeltsch's methodology, not the conclusions he reached or is supposed to have reached, that has paradigmatic significance for theology today. In the previous chapter we looked at history and underlined the relativism and openness to history that are part and parcel of the provisional character of history. The same might be said of the study of the history of religions; and the charge was levelled at Troeltsch that he had sold the side out. However, to pick up a thread which runs through this essay, that most certainly was not his intention, and, I think, it is premature to say that it was the corollary of his methodology. Troeltsch's revered teacher Wilhelm Dilthey asked, "Where are the means of overcoming the anarchy of
convictions which threatens to set it?' Some twelve years later
in the Auditorium Maximum at Berlin University Troeltsch began his
inaugural lecture as Professor of Philosophy and Civilisation with
the words, 'I have come here to put an end to the anarchy of
values.'(7) These words were said with more specific reference
to the problem of historicism, but they are equally applicable to
the religionsgeschichtliche Schule. It is to this that we now
turn.
2.2 BACKGROUND

(a) The Religionsgeschichtliche Schule.

The history of religions (German Religionsgeschichte) is a non-
normative, non-theological approach to the study of religion. It
uses comparative and phenomenological methods and is sometimes
referred to as the scientific study of religions, or comparative
religion. It originated in the latter part of the nineteenth
century in Europe and has become especially influential and
significant in religious studies in the latter part of the
twentieth century. The different names may be used
interchangeably and quite freely without confusion. The fact that
defining the method and giving it a title may be quite
straightforward, however, does not mean that there are no
problems. The unstated claim may be made that this method is
somehow objective and therefore, presumably, of more validity, if
not verifiability, than a theological or normative approach to the
study of religion. This comes out especially if the title
comparative religion is used.

The name implies that the scholar 'compares', that is to say
that he constructs for the religions a hierarchical scale,
according to their content and truth-value, from 'lower' to
'higher' and even 'highest' (Hochstreligionen) religions.
Various scales have been proposed. This activity, however,
necessarily implies that one has a criterion, a standard of
reference by which one is able to grade and compare. Where
does this come from? On what grounds is this held to be the
ture criterion?(8)

This problem, and it is a basic one, is something that Troeltsch
wrestled with. I merely introduce it here; I will pick it up
later.

In Troeltsch's lifetime, which coincided with the rise and
development of the history of religions approach, there were a
number of outstanding scholars who produced some brilliant studies
on the relation of the Old Testament and New Testament to their
respective cultural and religious environments, and interpreted
them in the light of these environments. This was of a piece with
the nineteenth century emphasis on history and the revolution in
historiography which was referred to in the previous chapter. The
aim was to explain the origin and content of Christianity in purely historical terms which, of course, meant in non-theological and non-normative terms. These biblical scholars formed what came to be called the religio\ngeschichtliche Schule. Their endeavour was an entirely appropriate one, given that both Old Testament and New Testament purport to relate the saving acts of God in history. However, there was a great stir and much disquiet. It seemed to many that the similarities that the biblical events shared with their environment were emphasised at the expense of their uniqueness: history dissolved theology, revelation was denied, and the message of Christianity was compromised.

Troeltsch had early become convinced of the importance of history and his association with some of the main representatives of the religio\ngeschichtliche Schule confirmed him in this. One of his closest friends was the New Testament scholar Wilhelm Bousset; they were students together at Erlangen and then instructors at Gottingen. Bousset was to become one of the leading religio\ngeschichtliche interpreters of the New Testament. For example, in his *Kyrios Christos* he recounted the history of faith in Christ from the beginning of Christianity to Irenaeus.

For the account of the origin and development of Christian piety given in this book he expressly 'removes from operation ... of the double barrier', that is, 1. 'the barrier of separation between ... the theology of the New Testament and the history of the dogma of the ancient church' and 2. 'the barrier of separation between the history of the religion of early Christianity and the general development of the religious life that surrounds Christianity in the first bloom of its youth.' Bousset therefore consistently avoids any discussion of the New Testament canon and of the presupposition of the uniqueness of the New Testament message.(9)

Also at Gottingen were William Wrede, Herman Gunkel, Albert Eichhorn, and later Johannes Weiss, Wilhelm Heitmüller and Paul Wernle. These all made their mark, the biblical scholars among them as historians of religion, and referred to themselves as "Die kleine Gottingen Fakultät."(10) Most of all it was the influence of the Orientalist Paul de Lagarde who taught Troeltsch and his friends "to see Christianity in the context of the history of religion and [...] demanded that strict historical and philological
methods be employed in the interpretation of religious texts."(11)
Of those mentioned Troeltsch alone was engaged in systematic
theology, though his main interest was, increasingly, in
intellectual and cultural history. Indeed he became known as the
systematic theologian of the religionsgeschichtliche Schule. Of
it he said,

The movement signifies, in general, simply the recognition of
the universally accepted scientific conclusion that human
religion exists only in manifold religious cults which
develop in very complex relations of mutual contact and
influence, and that in this religious development it is
impossible to make the older dogmatic distinction between a
natural and a supernatural revelation.(12)

As mentioned above, this interest was not a passing one for
Troeltsch. From his earliest days in academia it was a dominating
interest and fundamental theme that runs through his whole
programme. His major work on the subject, AC was first published
in 1902; and in his last, posthumous, work Der
Historismus und seine Überwindung 1923 he was still struggling
with the problem. In between there were a number of significant
publications on the theme. The reason for this is that for
Troeltsch history was nothing less than Weltgeschichte, and the
religionsgeschichtliche Schule simply added a further dimension to
the problem that history posed for theology. We saw in the
previous chapter how Troeltsch's historical studies alerted him to
the fact of cultural (and historical) pluralism; his being part of
die kleine Fakultät at Göttingen led him to struggle with the
problem of religious pluralism. I noted above (p.9) Diem's
statement that "Troeltsch marked a terminal point in the history
of theology from which there could be no further progress in the
same line of development." The question this chapter will seek to
answer is whether we need to read such a statement in a negative
way and conclude with B.A. Reist that Troeltsch's theology must
necessarily end in collapse.(13) However, before we address
ourselves to what Troeltsch said, it is appropriate to refer to
Harnack's Das Wesen des Christentum, as it was this which provoked
Troeltsch's most important statement on the subject.
In 1900 the great historian of dogma Adolf von Harnack published his *Das Wesen des Christentum* - "The Essence of Christianity". The English translation, 1901, was given the title *What is Christianity?* I will refer to the German title as it more accurately indicates the concern of Harnack, and Troeltsch, and this chapter. The book proved to be enormously popular. S. Neill relates how Paul Tillich described how, "immediately on their publication, the railway station at Leipzig was crowded with immense consignments of the books about to be dispatched to every corner of the civilized world. By 1927 the volume had already been through fourteen printings, and had been translated into as many languages."(14) It is perhaps not irrelevant to note that Harnack, like Troeltsch, took a prominent part in public life and was intensely concerned with the relationship between the Gospel and the culture of the times.(15)

In *Das Wesen*, as the title indicates, Harnack tried to get at the original deposit or essence of the gospel, in the light of historical rather than theological (dogmatic) thinking. Indeed Troeltsch regarded it as representative of all theological work based on historical thinking.(16) The gospel, said Harnack, was not a matter of intellectual doctrine but a living reality, namely the person of Jesus Christ. The gospel was the gospel of Jesus not the gospel about him. It embraced three themes, each being "of such a nature as to contain the whole. Firstly, the kingdom of God and its coming. Secondly, God the Father and the infinite value of the human soul. Thirdly, the higher righteousness and the commandment of love."(17)

Harnack's aim was to replace theological dogmatism by historical understanding. Dogmatic Christianity, he said, was a product of the "Hellenisation" or intellectualising of the primitive faith. It was "the mark of the Greek spirit on the soil of the gospel." This was not necessarily a bad thing, indeed it was a perfectly understandable thing as Christianity moved out of its Palestinian provenance into the wider Graeco-Roman world. Inevitably it had to accommodate itself to and express itself in the prevailing patterns of thought. This was not something unique to the period of the early church: ever since there has always been an effort
in accommodation going on in every age. The nineteenth century was no different: though now it was the philosophy of history which theology had to contend with. Harnack was more aware of this than most. His concern for history and the interpretation of Christianity in terms of its historical development is evident in his major works such as The History of Dogma (1886-89). Furthermore, it was incumbent upon each Christian to be historically responsible in being aware of his heritage. Livingston quotes from Harnack's essay "Über die Sicherheit und Grenzen geschichtter Erkenntnis."

We study history in order to intervene in the course of history and we have a right and a duty to do so: for without historical insight we either permit ourselves to be mere objects put in the historical process or we shall have the tendency to lead people down the wrong way. To intervene in history - this means that we must reject the past when it reaches into the present only in order to block us ... There is no doubt that, with respect to the past, the historian assumes the royal function of a judge, for in order to decide what of the past shall continue to be in effect and what must be done away with or transformed, the historian must judge like a king. Everything must be designed to furnish a preparation for the future, for only the discipline of learning has a right to exist which lays the foundation for what is to be.(18)

This is the key to everything - history has laid a new foundation. Thus nothing less than a total reconstruction of theology was necessary. There are two ways of reading this phenomenon. At one level it is the accommodation to different culture and thought patterns. At another it is, as N. Lash remarked referring to B. Lonergan, part of "that unquenchable intellectual curiosity, that 'pure ... desire simply to know', which has been one of the hallmarks of Western consciousness."(19) I think both of these should be kept in mind, not least when we engage with Troeltsch's thought. It is not just a matter of accommodation to different thought forms, there is also struggle to attain to a greater understanding. This is part of the dialogical nature of theology.
2.3 TROELTSCH'S RESPONSE

Troeltsch had three options open to him. He could opt for what we might call an exclusive model. Such a model would be taken up with preserving the uniqueness and normativity of Christianity and would of course be based on a theological or dogmatic methodology. However, as far as Troeltsch was concerned this approach had no relevance in the modern world: he preferred a dialectic or dialogical approach to an assertive one. An inclusive model on the other hand would recognise other religions in an ecumenical way, and would certainly be more amenable to a dialectic approach. Such a model though would compromise the uniqueness/normativity of Christianity, dispense with the need of faith, and spell the death of both theology and Christian missionary endeavour as traditionally understood. Troeltsch has been accused of acquiescing in this. Then again an alternative model might somehow manage to combine both and thus avoid the impasse.

I think it is truer to say that Troeltsch was struggling with the possibility of an alternative model rather than the inclusive one. Whether in fact he managed to avoid the impasse without ending up with an inclusive model is what this chapter seeks to answer. At the same time the question will be asked whether an alternative model is a viable, if not verifiable, alternative anyway. This was important for Troeltsch, and not just from an intellectual point of view. He was at the same time a sceptic and a believer. As a historian his aim was to be objective and impartial, at the same time as a Christian, he wanted to contribute to the task of apologetics in his own day. This could only be done by facing squarely the questions and implications that the Enlightenment posed for Christian theology. cf n.8 in the INTRODUCTION. This created a tension which he was still working to resolve at the time of his early death in 1923. He was not lacking critics either during his life or after.

He admitted further that his later work might give rise to the complaint that his interests had shifted from Christian theology to general culture; but the validity of this objection depended, he felt, on one's conceptions of the range of responsibilities implicit in the task of Christian theology. (20)
This sentence of S. Sykes sums Troeltsch up well. No matter what criticisms we might wish to level at him, a reading of AC makes it plain that he was not an infidel but a sensitive soul who did not regard his faith as an easy option. For example:

The fragmentariness and incompleteness of our knowledge, even today, make it plain that those new relationships too will have to be understood in terms of their historical limitations. In all this, he will simply live out of God's resources and in the presence of God, leading in his own way the life bestowed on us by Jesus and for which Jesus' struggle and victory constantly give us new strength and courage.

On the other hand, such a man will not seek to buttress this faith in such a way as to establish an impassable gulf between it and all other faiths or to deny the salvation that others have received. He will, however, feel constrained to lead others to the higher clarity of the salvation he knows. Again, he will not seek to filter out of the history of Christianity a finished and permanent principle of religion. Instead, he will rely upon the guiding hand of God, who leads us historically within history, and will leave to Jesus the disclosure and consummation of the salvation of the future.(21)

What then did Troeltsch have to say about the history of religions? It is worthwhile pointing out that his response to the problem of religious pluralism was not a single one. As well as AC the following significant writings indicate the importance the problem had for him, and for how long: The Essence of Religion and the Science of Religion (1906); Half a Century of Theology (1909); The Significance of the Historical Jesus for Faith (1911); The Religious Principle (1913); The Dogmatics of the Religionsgeschichtliche Schule (1913); Christian Thought: Its History and Application (1923). In what follows I will discuss three of the leading ideas that shaped Troeltsch's thinking on the Religionsgeschichte with special reference as to their suitability in forming an alternative model: these are Essence, Europeanism, and Absolutism.
(a) Essence

It is noticeable that the works mentioned in the previous paragraph come from the period after *Das Wesen*, but Troeltsch had already ventilated the problem some years before. In 1894 he wrote an essay "Die Christliche Weltanschauung und ihre Gegenströmungen" in which he referred a number of times to the "essence" "kernel", or "fundamental idea" of Christianity. The context of these references was that of the continuity of the Christian *Weltanschauung* in the post-Enlightenment world, and thus the difficulty of demonstrating the truth and uniqueness of Christianity. It is worth pointing out two things in particular with regard to the attempt to discern and state what the essence of Christianity is. First, the discussion did not originate with Troeltsch or Harnack. At the beginning of the nineteenth century Schleiermacher made it one of his central themes. But the problem was around and discussed even before 1800. Second, it is not simply an interesting side issue. Sykes pertinently comments "that some idea of Christianity's essence is a necessary part of the constructive theologian's intellectual equipment."(23)

It is not surprising then that there should be a certain variety. An analogy might be drawn with the efforts of the biblical theologians. Intense, critical, work has been done on both Old and New Testaments for a couple of centuries now, and a number of notable "Theologies" have been written on both, each seeking in effect to group the material around a "leading idea" or small group of ideas. And the work still goes on. However, it would be a presumptuous biblical scholar who would entitle his book *The Theology of the Old/New Testament.* Harnack's book, particularly if we think of it in terms of the title given to the English translation, made Troeltsch address the problem with greater urgency. He wrote *AC* in 1902, and the following year a six part article in *Die Christliche Welt*: "Was Heisst 'Wesen des Christentums'?" (What Does Essence of Christianity Mean?) In the latter work he began by referring to the variety of standpoints from which *Das Wesen* was attacked or commended. His aim was to investigate the presuppositions involved in trying to determine the essence of Christianity.

Troeltsch agreed with Harnack's basic contention that the gospel must free itself from outmoded dogmas and come to terms with the
new historical way of seeing things if it was going to have credibility in the modern world. However, he criticised him for not going far enough. It was all very well to try and get back behind the dogmatic accretions that overlay the gospel, but what does "the essence of Christianity" mean? And where do we get it from? From the Apostolic period? or is it to be inferred or abstracted from all periods of Christian history? Troeltsch observed that the quest in its modern form had arisen with the labours of modern historiography. German idealists had assumed the habit of surveying an historical phenomenon in its totality and of attempting by abstraction to grasp its driving idea (triebende Idee)."(25) The implication of this is that there is some kind of basic idea which finds expression in history as a single law of development (Entwicklungsgesetz). This notion might be amenable to a Hegelian or a Catholic, but Troeltsch was too much a philosopher of history and a Protestant to feel that either of these alternatives fitted the facts.

In the AC he highlights the presuppositions of the "essence" approach.

The basic ideas of this interpretation are clear. First, it subordinates history to the concept of a universal principle which represents a uniform, homogeneous, law-structured, and self-actuating power that brings forth individual instances of itself. Second, it elevates this concept of a universal principle to that of a norm and ideal representing what is of permanent value in all events. Third, it binds these two concepts together by means of a theory of evolutionary development. This implies, as the fourth basic idea, both a perfect congruity between the results of the law-regulated causal process as brought forth in accordance with the concept of the universal principle and the successive creation of value as produced in accordance with the concept of absolute realisation.(26)

It is worthwhile mentioning in passing that this approach is apt to use its "essence" or triebende Idee as a kind of Procrustean bed and thus be somewhat critical of Christianity as an empirical phenomenon.

Troeltsch referred to Das Wesen as an example of "evolutionary apologetic" which stemmed ultimately from Hegel. He quotes from Das Wesen: "It is evident then that the gospel is not a positive
religion like the others, that it has nothing legalistic or particularistic about it, that it is therefore religion itself." (Harnack's emphasis); and from his Die Aufgabe der theologischen Fakultäten und die allegemeine Religionsgeschichte (The Task of Theological Faculties and the General History of Religions), "One concerns himself with religion universally if he concerns himself with Christianity."(27) The trouble with this approach is that one misses the particulars. In just about any discipline, including history, generalisations of one kind or another are made, but history is made up of particulars. Thus Troeltsch's criticism:

The modern idea of history knows of no universal principle on the basis of which the content and sequence of events might be deduced. It knows only concrete individual phenomena, always conditioned by their context and yet, at bottom, underivable and simply existent phenomena. For this reason the modern understanding of history knows no values or norms that coincide with actual universals.(28)

Consequently Christianity must be seen as being somewhat less than amenable to the attempt to reduce it to a simple idea, or to a universally valid system of ideas. Long before Troeltsch Kierkegaard wrote his famous proposition. "Christianity is the absurd, held fast in the passion of the infinite."(29) The key word is absurd; and by this he did not mean that Christianity was something silly. In mathematics a surd is "that which cannot be fitted into the pattern." Thus, in a similar way, Christianity is that which cannot be reduced to rule, the exception, the individual, the irreducible.

Troeltsch's dissension from Harnack can be further clarified if we remember the distinction he made between the nomothetic and the ideographic sciences. The methodology of the former is that of "generalising" and the latter that of "individualising". He took over and further developed this distinction from the neo-Kantian philosophers Wilhelm Windelband and Heinrich Rickert. Moreover, J.L. Adams points out,

Troeltsch favoured a meroscopic instead of a holoscopic approach ... The holoscopic outlook, as with Plato, Hegel, and the naturalists, attempts to bring everything under a unitary perspective. The meroscopic outlook, as with Aristotle, Kant and Troeltsch, presupposes that different
spheres of reality should be described by quite different types of concept. Referring to both naturalism and Hegelian idealism, Troeltsch says that 'monism remains an empty ideal'.

Of course the macroscopic approach cannot deal with the question of verification or value judgments. The point that Troeltsch was making was that the approach or methodology used must be appropriate to the subject matter.

If then a question mark is put over the attempt to find the essence of Christianity, or the essence of religion in Christianity, how much more complex will the task be if other religions are brought into consideration? I mentioned above that the question of essence was not merely an interesting side issue for Christian theology; as far as the history of religions is concerned it is absolutely crucial. For the practitioners of Religionsgeschichte, unless they take a strictly phenomenological approach, work from the presupposition of an essence or a reality that is common to all religions. Furthermore, indeed by definition, this essence or reality is somehow normative and determinative for what is true. The trouble is, while there are undoubtedly certain things that different religions have in common, even allowing for differences in form, the diversities and differences in the perceived fundamental ideas of each one are such that an "ecumenical" approach is rendered suspect. This has nothing to do with mutual respect and charity: it is a recognition of the way that things are. Religions make certain claims about the truth of their beliefs and they cannot all be right. S. Neill pertinently remarked, referring to the Hindu propensity for syncretism, that truth must involve some exclusions.

Furthermore Troeltsch points out, our knowledge of the history of religions is indeed incomplete, but at least with regard to the principle phenomena it is now so firmly established that it is no longer possible to formulate the concept of a universal principle or essence of religion in such a way as to make it include both a normative principle and the necessity for a graduated manifestation of this realised normative principle.

W. R. Ward quotes Max Scheler's judgment on the ST - "the sociology of resignation." We will address ourselves to
the appropriateness of that remark in the next chapter: for the moment though we might paraphrase it as "the resignation of the Religionsgeschichte". I am not convinced however that we do full justice to Troeltsch's effort if we refer to it in terms of resignation, or, inconclusiveness. Certainly he did not complete the job; but such a judgment is only appropriate if we talk in terms of a result that is hard and fast, and is therefore somehow normative. Troeltsch did not lock himself into this way of thinking. This is to be seen for example in the words quoted in n.32.

For the inclusivist trades in certainties as much as does the exclusivist. The difference is that his certainties involve the value of universal ideas, to the depreciation of history, rather than a normative revelation. This was/is a marked tendency in liberal Christianity. S. Neill quotes C.C.J. Webb at length for the latter, opposite, point of view.

So far as by 'historical element in religion' we mean the element of sacred history, a belief in which forms an important element in some religions, it is a mark of high development in a religion to emphasise this element. For in the recognition of such a sacred history religion comes to recognise itself as the most concrete and individual form of human experience, concerned not with mere abstract universals, but with concrete individuals, those and no others, in which, and not elsewhere, the universals with which we have to do are, as a matter of fact, particularised, and apart from which they possess no actual reality. A religion which involves as part of its essence a sacred history is, in this way, at a higher level than one which, while setting forth certain universal principles, moral or metaphysical, is ready to symbolize them by anything that comes to hand as it were, and is comparatively indifferent to the particular symbol chosen. Thus a religion which, having developed a theology, regards the narratives which are associated with it as mere illustrative stories, ranks below one which regards them as the actual forms which the universal principles have taken and could not but have taken in a world wherein reason is throughout immanent, and all must be rationally necessary, although we cannot always see into the necessity.(34)
History is no place for certainties and Troeltsch was too much a historian and philosopher of history to be seduced by the promise of certainty held out by an inclusivist model.

But what sort of a foundation would an alternative model present? Would it transcend the impasse caused by the variety of religions? And what form would it take? Here we must repeat what was said earlier, namely, that it is Troeltsch's method that is of importance rather than his results. This is emphasised by him in his article "The Dogmatics of the Religionsgeschichtliche Schule". He pointed out that though he was regarded as the systematic theologian of the movement certain things should be borne in mind when talking of a dogmatics working with presuppositions and ideals of this school .... (indeed the movement does not) rest upon any simple and unitary foundation so that a 'school' might properly be said to be built upon this foundation. The movement signifies, in general, simply the recognition of the universally accepted scientific conclusion that human religion exists only in manifold specific religious cults which develop in very complex relations of mutual context and influence, and that in this religious development it is impossible to make the older dogmatic distinction between a natural and a supernatural revelation ... We cannot, then, speak of a religionsgeschichtliche Schule but only of a religionsgeschichtliche method which is more or less radically employed."

The recognition of the diversity of religions and the difficulty of defining a common essence did not mean that Troeltsch abandoned the idea of a unifying factor. It was here that his work in the psychology of religion proved to be of value. The real problem is not so much that there are different religions as that man seems to be inherently, and incurably, religious. Why is this so? And of what significance is it? Troeltsch found in this fact of human existence what he called the religious à priori. By this he meant an immediate, unconditioned, apprehension of the transcendent or the metaphysical. Of Kant's ethical a priori is the ethical as an autonomous realm is disclosed to us in an a priori way. After Troeltsch Rudolf Otto was to develop a similar conception, "the idea of the Holy". And before Troeltsch, Schleiermacher spoke of religious awareness or feeling as being fundamental. Troeltsch
criticised Schleiermacher's effort though as being "hampered by the retention of the ecclesiastical tradition and so the outcome of his effort was a travesty in the shape of an ecclesiastical, biblical dogmatics."(36)

However, fundamental to Troeltsch's thought and method was the complexity and interrelatedness of everything, including the religious a priori. It did not function simply within the Innerlichkeit of the relation between the individual and the divine. It comes to play in 'a world of historical struggle and becoming ...' Increasingly, Troeltsch became aware of the fact that the individuality of history can impinge upon the normative sciences, and particularly upon the functioning of the religious a priori.

Thus his recognition of the religions a priori does not function in quite the same way as the idea of essence did for other scholars.

Moral and religious ideas may be unconditionally necessary, but their content is dependent upon the actual, historical conditions of human life. In the light of Troeltsch's recognition of all these conditioning contingencies, it is not surprising that the concept of the religious a priori does not appear in his later writings.(37)

If we think in terms of verifying or validating Christianity, or religion, then the idea of the religious a priori falls short of the mark; even if we insist, with Troeltsch, of the inner necessity and obligatory force of this way of thinking. But the issue does not stop there: I think we can say more, and, in a way, rehabilitate Troeltsch's notion, by referring to the word **model** which I used above to describe the options open to Troeltsch. By **model** I mean something that is not univocal but something which has the nature of a symbol. Now a symbol is not a univocal thing which conveys a uniform interpretation to everyone. However desirable that might be, the danger is that an unambiguous sign will become identified with the thing signified and thus become a form of totalitarianism. By contrast, a symbol stands for a certain openness, it allows for future possibilities and indeed the hope of gaining a fuller understanding of reality.

As with his approach to history, Troeltsch's approach to the
question of other religions was not an exercise in reductionism and inconclusiveness but a recognition of the way things are and of freeing theology for new possibilities, of gaining new horizons. Troeltsch was committed to the new method and was prepared to follow it where it led, but he stopped short of scepticism.

(b) Europeanism

The great contribution of the religionsgeschichtliche Schule was to recognise and begin investigation of the often formative influence of other religious traditions in the Ancient Near East or Israel and the birth of Christianity. Biblical studies have never been the same since: for example, much ink has been split on determining just where and how much Hellenistic or Jewish influence there is in the New Testament writings.(38) The interesting thing to observe in this exercise is that, frequently, the underlying presupposition is that somehow the presence/influence of Jewish thought is more original; whereas Greek language, and thought, meant an innovation that was something of a departure from the norm. The last word is important. We all, consciously or unconsciously, necessarily work from some kind of norm. Accordingly, the discussion which follows in this section is grouped under three sub headings: No Norm; The Old Norm; The New Norm – impasse or alternative?

No Norm

In his important work The Semantics of Biblical Language(39) James Barr pointed out the difficulties of using the Hebrew-Greek contrast. There is great value, and it is a necessary exercise, in differentiating the Greek and Hebrew elements in the New Testament and the latter books of the Old Testament. It is worthy of note, however, that for most of their history the Jews had to struggle not against Hellenism, but against the Baalism and other gods worshipped by those who were just as "semitic" as themselves. As far as the New Testament is concerned, it was written in Greek, and when it quotes from the Old Testament it invariably does so from the LXX. The point of all this is to recognise that change and development and, indeed, though it must be said cautiously, a certain syncretism are part of the Judaeo-Christian tradition. If a tradition is so fixed that no innovation is permitted then no
conversation can take place with other traditions, and the sovereign freedom of God is limited.

Now some of the *religionsgeschichtliche Schule* (see above n.11 on de Lagarde) recognised this and investigated the Bible in an "uncanonical" way. This would seem to be a logical thing to do; and it is equally understandable why they met with opposition and censure from more conservative scholars. It is all very well to be "open" but does this not necessarily result in what J.B. Cobb referred to as "debilitating relativism"?(40) Troeltsch was not a biblical scholar but as he was committed to the *religionsgeschichtliche* method one would expect him to follow suit in his investigation of Christianity. And to a degree he did. However, in spite of the charges of relativism that have been levelled against him, he did not feel that the use of the *religionsgeschichtliche* method necessarily meant that one must end up with a situation in which everything was relative. In doing justice to Troeltsch we must recognise that "openness" does not necessarily imply the adoption of a "no norm" paradigm. Before we pursue this further it will be convenient to refer to what we might call the dogmatic alternative, namely The Old Norm.

**The Old Norm**

Before the nineteenth century there was a certain dominance of Western European political and economic and cultural hegemony. World history was more or less European history, and when it covered those parts of the globe that were not European it was usually in terms of European colonisation or political hegemony. The same went for the religious understanding of things. Because Christianity was so much a part of European history and culture it shared in this dominance. S. Neill interestingly describes the effect that the power and wealth of the West had on the young Bengali Swami Vivekananda at the Parliament of Religions in 1893 in Chicago. He, Neill, traces the myth of the supposed dichotomy between the spiritual East and the materialistic West to Vivekananda’s propaganda.(41)

Because of this dominance, and ignorance, the usual thing was to divide the religions of the world into two categories, "them" and "us". It was a case of Christianity and the "other" religions, as though they all fell into a single category. With increased ease of travel and communication in and since the nineteenth century,
together with claims of comparative religion and departments of religious studies in universities, there has come a greater knowledge and appreciation of non-Christian religious traditions; and they are studied in the light of their own history and culture. This is not always the case as far as theology is concerned: not infrequently the "them and us" syndrome prevails and non-Christian religions are studied as a topic subservient to dogmatics. The reason for this is that the dogmatic method begins with a given norm. The missiologists have long recognised the problem and struggled with the issues. "Yet there has also been a new blanket appraisal of 'other' religions from the standpoint of 'neo-orthodoxy'; and in many other ways the old model of a ready made Christian dogmatics confronted with an appendix problem about 'other' religions still lives on."(42)

The New Norm: Impasse or Alternative

The choice would seem to be an either/or one between unbridled relativism or dogmatics. Troeltsch does not neatly fit into either category. There is in his thought an idea, which at first seems to be rather curious, and a retrogression, given his programme and method: this is his Europeanism. He does not treat all religions equally, and I will refer to this more in the next section on Absoluteness, but refers to them from the standpoint of Western European (Christian) superiority. His concentration on the European tradition seems to suggest a variation of the old "them and us" way of thinking. For example, consider his striking sentence, "For us there is only a world history of Europeanism." (43) This seems to smack of the cultural and religious superiority and arrogance that he otherwise distanced himself from. But, I think, more must be said, if not to justify Troeltsch fully then at least to explain him better.

We must first note that he did not think that a universal history of the world could be written. It was just too big and complex a task. Furthermore, the non-European world is not really knowable to the European mind, and "Humanity as a whole has no spiritual unity and therefore no unified development."(44) It was because of his historicism and his historian's recognition of the individualities (particularities that make up history) that he would not lump non-European cultures together under a western oriented world history. "Thus Troeltsch's own restriction of
universal history to the European development was based not on blind arrogance but rather on an admittedly curiously stated humility and caution .... The concentration of European values grows out of his very respect for the autonomy of the specific content of historical formations."

Second, Troeltsch defined the basic category of history as the particular rather than the general (abstract) idea. History was made up of particulars which may be an individual or class or state, and so on. In other words each particular was not a simple thing, and its relationship to other particulars was not simple either. His term was "the individual complex" (die individuelle Totalität). cf. n.50 Chapter 1. In his article "Historiography", the English word totality is used, which is not as good a translation as it could have been. It is better to speak of a "complex", so that when he spoke of Europeanism he was not referring to a simple thing but something made up of Christian, Jewish, Greek, Roman and Germanic elements. However, for all its complexity and diversity it referred to a culture held together as eine Totalität. It was what he knew best and thus formed a kind of presupposition for his Weltanschauung. After all, one must have some point of reference, and it is hard to see how one can avoid dealing in value judgments when considering other cultures and traditions.

This brings me to the third point, namely, that religion as well as history is inextricably intertwined with culture. And the explanation of the correlation between religion and culture was one of the main problems which exercised him throughout his life. Christianity was something that belonged especially to the culture and history of Europe, and as long as one ignores post Enlightenment secularism and the existence of other cultures and religions then there is perhaps no great problem. But because Christianity claims universality it must meet head on the problem of other religions. Given the emergence of the non-Christian world the traditional idea of the aim/role of Christian missions being to convert non-Christians does not seem to be as simple and straightforward as it once did. It is not surprising that Troeltsch was president of a special missionary society that concerned itself with dialogue rather than conversion; the aim of missions was that of the interpenetration of culture and religions.(46) It is also not surprising that this understanding
of missions has not met with a great deal of warm approval by more conservative theologians. It has though proved to be very influential. There is a significant body of modern theological thought which takes such a view. (47) Such a view means of course that Christianity is relativised by limiting it to Western culture by making it the religion of Europeanism.

It is at this point then that we must ask if Troeltsch's Europeanism ends up in the same kind of either/or impasse of the approach of relativism or dogmatism. Pye thought that he does end up in a kind of impasse in that he was too bound by his historicism to take religious pluralism seriously enough. "It is regrettable that a better articulation of the autonomous plurality which can be seen in the history of religions continued to be inhibited in his thought." (48) This is a valid criticism, and it is one which is perhaps inevitable in that Troeltsch's programme aimed at comprehension rather than exclusion. It is questionable whether any explanation could comprehend the inclusive/exclusive - relativistic/dogmatic alternatives. Certainly one must feel a sense of unease about his Europeanism, that it is less than satisfactory.

But why do we think this? It is worthwhile pointing out what Troeltsch did not do. The dogmatic/exclusivist alternative, as has been touched on above, is something which locks theology into a way of thinking and compromises the sovereign freedom of God. Troeltsch did not do that. His methodology is premised upon an openness which while allowing the possibility of risk and failure also does not limit God or our understanding of Him. On the other hand the relativist option, which, as we shall see especially in the next section Troeltsch did not uncritically adopt, compromises the uniqueness of Christianity and also the sovereignty of God. Troeltsch's espousal of the religionsgeschichtliche method exposed him to the danger of relativism but it also demands an openness which is necessary if a greater understanding is to be attained. This will not be entirely convincing to those who trade in certainties; however, Troeltsch's restless intellect was not inclined to waste much time on such a mind set.

But what did Troeltsch do in his wrestling with the problem of other religions? His alternative was not in terms of hard and fast results but rather a way of approach of method that involved
dialogue, with one's own tradition as well as other traditions. This ought to be seen as a challenge to relativism; not simply declining to take seriously the uniqueness of Christianity. As N. Lash has observed about absolute relativism, elevating this into a "metaphysical principle is simply loss of nerve disguised as philosophy". (49) Unrestrained relativism is just as much assertion as dogmatic statements. Both need some external point of reference.

As well they also need to recognise that everything is subject to change, and therefore to be open to the future. Most importantly they need to be open to dialogue. Pye refers to an observation by Maurice Wiles that the way in which Christianity may be correlated with a religion different from itself probably be in principle not dissimilar to the way in which it is correlated with the world views with which it has come into successive context during its European history. This deceptively simple point has however not yet been taken seriously to heart by Christian theology. (50)

Such correlation does not mean uncritical identification of all religions. This century more than any other has seen Christianity take on national dress as never before in Eastern and non-Western countries. Missionary organisations and non-Western churches take very seriously the indigenisation of Christianity. The majority of believers no longer belong to Western countries, it is inaccurate to deem Christianity a Western religion in this sense. This is something which Troeltsch did not foresee and which no doubt would have caused him to readdress the question of Europeanism.

(c) Absolutism

There are really two terms that need discussing in this section, absolutism of course, and its polar opposite relativism. Troeltsch is often portrayed as rejecting the former in favour of the latter, and roundly condemned for doing so. However, I think that things are not so simple as that. In what follows I will make some preliminary remarks by way of clarifying the terms and the issues, and then go on to discuss Troeltsch's contribution to
the ongoing theological task of determining the status of Christianity vis-à-vis other religions.

Confronted as we are today with a situation of religious pluralism it is all too easy to say that a person's religion is simply a matter of inherited tradition or personal preference and that is all there is to it. This leaves unasked and unanswered the question as to the truth of a particular religion. Traditional Christian theology has tended not to bother asking the question but to assume, and not infrequently declare, the universality and absoluteness of Christianity, and argue from this position. However, ever since the Enlightenment and the nineteenth century such absolute claims have been made to look more and more like assertion. For Christianity does not have the stage to itself: there are other religions which, either implicitly or explicitly, make similar claims to universalism and absoluteness. Obviously all cannot be right, so the alternative seems to be to say that all religions have a common core or idea and the differences are really a matter of different forms, or that different religions belong to different cultures and races and that we should concern ourselves primarily with the descriptive task. There is a fair degree of overlap here of course. This approach is one of relativism and more or less characterises the Religionsgeschichte. For purposes of comparison we might label this approach "unbridled" relativism. As will be explained below Troeltsch advocated another kind of relativism. An unbridled relativism might be able to claim the sanction of the prestige of a scientific method but in the area of religious and ethical convictions other considerations must be taken into account. What then did Troeltsch have to say about relativism?

Relativism

Troeltsch addressed the question of relativism especially in chapter 3 of *NC*, "Historical Relativity and Norms of Value". He succinctly states the problem thus;

... if one should wish to say 'Christianity is a relative phenomenon', there is no reason to object to this, for the historical and the relative are identical. (my emphasis). Acknowledgement of this proposition can be evaded only by one who has deliberately or instinctively thrown up a bulwark to defend Christianity from the modern study of history. There can be no doubt about this result. However, it is by no
means shocking. Only the misguided thought habits of rational or supernatural dogmatism surround the word 'relative' with all the terrors of the uncertain, the unstable, the purposeless. What everything really depends on is that the concept 'relative' means and how it relates to the problem of acquiring criteria of value. (my emphasis). (51)

The thing to notice about these words is that Troeltsch deliberately repudiates what I above referred to as unbridled relativism. He referred to such as "unlimited" or "purposeless" relativism. Thus a critique which lays at his door the charge of relativism, implying that he has sold out the faith, has simply not read him carefully enough nor understood what he was trying to do. Nor has it appreciated his recognition of the multiformity and individuality of cultural phenomena. For Troeltsch did not stop with simply recognising such, but all his life worked at discerning some transcendent value and meaning within the dynamics and freedom of history and culture. By this effort he was trying to overcome aimless relativism.

The problem faced by the modern approach to history is not that of making an either/or choice between relativism and absolutism, but how to combine the two. This is the problem of how to discern, in the relative, tendencies towards the absolute goal. Or, to state the problem more accurately: How does one work out a fresh, durable, and creative synthesis that will give the absolute the form possible to it at a particular moment and yet remain true to its inherent limitation as a mere approximation of true, ultimate, and universally valid values? (52)

I think it is instructive to notice particularly the word discern used here. The dogmatic approach tends to take as its axiom something that is given; that is ahistorical; and that is timelessly valid. The approach that Troeltsch advocated, which was essentially that of the historian, was a complex thing involving, not least, an interpretative aspect. This of course was of a piece with Troeltsch's understanding of history - see above p.45 and the quote from J. Hick. It is this awareness of another level that is necessary to discern, and understand, students of truth and value. One must have a certain "feeling" to apprehend this other level. Indeed we might refer to this feeling as faith,
for faith involves a way of seeing things.

As with the freedom and unpredictability of history there is an elusiveness about this; it is not evident for all to see and it maintains an openness to the future when it will become sight. As mentioned on p.41 Paul frequently links faith with hope, and it is no accident that the biblical description of God is usually couched in verbal rather than substantive terms. cf. Exodus 3:14 "I am who I am" or "I will be the I will be". Being essentially a historian this was Troeltsch's understanding too: "Absolute, unchanging value, conditioned by nothing temporal, exists not within but beyond history and can be perceived only in presentiment and faith."(53)

This brings us to the second kind of relativism that Troeltsch spoke of, and which he endorsed, namely a relativism that involves making a choice. A purposeless relativism is apt to say that there is no reasonable basis for preferring one religion or ethic to another. This kind of relativism might assert that all religions/cultures possess a common aspect of the truth, or that all are equally valid in the functional sense, or that the question of validity is meaningless - that is, it is simply a matter of geography. Thus there is no reason really for preferring one over another. However, there is always the feeling that this is a little too easy and somehow sidesteps the crucial issue, which is that truth must involve some exclusions. This has nothing to do with a lack of subtlety or tolerance, but is rather a recognition of the law of contradiction.

But what shall determine our decisions? Here we see the interplay of perspectives that is so characteristic of Troeltsch's thought. It was not just a matter of the philosophy of culture, or religion, or history, or the psychology of religion (cf. above p.70f on the religious à priori), or comparative religions, nor even all of them together, but each and all of them in the context of the religious dimension of his thought. Furthermore, "this was not just a matter of faith but a renewal and realisation of faith."(54)Now faith involves standards of value, something that Troeltsch recognised. He said, "The creation of such standards of value ... is a matter of faith in the deep and full sense of the word: the contemplation of something built out of life and seen as an expression and revelation of the divine ground of
life."(55)

No doubt this is a smuggling in of a theological perspective, but not one that is the same as the dogmatic approach. For Troeltsch faith did not mean subservience to divinely given truths but rather both subject and object engaging in a dynamic continuum. It is this which characterises his method and his understanding of relativism.

Absolutism

Given then the eschatological orientation of history with all that that means for Religionsgeschichte, does this mean that we should delete the word "absolute" from our theological vocabulary? Certainly not as far as Troeltsch was concerned. He viewed his work and programme in constructive terms not merely critical, and pragmatic not merely theoretical.

He himself described his fundamental theme as 'the idea of the construction' of European culture ... What matters particularly are the major features which show how Troeltsch drew conclusions here from his new understanding of the 'absoluteness of Christianity'. For this 'absoluteness' was not construed in a way that set Christianity apart from culture, in an attempt to avert the crisis by a religious leap away from it; instead, viewing religion as an independent 'factor' within culture, Troeltsch tried now to make actual productive use of the Christian tradition for the new orientation for European culture which he saw to be necessary.(56)

Any writer must be read with due regard for his context and the reasons for his writing, and this is certainly the case with Troeltsch. In the course of this essay I have referred more than once to Troeltsch's programme: by this I mean that he had a definite aim in mind - to provide credibility for Christian theology by defining its agenda and task in the twentieth century.

What kind of absolutism then did Troeltsch think Christianity had? Previously there were two kinds of sanction that had been used to validate the absolute authority of Christianity. The first appealed to miracles. It had been traditional in Christian theology to regard the miracles of Christ as proofs of his divine nature. This attitude is less than satisfactory for two reasons. First, there is no way of proving such claims, they become little
more than assertions and not likely to convince anyone but a convinced believer. Second, modern biblical scholarship has drawn attention to the true function of the miracles of Christ. The first century was an age of miracles and wonder: and the question raised by Jesus' miracles and exorcisms was not whether he could truly do them or not, but by what authority he performed them (Mk.11:28). The miracles were meant as signs not proofs of his divine nature.

To perceive the θαυματουργία behind the miracles of Jesus was to penetrate the mystery of his person ... (and) the response which Jesus wanted from those who witnessed his mighty works was not astonishment, but repentance and faith: 'Woe unto thee, Chorazin! ... Bethsaida! for if the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon which were done in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes' (Mt. 11:21)(57).

There is another form of miracle which is referred to to validate the authority of Christianity. This is the "miracle" of individual conversion. While this is obviously meaningful for the individual, and self-authenticating, it is of limited use in terms of verification.(58) Whether the miracle is external or internal it is doubtful if it provides a useful formulation or starting point for a religionsgeschichtliche discussion. After all, all religions have their miracles and conversions. We must add, parenthetically, that Troeltsch took religious experience very seriously. Half a century before Ludwig Feuerbach had tried to discredit Christianity by explaining religious beliefs in terms of "projection". Later Freud was to expound this notion with great impact, but Feuerbach said it first. Troeltsch on the other hand tried to answer the truth of religious experience from the standpoint of religious psychology.

The second sanction which theology has made use of to validate its absolute authority is a philosophical one which finds expression in, for example, Hegel. This approach involves finding a universal "idea" of religion which finds expression in the major religions but which comes to its highest form in Christianity. "The use of the word 'absolute' in this context appears to have begun with Hegel." (59) While Troeltsch appreciated Hegel's effort to come to terms with the dynamics of history in introducing the notion of progress into philosophical reflection
he was led to criticise him for not meeting the demands of historical method. For Hegel has to force the data to make it fit his Procrustean framework. Furthermore, if the notion of progress is central then it is premature to refer to Christianity as the absolute religion: one should wait until the end of history to do that.

It was Troeltsch's aim though not simply to criticise but to try and bring order to a pluralist situation. This cannot be done by simply asserting the absolute authority of Christianity. There should be, given the historical conditionedness of everything, an honest appraisal of the relativity and singularity of the different religions. Troeltsch's effort in this direction was to categorise religions into two groups. These he designated as "the prophetic, Christian, Platonic, and Stoic world of ideas on the one hand, and the Buddhist or Eastern world of ideas on the other."(60) These he set over against each other. His reasons for reducing them to two categories were because he wanted to limit the force of relativism, and to simplify the choice that had to be made, between a personal and an impersonal religion. His preference was for the former, and Christianity was the highest religion because" it is 'die starkste und gesammeltste Offenbarung der personalistischen Religiosität (the strongest and most concentrated revelation of personalistic religion)." Therefore it is not only Hohenpunkt (culmination-point) but Konvergenzpunkt (point of convergence) of all religious development."(61) Some twenty years later in his lecture "The Place of Christianity Among the World Religions" Troeltsch repeated this conclusion. Christianity is "the loftiest and most spiritual revelation we know at all. It has the highest validity. Let that suffice."(62)

I am not sure, however, that we can leave it there. The subjective element seems to intrude a little too much into what, after all, is meant to be an objective appraisal of religious pluralism. I make the following observations ...

1. Troeltsch turns his preference for the Western tradition with its theism and personalism into a criterion.
2. He starts by assuming the superiority of Christianity as self evident pretending however to prove it.
3. There seems to be no reason why the adherent of an Eastern religion should not claim the same for his religion.
4. Troeltsch does not seem to have entirely freed himself from
his Ritschlian heritage.
5. The talk about Hohenpunkt and Konvergenzpunkt sounds suspiciously like some kind of Hegelianism.

In Troeltsch's defence though we must add that he spoke of Christianity as the Hoherpunkt bis jetzt (up till now), and understand that by this he was not repudiating his heritage but recognising the teleological character of history and the limited nature of our understanding of the revelation of God. If it is of the nature of Christianity to be inextricably part of history this does not mean that it has the past as its only referent. In the bible, both Old and New Testaments, when it is taken as a whole the eschatological perspective is seen to be part of the historical dimension. In more recent years W. Pannenberg has made this observation a crucial part of his work on revelation and history. His point is not simply that God has revealed himself in Jesus but that this revelation is a proleptic revelation. Pannenberg says,

Thus, the proleptic character of the destiny of Jesus is the basis of the openness of the future for us, despite the fact that Jesus in the ultimate revelation of the God of Israel as the God of all men. And, conversely, without this proleptic character, the fate of Jesus could not be the ultimate revelation of the deity of God, since the openness of the future belongs constitutively to our reality - against Hegel.(63)

There are certain value judgments bound up in all this, but it is hard to see how they can be avoided. Perhaps Troeltsch would have been more "objective" if he had referred more clearly to, or designated, the provisional character of Christianity as the absolute religion as a kind of working model. Such an approach need not be regarded as an expediency born of scepticism or flippancy. Long before the French philosopher Blaise Pascal pointed out that certainty was lacking in questions of religion, and also in questions of ordinary life, and that decisions had constantly to be made in the face of uncertainties. He proposed the idea of a wager and applied the basic idea of the calculation of probabilities to the question of the existence of God. "Reason cannot decide this question ... How will you wager? Reason cannot make you choose either, reason cannot prove either wrong. Do not then condemn as wrong those who have made a choice, for you know
nothing about it." (64) The point here is that one must choose. Even not choosing is a choice. And Troeltsch, like Pascal, and Kierkegaard, was concerned not with general theoretical explanation of Christianity but with how it worked out in practice. More will be said on this in the next chapter.

But in the context of the Religionsgeschichte, as Troeltsch struggled "toward a theology of the history of religions" (as Pannenberg put it), he was content to add to scientific history the need for personal decision and faith. In this way it is appropriate to speak of the absoluteness of Christianity. In this way he means to "overcome history by history". This was a phrase from his later writings by which he meant to overcoming of aimless relativism by historical decision based on norms drawn from empirical history.

Thus the problem is to define the relative and individual with ever increasing exactness and to understand with ever increasing comprehensiveness the universally valid that works teleologically within history. Then we will see that the relative contains an indication of the unconditional. In the relative we will find a token of the absolute that transcends history. (65)

But until that time when all sight will be hindsight we are bound to go on comparing the different religious traditions. "Comparative religions" is not a literal translation of Religionsgeschichte but it accurately captures an essential element in the whole exercise of making sense of human existence in all its diversity. The point is that we are always making comparisons and we are bound to exercise a certain discrimination if we are going to transcend what Troeltsch called "the anarchy of values". His solution was to identify Christianity as the norm needed, which goes to show how strongly he was bound to his spiritual and cultural background. This is not to say that he was at heart a conservative. It was not so much Christ who was the measure of true religion but an ultimate religious à priori. One of the criticisms that has been levelled at AC is that its portrait of Jesus is less than satisfactory. Troeltsch, reflecting somewhat nineteenth century liberal Protestantism, speaks of the self consciousness of Jesus rather than discussing his person.
Some years later Troeltsch addressed himself to this central question in his "The Significance of the Historical Existence of Jesus for Faith". (1911)(66) This was a response to A. Drew's Die Christusmythe, which, as the title suggests, said that the historical Jesus was a mythical figure, a pious fiction of the early Christian community. The real question though was not the historical one but the more subtle one about the relationship of the historical Jesus to Christianity. Troeltsch's approach was a socio-psychological one.

The present chaos and poverty of religion cannot last. Within our cultural sphere it would be impossible and wrong to expect some other religiosity than the Christian one which is the result and the foundation of West Asian, European and American intellectual history. If within our culture religious life is to re-emerge at all, it will in all essentials steam from Christianity and find its symbol in the person of Jesus.(67)

A little later he speaks of Jesus' central position being based on social and psychological necessities. Thus the connection between faith and the historicity of Jesus is purely psychological. Feuerbach would have had some interesting things to say about that; and B. Gerrish pertinently remarks that "the question remains whether the psychological need, in this instance, does not call for therapy rather than indulgence."(68) Granted the overlap/interplay of perspectives and the necessary presence of the psychological it is the person of Christ that determines the absoluteness of Christianity. As with AC, Troeltsch's mediating position does not quite come off. There is not the critical engagement with Christology: he is perhaps too much the historian and psychologist of religion and allows these perspectives to crowd out the theological.
NOTES


2. S. Sykes, *The Identity of Christianity*, Fortress, Philadelphia, 1984, has an important discussion of "Troeltsch and the Relevance of Epistemology", pp.148-173. Then, by way of contrast, in the following chapter he discusses the rival epistemology of Karl Barth.

   cf. A.C. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons* p.4 quoting Ebeling, "Hermeneutics now takes the place of classical epistemological theory ..." See also pp.211-217.


7. cited by A.O. Dyson, *The Immortality of the Past*, SCM, London, 1974, p.28. Dyson adds "These two statements capture the background of intellectual conflict and uncertainty in which German theological liberalism waxed and waned."


10. Troeltsch wrote an article on them in *Die Christliche Welt* 34 (1920) entitled "Die kleine Göttinger Fakultät von 1890". For an exposition of the religionsgeschichtliche Schule see W. Kummel *New Testament* S. Neill, *The Interpretation of the New Testament* 1861-
Modern Christian Thought pp.304-307.

11. W. Pauck Harnack and Troeltsch p56.

W. Kummel New Testament p302 points out that "As early as his essay 'Über das Verhältnis des deutschen Staates zu Theologie, Kirche und Religion' (Concerning the relation of the German state to theology, church, and religion) - first published in 1872 - he expressly maintained that 'the New Testament Canon (is) nothing but the collection of the books which the early Catholic Church found suitable for service as weapons in its conflict with the heretics and sects of the second century; and therefore concluded that, so far as the historical understanding of the primitive Christian era is concerned, the Canon must be left out of consideration and all documents from that time are to be employed."


Reist's assessment of Troeltsch is summed up in his chapter 6 entitled baldly, "The Collapse of Troeltsch's Theology." He concludes that Troeltsch failed to answer his own question; and that his failure "has all the noble overtones of the authentically tragic." p.202.


15. Troeltsch and Harnack were friends; Harnack delivered a moving funeral oration when Troeltsch died, and Troeltsch contributing a warm appreciation of Harnack to a festschrift for him. The texts of both are to be found in W. Pauck Harnack and Troeltsch, pp.95ff.

16. See his "Was Heisst 'Wesen des Christentums?'" GS Vol.II (1913)

English translation in R. Morgan and M. Pye ET Writings, pp.124ff.


20. S. Sykes in *ETFT*, p.142


22. S. Sykes, *ETFT* p.139 refers to H. Wagenhammer, *Das Wesen des Christentums, Eine begriffsgeschichtliche Untersuchung*, Mainz 1973. In this Sykes says "the commonly-held view, which Troeltsch shared, that the quest for the essence of Christianity began with the Enlightenment is conclusively disproved."


   By way of introduction the editors refer to it as "a piece of sustained methodological analysis (in which Troeltsch) attempted to state what is involved in identifying the essential meaning of Christianity, recognising this as a historical, yet theological act. .... It also sheds light in a most suggestive way on traditions other than the Christian one in which it was cast." (my emphasis) p.viii


26. *AC*, p.66


38. The distinction is an artificial one. The process of Hellenisation had been going on for a couple of centuries before apostolic times. It is a reasonable generalisation to say that by the first century of our era all Judaism was in some sense Hellenistic Judaism. For example the LXX was commonly used, even in Palestine, the highest council of Israel was called by a Greek name (Sanhedrin = συνεδρία); and at the time of the second Jewish War with Rome in the second century even so doughty and rigid a conservative as Rabbi Akiba wrote letters in Greek. See especially M. Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism* 2 vols. SCM, London, 1974.


42. M. Pye, *ETFT*, p. 175.


45. M. Pye, ETFT, p.181.


49. See his essay "How Do We Know Where We Are?" in Theology, p.65.

50. M. Pye, ETFT, p.194 n.20.

51. AC, p.85f.

52. AC, p.90.

53. AC, p.90.


pp.194-257.


60. AC p.93 and on p.117 he says, "The personalistic redemption religion of Christianity is the highest and most significantly developed world of religious life that we know."
Apart from the question of oversimplification, Troeltsch did not have much appreciation for the Naturreligionen: the religions of the primitive apprehensions of the totality of existence or of naturalistic monotheism. See H. Kraemer, The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World, James Clark, Edinburgh 1938.


63. Basic Questions, p.25.


65. AC, p.106.

66. English translation in ET Writings, pp.182-207.
See too B.A. Gerrish "Jesus, Myth and History: Troeltsch's Stand in the 'Christ-Myth' Debate", Journal of Religion, 55, 1975, pp.13-35. The value of Gerrish's article is that it pays special attention to the original context of Troeltsch's text and to whom it was addressed.


68. B.A. Gerrish, "Jesus, Myth and History", p.33. On the next page Gerrish adds, "The necessity for the God-Man survives in Troeltsch's thinking only as a psychological need - a need to know that the symbol is rooted in a life once lived."
3. SOCIOLOGY AND THE GREAT REJECTION

3.1 THE SOCIAL SCIENCES AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE

Excursus 1 Church and State.

3.2 THE ALTERNATIVES

(a) Comte - replacement
(b) Marx - rejection
(c) Durkheim - function
(d) Weber - correlation

3.3 THE SOCIAL TEACHINGS

(a) Introduction
(b) The Agenda
(c) Methodology

(i) Results and suggestions
(ii) Ideology and conversations
(iii) Working models

1. Compromise
2. Natural Law
   Excursus 2 Where do we go from here?
3. Church/sect typology
   Excursus 3 Liberation Theology

(a) Oppression
(b) Religion
(c) Hermeneutics
SOCIOMETRY AND THE GREAT REJECTION

3.1 THE SOCIAL SCIENCES AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE

W. Pauck points out that Troeltsch's "books are again read, especially by those who want to understand the origin and character of modern civilisation and the place of religion in it." (1) When Troeltsch moved to Berlin it was to be Professor of Philosophy and Civilisation. The second part of his title, and brief, is of the highest significance. We may define civilisation as those characteristic ideas and institutions which make up a particular (national or ethnic) group; it includes language, beliefs and values, and how they are expressed. Since the nineteenth century the attention of some philosophers has been concentrated on civilisation (or culture). This might be seen as a kind of counterpart to existentialism and the so-called philosophies of life. They attempted to understand the nature of human existence, its dilemma and future. The philosophy of civilisation recognised rather the corporate social nature of man's existence, eschewing what we might call the privatisation of existence. Troeltsch's new position, though not new role as it had always been part of his programme, was a continuation of that of his revered teacher Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911). Dilthey also was a philosopher of history and civilisation; indeed he was the virtual creator of the philosophy of history in its modern form. His studies in religion were directed to it especially as an element in human culture.

It was said above that theology does not inhabit a vacuum; neither does philosophy. One of the characteristics of much of modern philosophical thought is the way that what Frederick Copleston calls extra-philosophical factors (2) have impinged on philosophy. These factors include economics, social and political conditions, religion and science, and also psychological factors. They make the point that philosophy has a context, or a number of contexts, and is related to life. (See the section Alternative (b) Marx below p.108).
Something else which should be borne in mind is that the study of civilisation is not the study of a static thing: civilisations are always in the process of rise or decay and the idea of evolution or development or change must always be taken into account. Thus a historian will typically describe the rise and fall of a civilisation, and discuss the reasons for this. My purpose in mentioning this point about change is that the study of civilisation involves not only consideration of how it came to be, but what its options are for the future. This was of more than just academic interest in the nineteenth century: there was a certain urgency in the air. Not all greeted the implications of secularisation with equanimity. Ward points out that "By the 1890's the German academics had begun to scent a 'crisis of civilisation', and to be victims of a sense of anxiety which reached its peak in the years following the first world war."(3) And do we divine these options by the study of material causes or of the inscrutable providence of God?

Among the extra-philosophical factors involved in the study of civilisation is a new group of disciplines which also came into their own in the nineteenth century, the so-called Social Sciences. These formed the third great universe of discourse which characterised Troeltsch's thinking and which were exemplified by his 1915 move to Berlin. R.A. Nisbet describes the social sciences as those disciplines "which deal with human behaviour in its social and cultural aspects, (and) include the following disciplines: economics, political science, and sociology; social and cultural anthropology, social psychology, and social and economic geography."(4) A good deal of the concerns of these disciplines is coterminous with that of history. The overlap may be seen in the often marked tendency to specialisation which has, for example, scholars writing history from an economic or political etc. perspective; or subsuming history within the framework of a study of economics or politics etc. As far as Troeltsch is concerned, the overlap may be seen in that 1915 did not add another dimension to his thoughts, but was a development of something that had for some time been part of his programme.

In this chapter we will be referring primarily to sociology rather than to the social sciences as a whole, though reference will be made to others of them. The reason for Troeltsch's interest in
sociology is evident from the following definition by R.E.L. Faris.

Sociology is a branch of the science of human behaviour that seeks to discover the causes and effects that arise in social relations among persons and in the intercommunication and interaction among persons and groups. It includes the study of the customs, structures, and institutions that emerge from interaction, of the forces that hold together and weaken them, and of the effects that participation in groups and organisations have on the behaviour and character of persons. Sociology is also concerned with the basic nature of human society, locally and universally, and with the various processes that preserve continuity and produce change. (5)

The last sentence echoes the aims of Troeltsch's PP (1906). In the Preface to the English Translation (1912) Troeltsch listed these as describing with complete impartiality and objectivity the relation of Protestantism to modern civilisation, and on the basis of the first, of correlating the valuable elements of both in a constructive synthesis. Not all sociologists though would feel comfortable about the second of Troeltsch's aims. And here we need to define our terms some more.

In any discipline there are various subsections and schools of thought, and as far as sociology is concerned there is no doubt that the study of society is going to involve a study of the role of religion. This is the job of the sociologist of religion. His task is essentially a descriptive one, supposedly non-normative and objective. He analyses religious phenomena in society but is not concerned with the veracity of what ideas and beliefs may be expressed. He may take a qualitative approach: that is refer to and describe the ritual and worship that are part of religion. Or he may take a quantitative approach: that is analyse, for example, figures on church attendance and church membership, or the relationship between patterns of belief and employment. There is a certain overlap here with other of the social sciences, economics and psychology. The quantitative approach arose from Durkheim's notion of the "social fact". This was taken further by the Chicago school of sociology which said if there are some facts then they must be able to be measured. In all this we can see working the idea that sociology is a social science, in some way "objective" along the lines of the natural sciences, free from
moral or value presuppositions, and therefore of more validity than the humanities.

On the other hand, perhaps correlating somewhat to the second of Troeltsch's aims in PP, the religious sociologist may adopt a partisan approach. He studies religious phenomena as a believer, or at least in a "non-objective" way, using sociological methods and insights in order to gain a deeper understanding of religious tradition and to augment its function. As a fairly recent popular example we might refer to the Church Growth movement which analyses from a sociological point of view why, when, where and how churches grow - the aim being to facilitate further growth by learning from and applying the insights gained.

Not unnaturally there is often friction between the sociologist of religion and the religious sociologist. B. Wilson (6) gives a sensitive description of the differences involved in the two approaches and of the dilemma the sociologist can find himself in when he has to give an empathetic account of what he is describing. He says, "It will be apparent that the cultivation of what I call 'sympathetic detachment' will always remain a matter of difficulty, and between sympathy and detachment there is a frontier of tension ......". (7) This frontier of tension is evident in Troeltsch as he struggled with the problematic of the church's existence in a sociological world. Before we discuss this problematic more fully it will be useful to discuss its political implications. These implications will be explored in the following sections on Troeltsch, and Liberation Theology, but I mention them here because they will be touched on in the following section 2 Alternatives.

**EXCURSUS 1 CHURCH AND STATE**

Basic to any society (or civilisation) is its political organisation. This we usually refer to as the "state". Defined more narrowly it can refer to the institutions of government; however it is used here in a fairly general way. From the very first Christianity has had to come to terms with the state. The problem was that the New Testament does not give any clear unequivocal directions about how to deal with the role. It does
on occasion refer to the Christian's relationship to political authority, but does not speak with a unanimous voice. Thus, Paul in Romans 13 speaks of political authorities having been given a mandate by God. But Jesus said to "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's." (Matt. 22:21), and the author of Revelation has some pretty pungent things to say about the Roman Empire. This ambivalence is echoed in subsequent church history as the Church in different times and places struggled to work out a modus vivendi with the state. For convenience's sake I suggest that the problem boils down to a choice between three models.

First, there is the model of identification, which sees religion and society as being somehow coterminous. The fourth century Roman emperor Constantine recognised the political factor in the Church's resistance against the Roman state. He stopped the persecution of the Church and made the Church itself the basis for the spiritual unity of the empire. Thereafter, church and state became partners, and this partnership (συμφωνία) became one of the foundations of the subsequent Christian empires. From a religious, or Christian, point of view this model has the merit of, if not endorsing theocratic, at least acknowledging the existence and ultimate authority of God. It also declines to separate the secular totally from the sacred, recognising that all of life has God as its ultimate referent. This is not to say that church and state (society) are the same thing: the problems of absolutism and domination were always there. These problems manifested themselves in the Middle Ages with the struggles between Church and state. Most of the mainstream mediaeval thinking was anti-theocratic and insisted on the relative autonomy of the "two powers" (Church and state). The trouble was that the Church had long since established its legitimacy while the state was trying to establish, or re-establish the basis of its legitimacy. Thus the Church was able to assert its authority over the state.

More recently Hegel, detecting the dialectic working of the Spirit in history, found its culminating point in the emergence of the Prussian monarchy from Graeco-Roman antiquity.

The History of the World is the discipline of the uncontrolled natural will, bringing it into obedience to a Universal principle and conferring subjective freedom. The
East knew and to the present day knows only that One is Free; the Greek and Roman world, that some are free; the German world that All are free. The first political form therefore which we observe in History, is Despotism, the second Democracy and Aristocracy, the third Monarchy. (8)

Now Hegel was a philosopher writing philosophy but he regarded theology as simply putting in more pictorial terms the truth of his philosophy. His philosophy was both an attempt to state in terms of absolute idealism the meaning of Christianity, and a reaction against increasing materialism and secularism. What he said is of interest to us as an example of the identification model of church and state, and the way that it involved the attempted domination of the secular by the spiritual. The fact that the church and state were not separated in Germany until a century later with the collapse of the Hohenzollern dynasty in 1918 may not be unrelated to the climate of absolutism which Hegel helped create. His main importance in this particular area though is that he provoked Marx to write his Towards a Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right. (See below p.111)

It is just this question of absolutism that seems to be the besetting sin of this particular model. The fact that the modus vivendi is so often a struggle is perhaps an indication that this view would not last, for there is a certain persistence about both religion and secularism, neither has shown any inclination finally to wither on the vine. Moreover, as far as Christianity is concerned, as soon as a state decided that it did not need the church to legitimate its existence, and set up its own institutions to look after areas such as education and health which the church traditionally looked after, then the Church's existence would be made more problematic.

Second, there is the model of acceptance. In common with the above it sees God as being the ultimate authority but gets around the problem of church and state competing with each other by recognising that both have their own areas of activity and authority. This is to be seen especially in the Lutheran doctrine of the two kingdoms. "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's" (Mt. 22:21) might be regarded as its proof text. In European countries this ideology frequently went hand in hand with a nationalism that was
accepted as a matter of course. And part of this nationalism was an obligation to obey the civil authorities in fulfilment of Romans 13:1-7. Thus this model may be seen as aiming at preserving the strong points of the previous model while avoiding its shortcomings. And, of course, it can, apparently, claim the authority of certain important scriptural passages.

However, while such a recognition of the state might carry with it the promise of a more positive relationship than the previous model it may be criticised for engendering a certain aloofness. It is fine to recommend the obligations of dutiful obedience to governing authorities, but political passivity is not necessarily the same as good citizenship. Looking at things from a religious point of view, within the Judeo-Christian tradition the people of God, whether as individuals or as a group, have been called upon to fulfil a prophetic role. And the prophet, not infrequently, had to stand on the edge of society and not acquiesce in the way that things were. Relating this to a modern situation, the Church might be seen as being truer to its traditions if it engaged in dialogue with and criticism of the state. The acceptance model is not really geared to this. It is all right if the state recognises and carried out its duties under God, but it is questionable whether such a state has or does exist in western civilisation. This model also highlights questions as to the authority by which the Church speaks. Is it just a democratic right, or is there some other, deeper, validity?

Third, there is the model of contrast. This model, or attitude, is the result of dissatisfaction with the way things are, and it is combined with a negative assessment of the present structure of society. This goes hand in hand with a certain emphasis on teleology: the present order is contrasted with the future order - of God’s kingdom of peace and justice to come if religious, or a secular version if not religious. A religious form of this model is that of the theologies of liberation, which will be referred to below, though we might add, parenthetically, that there was a good deal of Christian political thought (of a socialist nature) in Europe before Liberation Theology appeared on the scene. For example, W.R. Ward examines some significant German thinkers who were active contemporaneously with Troeltsch’s academic career and who struggled with the issue of political and social involvement for the Christian. (9) They were characterised, and
distinguished, from the bulk of mainstream European Christianity, by their attempt to overcome the contrast not so much by theological assertion as by social involvement.

More recently, the French worker-priests of the early 1950's may be seen as a response to the new situation facing the Church and as a more immediate antecedent of the Liberation Theology movement.

Significant historical developments are often best represented in relatively small events. The crisis over the worker-priests in France in 1952-54, involving a 'sociologically insignificant' total of fewer than one hundred men (without a uniform policy), was just such an apparently small-scale event. In a larger perspective, all the major issues of contemporary Christianity were focused in it ..... (10) (my emphasis).

This is not to say that there is anything like unanimity in the Christian/religious form of this model; and there are indications that today the most pronounced theological differences in the Church centre on the question of the legitimacy of political theology. The time may well have come for the relevance and importance of Troeltsch to be recognised, but this is not to say that all are happy about this. As a kind of counterpoint we might refer to Barth. After an early flirtation with socialism, (11) (he became known as the "Red Pastor of Safenwil"), Barth turned his back on political theology. By the end of the first World War he "was proclaiming that the attempts of the past to find a bridge between Kultur and Protestantismus were a betrayal of revelation." (12)

However, it is the secular form of this model that has had such an enormous impact and which has played such an important role in provoking Christian thinkers to apply themselves to the idea of a political theology: namely, the Marxist interpretation of society and history. This interpretation was a result of the Enlightenment and spoke of a world come of age, or on its way to coming of age. The struggle inherent in the identification model ended with the secularisation begun with the Enlightenment. This also rendered untenable the acceptance model. The contrast model is to be seen in terms of emancipation from churchly or theological constraints, of opposition to what formerly hindered
the development of man. This all has to do with Marx's critique of religion which will be discussed below in part (b) of section 2.
3.2 THE ALTERNATIVES

We return to the question of the Church's existence in a sociological world. It is problematic because neither theology nor sociology is completely sure what to do with the other. Neither can dismiss the other as fatuous, and the question as to status and role and relationship is still on the agenda of both disciplines in the twentieth century. What follows are the main attempts to answer the question from a sociological point of view. These are to be found in the work of four sociologists, two French and two German. Diagrammatically, we might place them on a spectrum thus ..... 

Negative

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Comte Marx Durkheim Weber

The adjectives "negative" and "positive" refer to their respective attitudes to religion. Obviously the question of value judgments comes into all this, and as social scientists we may presume that they were striving after a certain objectivity. They were also struggling with the tension referred to above which seems to be inherent in any sociology of religion. It is perhaps worthwhile mentioning at this point the issue of scientific "objectivity". It is usually taken for granted that this is a desirable thing, and that it is equally desirable to avoid the "subjective" element. I am not sure that this is possible, or, necessarily, a desirable thing. When we study the social (or human) sciences it is hard to see how the question of value judgments and personal decision can be avoided. This question will surface later on more than one occasion.

The order of names on the spectrum happens to be in chronological order. That might be accidental. Or it might be because the latter tended to build on and react to the work of the earlier names. This may well have something to do with the latter's more positive attitude to religion: both were agnostic in their personal beliefs but not as antipathetic to Christianity as Comte and Marx. Perhaps too it might be a hint that the social sciences cannot get on without the religious dimension.
Auguste Comte (1798–1857) is usually regarded as the founding father of sociology. In connection with this we need to remember the two other elements of his thought that went hand in hand with his sociology. These were his positivism and his humanism. That is, he saw sociology as a science like physics or chemistry; and his humanism as a new "religion" to replace the decaying Catholicism of his native France. Comte lived in the troubled times following the French Revolution. With the failure and passing of established beliefs and institutions and the uncertainty of present and future, he aimed at replacing the theological interpretation of society with the (objective) sociological interpretation. Thus sociology becomes an end in itself. Leaving to one side the question of just how "scientific" sociology is, the raising of it to the status of an all encompassing Weltanschauung is illegitimate. Furthermore, Comte's positivist presuppositions ruled out of court from the outset any other (theological) interpretation of society.

What one misses in the Comtian (positivist) approach is a certain openness which should characterise the investigations of a supposedly disinterested scientific approach. This either/or-ness, which is so characteristic also of many theological fundamentalists, leaves one with a feeling of unease: something is being left out. Human existence, whether in its individual or historical or corporate modes, is a complex thing and it is to be questioned whether one perspective or discipline can adequately account for everything. The relationship between the theological and sociological interpretation of (the role of religion in) society would be better seen as being complementary rather than as one displacing the other. This complementariness relates to the synthesis which was the second of Troeltsch's aims in PP and foreshadows what will be said below when dealing with his ST. Such an approach uses a methodology centering on dialogue rather than confrontation.

A further caveat may be raised. This is, that it is questionable how what is purportedly a scientific discipline, and hence presumably descriptive, objective and value free, can talk about value systems. For in discussing and analysing human behaviour, whether on an individual or a group basis, values and value
systems are indispensably part of the agenda. Comte in effect recognised this in his *System of Positive Polity*. He proposed what was really a new religion; institutions and rituals intended to establish and sustain sentiments and beliefs in society. It was a Catholicism without Christianity. Looking at it from this distance in time it appears rather quaint. But more importantly, as Wilson points out,

Comte's perspective reveals the sources of tension between the claims of sociology (and hence of the sociology of religion) to be scientific when confronted by a Weltanschauung that is patently normative, arbitrary and metaphysical, and which exploits the mythical, the ritual, and the emotional. (13)

(b) **MARX: Rejection**

Karl Marx (1818-1883) is regarded by most people as a revolutionary. It would be truer to say that his ideas have proved to be revolutionary in their impact, for he was primarily a theoretical thinker. But a thinker who was passionately interested in the real world of human existence and how it ought to be. In his thought philosophy, sociology, economics and history combine. He, more than most, gave the world a new way of seeing things. He also had a great influence on Durkheim and Weber, whom we will look at next, and Troeltsch. (14) Indeed, it might be said that twentieth century political theology is in large part due to this non-believing Jew who thought economics and sociology to be of far more importance than religion. Not all theologians or theological traditions have come to terms with this. W.J. Hullenweger, reviewing N. Lash's *A Matter of Hope*, refers to the "curious disparity between contemporary English Christianity's practical obsession with Marxism and its theoretical indifference." He adds that his particular theological tradition, since World War I, considered the study of Marx essential for a theologian. (15) In this section we will consider Marx's sociological critique of religion; and ask how foundational atheism was to it.

I should mention here at the beginning that when Marx speaks of religion he was speaking of the mid-nineteenth century Judaeo-Christian tradition; and that his critique of religion was really a rejection. His Jewishness was pretty minimal religiously and
culturally speaking.

There are two main reasons why the Church should take Marx seriously. First, there is the basic fact that there are a lot of Marxists. Marxism is not an obscure cult but one of the great ideologies of the world which, no matter how much it might disagree with it, the Church must take seriously. In the past both sides have tended to be implacably opposed to each other. Indeed, many on both sides still are. However there has been over recent years a tendency to dialogue. (16) It is not clear as yet whether one can call this a positive step towards rapprochement, but at least the two sides are talking to each other. The main problem is that there are fundamentalists on both sides and these have tended to set the, negative, tone of the relationship.

N. Lash refers to the apologetic character of the way that Christian theologians have approached Marxist thoughts; and adds that "the mood of apologetic is assertive rather than interrogative. The apologist sets out to teach rather than to learn, to prove or refute rather than to enquire, to give rather than to receive. Academic theology, on the other hand ... is - or should be - fundamentally interrogative in character."(17) It is to the credit of a number of theologians in the twentieth century, especially of course the theologians of liberation, that they have adopted an interrogative approach to Marx/ Marxism. They have learnt or decided, that Marx does have something to say to Christian theology and the Church. His thought poses acute questions as to the past performance and present practice of Christian mission. Also, his ideology and paradigms, in the opinion of many, provide a basic hermeneutic with which to read both modern socio-political situations and the Bible. It would be interesting to have Marx's comment on the latter.

This leads to the second reason; namely, the nature of Marx's critique. He was not just another atheist offering another disproof of Christianity. The theoretical truth or otherwise of Christianity did not interest him so much as its social effects. Actually, what he does have to say about religion in general and Christianity in particular is neither very much nor very original. But he does ask some very basic questions about the practice of Christianity. And it is here that we may see the key to understanding Marx. His philosophy was a philosophy of life.
By that I mean that he was profoundly taken up with the question of human existence rather than abstractly discussing the essence of man or whatever.

This has been a marked characteristic of much of European philosophy over the last few centuries. Referring to Hegel, whose philosophy provides the point of departure for Marx and virtually all subsequent European philosophy, Tillich says that every great philosophy combines two elements. The one is its vitality, its lifeblood, its inner character; the other is the emergency situation out of which the philosophy grows. No great philosopher simply sat behind his desk, and said, "Let me now philosophize a bit between breakfast and lunchtime." All philosophy has been a terrible struggle between divine and demonic forces, skepticism and faith, the possibility of affirming and of negating life. The question of the mystery of existence stands behind all who became creative philosophers and were not merely analysts or historians of philosophy. In Hegel's fragments one thing stands out quite clearly, namely, that religion and politics formed the lifeblood of Hegel's thinking. It was religion of a super-natural kind in conflict with rationalism which he found disrupting the souls of students of theology and philosophy while he was a seminary student living in the Stift in Tubingen, Wurttemberg. Besides religion there was the political situation determined by the French Revolution, on the one hand, and the tyranny of the German princes, on the other hand. And across the Channel there were the democratic beginnings of the British constitution.

These two things, religion and politics, came together very early in Hegel's philosophy of life. If you want to know what "philosophy of life" means in continental terminology - Lebensphilosophie in German can hardly be translated into English - you can read Hegel's fragments. Here among others you have a fragment on love which offers one of the deepest insights into the dynamics of the love relationship, not only on the human level, but in all living reality. (18)

"Religion and politics!" We may say the same of Marx. His philosophy is unthinkable without the religious and political context of his time. His philosophy was based on a profound
dissatisfaction with the way that things were. And as a philosopher he was also a sociologist. It is not without interest that he gained his sociological perspective from France where it was fully developed before German scholars started to think sociologically; and also from his insight into the miserable sociological conditions of many groups of people in Europe. This perspective was ventilated especially in his brief, fragmentary *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* of 1844. There he discussed alienated labour, communist man and society, the relationship of capitalism to human needs, and criticises Hegel's abstract philosophising. Christianity was rejected not so much because it was untrue but because it did not do anything to meet man's needs.

Hegel

To further understand Marx's rejection of Christianity we must refer to two of the great influences on him, Hegel and Feuerbach. In both cases he criticised and at the same time took over and adapted certain fundamental ideas of theirs and made them central to his own thought. With regard to Hegel the two concepts that proved crucial for Marx were those of *idealism* and *alienation*. There was also Hegel's espousal of a right wing political view identifying church and state, with both being an expression of the Absolute Spirit. This was sanctified by the Lutheran doctrine of the social and political structure being ordained by God. Such an attitude is going to encourage a certain political passivity. This might be acceptable when things are prosperous, or acceptable to a member of the ruling class. But it is not going to encourage social amelioration; and things were not prosperous for most in early nineteenth century Germany. This is the context for Marx's famous sociological analysis of the class structure of society. His analysis was meant as a prelude to revolutionary action, to improve the lot of the proletariat.

Hegel's political conservatism was a result not least of his absolute idealism. That is, he understood that world and everything in it as the manifestation of a spiritual principle. This does not mean that material things are illusory but that they are correlative to the Spirit which realises itself in the processes of nature and history. The Spirit (*Geist*) is foundational. His idealism was absolute in that in his philosophy
he sought to embrace everything in one vast interlocking unity. This was not all: part of his greatness and continuing influence is that his philosophy did not try to capture this in a static moment but portrayed reality/Geist as working itself out or coming to greater realisation in the process of history. This "process" was a dialectical one of thesis, antithesis, synthesis. It is in this dialectical process that we find the notion of alienation that was so central to Hegel's thinking.

For Hegel the Absolute Spirit exists in an alienated state i.e. in a finite and limited and partial mode in human consciousness, but this state of alienation will eventually be overcome when human consciousness is reinterpreted within the infinite and unlimited universal Absolute Consciousness or Spirit (Geist). From our human point of view, the sense of alienation consists in the realisation that we are finite and limited expressions of, and vehicles of, the Absolute Spirit and that we are not at one with this latter ........" Hegel's position can be expressed diagrammatically as follows:

```
Absolute Spirit (God)
  |
  |
  |
  alienation
  |
  |
  |
  human consciousness
  |
  |
  |
  de-alienation
  |
  |
  |
  Absolute Spirit
```

(21)

Feuerbach

Like Marx Feuerbach was greatly influenced by Hegel before turning against him. His importance lies in the anthropological criticism he levelled against Hegel. As far as Christianity was concerned his critique aimed at turning theology into anthropology. Briefly, Feuerbach in effect reversed what Hegel said about God and man. For Hegel God comes to himself in men: for Feuerbach man creates God in himself. God was simply the projection of man's thoughts of infinity and father image. See above p.87 where
I referred to Feuerbach's notion of projection in the context of discussion about *Religionsgeschichte*. Alienation is overcome when man realises the illusory nature of God and recognises that those qualities he ascribes to God really belong to himself. Diagrammatically Feuerbach's position can be presented as follows:

![Diagram](image)

(22)

Feuerbach's theory was why Marx did not bother with the theoretical truth of Christianity: he felt that Feuerbach had made the final and definitive criticism of religion. But Marx was not wholly a Feuerbachian. Before we see why we must consider Marx's criticism of Hegel.

Marx's Criticism of Hegel

(1) **Materialism**

Both Hegel and Marx saw history in terms of a process of dialectical change. But whereas Hegel saw it as the unfolding of the underlying *Geist*, which somehow seemed to reach its political fulfilment in the Prussian monarchy of his time, Marx looked elsewhere for that which determined its course and character; and its fulfilment. In place of Hegel's abstractions he saw the means of production as determining man's life. The fundamental factors in this are that man is a creative being, is a member of society, and that this society is divided into economically determined classes. Between these classes there is an inner dynamic, and conflict arises over the production, distribution and control of goods. This conflict is to be resolved not by abstract thought, and still less by endorsement of the status quo, but by concrete action.
This is why Marx rejected Idealism and advocated a kind of "materialism". And it is important to be aware of the kind of materialism that Marx advocated. There are basically three ways of understanding materialism. First, there is ontological or metaphysical materialism. This refers to those philosophical theories which say that ultimately everything is material and that all movement in nature is a matter of calculable cause and effect. Feuerbach was a metaphysical materialist and Marx criticised him for being so. Second, there is ethical materialism which is so often attacked from pulpits. This means just being interested in material goods, money etc. Marx was not a materialist in this sense either; quite the reverse, his whole philosophy is based on attacking the ethical materialism of the bourgeoisie. Third, there is historical materialism. This says that the historical process is ultimately dependent on the means of economic production, i.e. the materials available; the technology available for the exploiting of those materials; the forms of organisation necessary for that exploitation, etc. This is what Marxist materialism means. For the sake of clarity it should be called historical or economic materialism.

(ii) Alienation

The notion of alienation is just as central to Marx as it is to Hegel: though as he did with Hegel's idealism, Marx turned it around and gave it another content. Marx used the word fairly loosely; "or, at least, its precise meaning must be judged more by context than by definition." (23) The context being that of the endemic conflict between the classes that is part of the capitalist industrialist society. By alienation Marx means essentially alienated labour: see especially his section on this in the Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts. The important thing to note is that this arises out of his sociological, and economic, analysis: for him this was not a matter of abstract thought but of the concrete human situation.

But what does Marx mean by alienated labour? Very briefly Marx saw man as a creative being who put something of himself into what he produced. In the industrial and capitalist system the worker produced goods not for the needs of man but for the needs of the market; so that goods were controlling man rather than the other way round. As well, between the worker and what he produced the
capitalist interposed, so that the worker did not get full value: the more he produced, the greater the gap between rich and poor. In all of this the worker is alienated from his work, nature, his fellow man, and himself. The economic system causes the upset of social relations, and the poor conditions lead to the dehumanisation of man.

In the practical, real world, the self-alienation can only appear through the practical, real relationship to other men. The means through which alienation makes progress are themselves practical. Through alienated labour, then, man creates not only his relationship to the object and act of production as to alien and hostile men; he creates too the relationship in which other men stand to his production and his product and the relationship in which he stands to these other men. Just as he turns his production into his own loss of reality and punishment and his own product into a loss, a product that does not belong to him, so he creates the domination of the man who does not produce over the production and the product. As he alienates his activity from himself, so he hands over to an alien person an activity that does not belong to him. (24)

Notice in particular that it is the system that is the cause of the alienation, and Marx's words "in the practical, real world .... the practical real relationship ...."

To understand Marx's rejection of religion we should see it in the context of what he said about alienation. Religion not only contributed to but was an expression of alienation. Because it was so closely associated with an idealist Weltanschauung it taught man to be detached from his real situation. The spirit was more real than the flesh. Theology has always been more wont to appeal to "ultimate reality" or a "higher truth" rather than recognise the urgency and dilemma of a contemporary sociological or economic problem. "Idealism is always in the end the acceptance of the realm of ideas as somehow self-justifying, of man's spiritual experience as the real motor force of historical change."(25)

Theology also, and I have touched on this above, was an alienating force in that it provided a divine justification for social evil. There is the Lutheran two kingdoms doctrine, and also the "ple in
the sky" idea; the poor will be compensated in the hereafter for their present mean lot. "Heaven and hell are indispensable to class society, because they produce hope of imaginary justice later and thereby emasculate longings for real justice now. Resignation is indispensable to class society because it makes men accept, not only inevitable as inevitable, but remediable as irremediable, division as permanent, strife as natural."(26) This is the context for Marx's famous epigram about religion being the opium of the people. Though there is a certain ambivalence in this. Even though Marx pilloried religion as a narcotic he also saw this as a kind of protest, "the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world."(27)

However, as far as he was concerned, it did nothing to overthrow the causes of suffering. His reasoning was that if you have your sights set on a future reward then you are not going to be bothered fighting for something in the here and now. This is not true of course: there are plenty of examples of devout believers who looked forward to the after-life but busied themselves with the affairs and inequalities of the world. Later Lenin was to concentrate not so much on the oppressed as on the oppressor. The operative phrase changes from "opium of" to "opium for" the people. Whatever form of the phrase is used it highlighted for Marx and Marxism the need to educate the people so they will realise what their situation really is. And in our time this is also one of the primary aims of Liberation Theology.

Marx's Criticism of Feuerbach

Feuerbach's critique of religion relieved Marx of the need to produce a theoretical critique. However Marx criticised him for not going far enough. It was correct of Feuerbach to describe religion as an illusory projection but he did not say why the projection was done at all. In answer Marx takes Feuerbach's criticism further by, typically, introducing the sociological element. We may summarise Marx's criticism of Feuerbach under three headings.

(i) Sociology

Feuerbach spoke about the individual man, but Marx pointed out that man has his existence as a member of a social group. In 1845
he jotted down eleven points in which he summarised his criticisms of Feuerbach. These are the famous Theses on Feuerbach. Feuerbach resolves the religious essence into the human essence. But the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations. Feuerbach, who does not enter upon a criticism of this real essence, is consequently compelled:

1. To abstract from the historical process and to fix the religious sentiment (Gemüt) as something by itself and to presuppose an abstract - isolated - human individual.

2. The human essence, therefore, can with him be comprehended only as a "genus", as an internal, dumb generality which merely naturally unites the many individuals. (Thesis VI)(28)

Two things flow from this. First, it is the political and social conditions of the world which represent real human life. Second, the social existence of man and the class situation in particular are responsible for religious projection. Religion is the escape mechanism of imaginary hopes for fulfilment by the oppressed.

(ii) Practice

The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to change it. (Thesis XI)(29)

The trouble with Feuerbach, according to Marx, was that he never got past theory. It was no good simply meditating on and interpreting the world. An insight was not of much use unless it was used to reshape the world economically and politically. When Marx used the word "critique", as he did a number of works, he meant it to be taken as providing a basis for action; it was an integration of theory and practice. Thus in criticising Feuerbach's metaphysical materialism Marx says,

The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism - that of Feuerbach included - is that the thing (Gegenstand), reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the form of the object (Objekt) or of contemplation (Anschauung), but not as human sensuous activity, practice, not subjectively. Hence it happened that the active side, in contradistinction to
materialism, was developed by idealism - but only abstractly, since, of course, idealism does not know real, sensuous activity as such. Feuerbach wants sensuous objects, really differentiated from the thought-objects, but he does not conceive human activity itself as objective (gegenständliche) activity. Hence, in the Essence of Christianity, he regards the theoretical attitude as the only genuinely human attitude, while practice is conceived and fixed only in its dirty-judical form of appearance. Hence he does not grasp the significance of "revolutionary", of "practical-critical", activity. (Thesis 1)(30)

(iii) Time

Marx strove to be concrete and practical, and related what he said to actual conditions and situations. This is not least a result of his sociological and economic and historical approach to things. Both he and Engels had some harsh criticisms of Feuerbach in this regard. They pointed out that Feuerbach's critique of religion was too general: what he said about religion or man, was taken to refer to any or all time. This can be seen in his major work Das Wesen des Christentums (1841). Given the title and topic one might have expected a careful treatment of the historical origins of Christianity. However a psychological explanation is all that is given, and even this is less than satisfactory. Marx says that in Feuerbach's philosophy "the earthly world ..... appears merely as a phrase". And both he and Engels reproach him for positing "'man' instead of 'real historical man'".(31) Engels, in his 1886 essay Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy, wrote

The only religion which Feuerbach examines seriously is Christianity, the world religion of the Occident, based upon Monotheism. He proves that the Christian god is only a fantastic reflection, a mirror image of man. Now, this god is, however, himself the product of a tedious process of abstraction, the concentrated quintessence of the numerous earlier tribal and national gods. And man, whose image this god is, is therefore also not a real man, but likewise the quintessence of the numerous real men, man in the abstract, therefore himself again a mental image ..... To him history is altogether an uncanny domain in which he feels ill at ease.(32)
Marx’s Atheism

The upshot of all this is that religion was not something to be dismissed because it was theoretically untrue, but to be overcome and done away with. "The criticism of religion is the presupposition of all criticism." Hovering behind all of these critiques is the issue of Marx’s atheism, and whether and to what extent atheism is a constituent part of Marxism. Marxism is not uncommonly spoken of as being a godless thing. But is it inherently or necessarily so? Both Troeltsch and the theologians of liberation were and have been greatly influenced by Marx and would therefore say no. However, before we refer more specifically to them it will be useful to clarify further aspects of Marx’s atheism and the part that it played in his way of seeing things. A kind of parallel could be drawn with Darwinism in nineteenth century England. At that time there was not lacking antagonists of Christianity such as T. Huxley who were quick to use this "new evidence" from the natural sciences in their criticism. O. Chadwick cites from G.K.A. Bell’s biography of Randall Davidson the words of Professor W. Flower of the Natural History Museum complaining to the Dean of Windsor.

He said, 'it is very hard and very unfair that, because Huxley and Tyndall happen to be scientific men of the first order, and happen to be opposed in some sense to the truths of religion, scientific men generally should be ticketed as though they belonged to the same school of thought .... Both Huxley and Tyndall were anti-religious in a dogmatic sense long before they had made any mark in science (my emphasis) and ..... their views on these subjects cannot be therefore, regarded as the legitimate outcome of scientific thought and scientific knowledge'. (33)

Can a similar thing be said about Marx? Though Jewish by birth he is sometimes referred to as an ex-Protestant who abandoned his faith, presumably for one or other or both of the following reasons. K.S. Latourette, referring to the religious revival in the Lower Rhine and Westphalia, remarks,

It is thought provoking that both Karl Marx and his collaborator, Friedrich Engels, were in touch with the awakening in the Lower Rhine. Engels was the son of Jewish manufacturer in the Wupperthal. He was a friend of the sons
of one of the pastors who was of the Pietist circle, and for a time was a Protestant. Presumably his contact with the Pietists led him to react against a religion which he deemed too individualistic to deal with the collective problems brought by the Industrial Revolution. (34)

Alternatively, or as well as, there were his studies and involvement with the Young Hegelians, especially Bruno Bauer. It was really from the radical sceptic Bauer that he learned his atheism; that is, if we can properly refer to him having been a believer. Lash thinks that we would be better to think of him as not really having been a religious believer. If he espoused Christianity in his youth it was a very cerebral thing, and it was no great trouble to make the easy step to the atheism of the Young Hegelians. (35) Thus we do not need to see his critique as being the reaction of an apostate.

This leads me to the question; given what Marx said about historical materialism and religion as alienation, in any discussion with Marxism how much is atheism a negotiable item? From the Christian side there are basically two responses. One sees Marxism as more than a kind of socialism; it is rather a Weltanschauung, with atheism as an important presupposition. As K. Bockmuehl says, "Nobody should under-estimate the philosophical consistency of the Marxist system of thought. The abrogation of its atheism would necessarily imply the abolition of its historical materialism and thus its anthropology, its eschatology and its ethics .... (such a) reduction would have completely altered the substance of Marxism." (36) This is not just a Christian caveat. A lot of Marxists would say, quite firmly, the same kind of thing. Such an attitude begs the question about the centrality of atheism to Marx's system.

Alternatively, we find in Troeltsch one who was greatly influenced, though not uncritically so, by Marx's socio-economic approach to history and did not find his atheism an insuperable barrier. D.E. Miller comments,

One of the most perceptive and illuminating analyses of the theories of Karl Marx available in any language is to be found in Troeltsch's Der Historismus und seine Probleme. Troeltsch's criticism is not simply negative in its force. It is a broadly constructed, analytic study of Marxism which intends to draw out Marx's potential contribution to Western
thought and at the same time to set aside the dogmatic and propagandist elements. Troeltsch's own conception of sociological and historical development was profoundly influenced by Marx."(37)

Theologians of liberation have almost no qualms about claiming Marx as one of their own. Were not many of the ideas that Marx talked about also biblical ideas? He was passionately concerned about the poor; he spoke about freedom; and the idea of alienation is central to his thinking. It is not too difficult to find parallels in the Bible, and N. Lash quotes approvingly R. Tucker's assertion "that there is 'a redemptive idea' at the core of Marx's thought."(38) Marx's atheism, and antipathy to religion, is countered by distinguishing between the scientific and historical/ideological aspects of his thought. His atheism belongs to the latter and is dispensable. The former, on the other hand, consists of those useful analyses and paradigms of social and economic realities that have to be righted. Thus J.L. Segundo can boldly state that he is tired of "trying to forestall every partisan and stupid misunderstanding ... Latin American theology is certainly Marxist (in the sense that) present day social thought ... is profoundly indebted to Marx."(39) P. Lehmann calls this appropriation of Marxism, instrumental Marxism. (40) cf. the use by early Christian theology of Greek philosophy.

Which of these alternatives is the more valid one? This question will be answered in the excursus on Liberation Theology. Before that though we consider two other sociological alternatives, those of Durkheim and Weber.

(c) DURKHEIM: Function

"Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) is, along with Max Weber, one of the two dominating influences on contemporary sociology." (41) Our interest in him is because of his contribution to the sociology of religion. Troeltsch did not engage in dialogue with him probably because he was French and Troeltsch was too busy talking to Weber, who similarly worked in independence of him. But Durkheim was influenced by Comte and Marx, and his sociology of religion marks an advance on their negative attitude. This is not to say he was
a believer: he was agnostic in his personal beliefs but he did recognize that religion provided one of the powerful influences in human history and society. However, to appreciate his understanding of the status and nature of the religious influence we must take note of his relationship to Comte.

"Subsequent sociologists did not escape involvement in the issues raised by Comte's programme for the replacement of religion by positivist sociology."(42) Durkheim was happy to acknowledge his indebtedness to Comte and saw himself as standing within the Comtian tradition, though not in a restrictive way. Comte's influence on Durkheim was very much a formative rather than a continuing one. "Its most important element was precisely the extension of scientific attitude to the study of society."(43) Durkheim was happy to speak of himself as a rationalist rather than a positivist and this is where he distances himself from Comte. Though he was quite firm in his rationalism his thought lacks the dogmatism, and the hubris, of Comte. Sociology might be a science but positivist metaphysics was going too far.

We do not make science into a sort of fetish or idol, whose infallible oracles may only be received on bended knee. We see it merely as a grade of knowledge, but it is the highest grade and there is nothing else beyond it. It is distinguished from the humbler forms of knowledge only by greater clarity and distinctness; but that is sufficient for it to be the ideal to which all self-critical thought aspires.(44)

Durkheim went beyond Comte in recognising that religion played a far more complex role in society than the latter allowed. This insight was stimulated by the work of the Scottish Semitic scholar William Robertson Smith who emphasized that religion was to be explained in terms of its social nature. Durkheim built on this and made it central to his sociology of religion. It was not that religion was simply there in society, illegitimately and without substance, but that it was part of the social pattern and order. The religious ideas of a society and its ultimate social values were intimately interconnected. The function of religion was that of providing the overarching values and normative order which holds society together. At work in this function of religion is Durkheim's notion of the conscience collective, which is "the act of beliefs and sentiments common to the average members of a
single society". These "beliefs and sentiments" are both moral and religious, and they are what the sociologist of religion must take careful note of. "The positivists, and every adherent of a scientific theory of society, began with the axiom religion is a social phenomenon. But Durkheim ... accepts the axiom and yet comes near to inverting it into another axiom, society is a 'religious' phenomenon."(45)

This is not to say that Durkheim was a religious sociologist. Whatever influence his Jewish background and rabbinic forebears, or a devout Roman Catholic teacher in his youth, had on him Durkheim had no room in his life for personal religion. Though he saw religion as providing a social function he also thought that it was on the way to becoming defunct, and looked forward to the functions it had hitherto filled being served by other social institutions. Wilson points out that although Durkheim's thought went far beyond that of Comte, there is here, none the less, and even if expressed in a somewhat different way, Comte's old assumption that sociology itself might become the body of knowledge which informed social organisation and social planning. Sociology was still seen as the exemplification of a self consciously rational interpretation of social life, which was destined, both as part of social evolution and by virtue of the more developed consciousness about social organisation, to displace religion as the source of values.(46)

Wilson has here put his finger on a certain ambivalence in Durkheim. On the one hand he recognised the reality and the complexity of the role of religion in society, but on the other hand there is not the dialogue that one would expect. Durkheim remains locked within his sociological perspective. His emphasis on the social function of religion more or less identifies religion with its social function thus dissolving the identity and autonomy of religion, and theology. He says, "I see in the Divinity only society transfigured and symbolically expressed."(47) One is reminded of R.H. Braithwaite's An Empiricist's View of the Nature of Religious Belief in which he sets out his thesis that indicative theological statements are really disguised moral prescriptive statements.

We may compare Durkheim here with Marx. Marx also held that
religion played a certain functional role in human society. However he saw that religion was temporary and unhealthy for society, and to be rejected and got rid of. Durkheim differs in that he sees religion as being always there and unable to be excised, and that it had a positive value. However, the role and status he ascribes to religion in effect results in a dissolving of the difference between the sacred and the secular in such a way that the latter swallows up the former. Thus, it is another way of stating the familiar either/or dilemma. Comte replaced religion with sociology; Marx rejected religion. Durkheim was more positive in his attitude, but the adverb "more" should be seen, in the long run, as a limiting one. Obviously religion plays some kind of functioning role in society but one is left with the feeling that, in Durkheim's scheme of things, there is missing an external point of reference that is part and parcel of the theological perspective. As with Comte, and Marx, there is missing that certain openness that is necessary for true dialogue.

(d) WEBER: Correlation

(i) Weber's Motivation

Max Weber (1864-1920) is best known as a sociologist of religion. However we make a mistake if we think of him narrowly in these terms. His greatest contribution, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism,* as the name suggests, tries to spell out the connection between Protestantism and capitalism; economics and religion being the two great interests of his thought. But, as with many other nineteenth century European scholars, he did not narrowly confine himself to one discipline. We may probably best think of Weber as being essentially an economist with special interests in history, law and religion as well. The historical interest comes out not just in his historical works but also in his analysis and explanation of twentieth century western civilisation as a post Enlightenment phenomenon. The great question for Weber was, how and why did we get to the stage we are at now? In answering that question, in the light of his interests, he was wrestling with the issue of an economic ethics of culture.

Now this interest in western civilisation was a similar concern of
Troeltsch's. He did not confine himself to theology, or philosophy, but let his mind range over a number of related disciplines and eagerly talked with other thinkers and researchers. More and more he found himself directed to the problems of the theology of culture. "He plunged into sociological studies and learned a new way of seeing things. At the same time, he came under the spell of the overwhelmingly powerful person of Max Weber".(51) They were close friends for a number of years, travelling together to the United States in 1905 where Troeltsch delivered a lecture on "Psychology and Epistemology in the Science of Religion" at the World Fair in St. Louis, and later sharing a house in Heidelberg. Of Weber Troeltsch said later, "For years I experienced in daily contact with him the infinitely stimulating power of this man, and I am aware of owing him a great part of my knowledge and ability."(52)

Of this common interest R. Robertson says, "Troeltsch and Weber had in common the great historical problem of the rise of the prospects for western civilisation, and the particular significance of Protestantism in that historical trajectory".(53) This sentence sums things up fairly neatly excepting that the phrase "the prospects for western civilisation" may perhaps overstate things a little as far as Weber is concerned. Troeltsch certainly was interested in the future for Christianity, or Protestantism: I have indicated above disagreement with Barth over the interpretation of Troeltsch's programme and aim although in his posthumously published Ethics there are indications that Barth was beginning to address the question of civilisation or culture. Weber though does not have such a teleological aspect to his work.

It is at this point that the objectiveness of Weber as a social scientist comes out. As a sociologist he was concerned to say how and why western civilisation had reached its present stage; and as a sociologist of religion to explain the peculiar role of religion in that development. But also as a sociologist of religion he was an agnostic. He manages to maintain that tension that the empathetic researcher of religion finds himself in, which Wilson Religion describes, whatever sympathy he might have felt for religion, or appreciation of its formative role in civilisation. He was agnostic in his personal beliefs too; cf his complaint that he was religiously "tone deaf". His father does not appear to
have had any strong religious beliefs or motivation, but his mother was a pious Calvinist and it may be that her influence is to be seen in Weber's interest in religion.

So here we have a great difference between Troeltsch and Weber. They both, so to speak, addressed the same problem, but they came at it in different ways. Weber confronted it as an economist using social theory: Troeltsch confronted it as a philosopher/theologian using social theory. Of their similarities we should point out the common interest and similar understanding of the role of religion in society, and the use of social theory as a methodology rather than an end. This distinguishes Weber from Comte who used sociology as a Weltanschauung as well. Weber also marks an advance over Durkheim. He too sees religion as having a functional role in society but is tentative about the connection and does not reduce the issue to a question of either/or. He said,

'It is ... not my aim to substitute for a one-sided materialistic interpretation an equally one-sided spiritualistic causal interpretation of culture and of history. .... Each is equally possible, but each, if it does not serve as the preparation, but as the conclusion of an investigation, accomplishes equally little in the interest of historical truth.' (54)

However, Weber worked in independence, or ignorance, of Durkheim. But not so Marx, against whom he should be seen as a kind of counterpoint.

(ii) Marx

There were two sources of tension in Weber. The one which he had as a true sociologist of religion, and the other which was because of the relationship between the roles of religion and economics in society. This latter tension had to do with his reaction to Marx. Both of them were economists interested in the rise of capitalism. (55) He saw society being structured the following way: the economic substructure, or infrastructure as it is sometimes referred to as today, consisting of the economic modes of production is the real basis and determinant of society, and history. "Above" this is the ideological superstructure consisting of legal and political forms of social consciousness and to which religion belongs. Diagrammatically it might be
It is important to note that Marx does not go into the nature of the correspondence between infrastructure and superstructure.

On the other hand, Weber was primarily an economist who used sociology of religion to explain the rise of capitalism. Part of his aim in doing this was to refute Marx's historical materialism. He did this by investigating the correspondence between infrastructure and superstructure. Now Marx had inverted Hegel's idealism but Weber did not, so to speak, simply invert Marx's (historical) materialism. Rather he saw both economic infrastructure and religion playing a reciprocal role in influencing one another, as in The Protestant Ethic.

Karl Lowith points out that Weber's critique of Marx was not intended to be a positive critique of the materialist conception of history, in the sense that it opposes to it a spiritualist approach; rather, it aspires to be positive by rejecting, in a fundamental way, every kind of definitive deduction, and putting in its place a 'concrete' historical analysis of the mutual determination of all the factors of historical reality, thus cutting the ground from under any one-sided formulation of either a spiritualist or materialist metaphysics of history. (56)

In a similar vein Robertson comments,
In some respects Weber's sociology of religion was a synthesis of Hegelian ideas concerning the entry of 'spiritual' matters into 'worldly' history and Marxian ideas concerning the impact of religion on economic-class interests and structures. (57)

Thus his tension was not 'something to be resolved but a true mediation attempting to hold together different perspectives. Any mediation is going to be unsatisfactory for those who trade in certainties; but certainties, if they are to be had in this world, have to do with results. Weber though, was here dealing with a methodology, and it is to his methodology, as a sociologist of religion that we now turn.
(iii) Methodology

The twentieth century has seen a sociological approach to religion that is peculiarly German. The rise of and influence of the social sciences have contributed to this, but there is also the powerful, formative influence of the Reformation. It was Weber more than anyone else who directed attention to this. Marx and Engels had written socio-economic interpretations of, (aspects of) the Reformation but these interpretations had a one sidedness about them: they did not do full justice to the religious perspective. It was Weber's contention that religious motives unleashed by the Reformation were determinative for the character of twentieth century western capitalism. There used to be in the nineteenth century a fairly general consensus that modern western civilisation with its secularism is an outgrowth of the Reformation; that view has been repeated in recent years by the sociologist Peter Berger. "'Protestantism cut the umbilical cord between heaven and earth ...' The argument is that the Reformation rested the sacred upon the Bible alone, instead of a breadth of sacramental universe. Then it only needed historical criticism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to shake the sacredness of the Bible, and we had arrived at the 'disenchantment of the world'."

Berger found the origins for this line of thought in Weber's Protestant Ethic. I am not sure that this line of reasoning is altogether obvious; nor that this was Weber's intention or result. And, in any case, Troeltsch more or less effectively demolished that old canon in 1906. The point in all this is that, as Weber tells it, the Reformation did not inaugurate a decline and fall of the sacred. Rather, things were much more complex.

But what did Weber say? First, he made special reference to Luther. A major characteristic of mediaeval Catholicism was the domination of the secular (if it existed) by the sacred. The spiritual was seen as being somehow more real and important than the material. One of the things Luther did was to break down this idea by emphasizing that the world was a fit place for human endeavour: "religious" activity was not necessarily inherently superior to "worldly" activity. He insisted that the idea of a 'calling' (bereuf) was just as valid for a worldly job or pursuit. And in place of other worldly mysticism he advocated a kind of
this worldly mysticism whereby one's non-religious pursuits were an outworking of one's faith. This idea was developed particularly by the Puritans who had a very "religious" attitude towards their worldly pursuits. This perhaps more than anything else provided the dynamic of the spirit of Protestantism.

However, there was a negative aspect to all this; the doctrine of the "two kingdoms" division between the sacred and the secular. A distinction was drawn between the faith of the individual and (secular) society. Weber particularly noted this individualistic - mystical element in Luther. It was not just the distinction that was the problem but the independence of each and the lack of mediation or interaction between them. This became part of Lutheran orthodoxy and it was Weber's strong conviction that the early twentieth century was characterised, at least in the West, by a cleavage between the realm of personal values ..... and secular realms (and that this) paralleled the thinking of some Lutherans of his own time. However, for Weber this was a highly problematic circumstance in which he as a social-scientist and man of public affairs felt concerned about both sides of the coin, this resulting in Weber's later work in attempts to talk increasingly about the ways in which individuals could/should mediate between these realms, at the same time doing justice to the internal principles of operation of each.(59)

However, Luther and Lutheran orthodoxy was not the only strand of Protestant thought stemming from the Reformation. There was, a second, that of Calvin. Here Weber found something more positive, for Calvin eschewed the "two kingdoms" doctrine making the entire area of worldly affairs suitable for religious action. Man could serve God in the world: he could use mammon in the service of God.

There are three ideas that come together here. There is Luther's idea of calling which Calvin picks up and develops. There is the doctrine of predestination which Weber saw as providing powerful psychological stimulus to the development of capitalism. It worked something like this: naturally enough one wanted to know if one was a member of the elect, therefore effort and diligence were made to serve God in the world. This was not just a matter of personal interest but was a means of expressing the
belief that men should work for the greater glory of God. The consequence of this was an ethic of commitment to one's worldly calling. Part of this was the third idea, that of worldly asceticism. In a mediaeval age ascetic tendencies and energies were directed in an other worldly direction. Calvinism redirected these to worldly endeavours. The practical result of this religious, psychological motivation according to Weber was prosperity and the accumulation of capital. His Protestant Ethic found a direct correlation between successful capitalist ventures and a Calvinist Protestant background. Whatever decision will finally be made on the Protestant Ethic, Calvinism was certainly more amenable to providing an interaction between religious beliefs and secular society than the politically passive Lutheranism.

The third stream of Protestantism stemming from the Reformation was the Anabaptist movement. Ecclesiologically, and sacramentally, more left wing than Lutheranism, or Calvinism, it is often referred to as the Radical Reformation, and found itself persecuted by both Catholics and Protestants. Numerically much smaller than the mainstream Protestant churches it has traditionally tended to be somewhat overlooked, although in recent decades Reformation historians have been devoting a good deal more attention to it. It not only has its interest for the historian but also for the sociologist. Because of its smaller numbers and individualism, the movement did not have or generate the kind of social and political impact that Lutheranism and Calvinism did. But it did comprise groups of people who saw themselves as different from the rest of society, and therefore offering an alternative model of society. Its ecclesiology also implied a different social and political attitude to, for example, Lutheranism with its divine ordination of the status quo.

From his study of the Radical Reformation Weber delineated and developed ideas of structure and authority. The structure of the Anabaptists sects was different to that of the other Protestant Churches and so Weber made the important distinction between church and sect.(60) The church type belonged to the Catholic idea which saw church and society as being more or less coterminous. One did not so much become a member of the church, rather one was born into it. Church and state were intimately connected, and tried to dominate each other. The sect on the
other hand was a voluntary association of free members: the individualism of the members being balanced by the idea of commitment to the group. As a voluntary association the sect saw itself as being set over against society at large - "in the world but not of it" - and emphasised the separation of church and state. It can be seen from a brief description of the characteristics of the sect that there was inherent in its organisation and principles certain sociological and political implications.

There are three points to add at this juncture. (1) Weber, in delineating his typology, posited his models as ideal types; that is, as abstractions, a church might display characteristics of a sect, and vice versa. (ii) They were meant as working models rather than ends in themselves. (iii) The church/sect typology was to prove very useful to Troeltsch - he took over and developed it. It also provides useful models when discussing Liberation Theology.

The Reformation threw into high relief the question of authority. (61) The Catholic Church could point to an unbroken line of tradition. The Protestant churches had to justify themselves by pointing to different "marks" of the true church, and, as P. Avis puts it, "define the circumference". Weber brought the sociologist's perspective to the study and described what he called the routinisation of charisma in three stages. First, authority was recognised or vested in the charismatic leader, and his followers. (62) Second, after the leader and his followers died authority devolved into the offices and structures (of the Church). The third stage was when authority became legal in being enshrined in laws. This was what happened with the Catholic Church. It located authority not only in the scriptures but also in the later traditions which were held to be authoritative too. Luther and Calvin were not unaware of the presence and importance of tradition but referred back to the scriptures as authoritative and interacted with them with the aim of reforming the church.

The Anabaptists though aimed at restitutio rather than reformatio. They went back to the primitive church of the New Testament and found a pattern for doctrine and organisation. Their charge against Luther and Zwingli was of tearing down the old house but erecting nothing better in its place. However their primitivism
was misplaced. Apart from being built on a myth it soon found the need to "define the circumference". Enthusiasm "soon gave way to 
a formalised and legalistic programme claiming the authority of 
the New Testament and stressing exclusivism and discipline."(63) This exclusivism and discipline are some of the marks of the 
Anabaptist movement. It is not too difficult to see in the 
Anabaptist movement certain characteristics of Liberation 
Theology, and we will consider these in the excursus below. For 
the moment though I simply raise the point of the need for ongoing 
hermeneutic. One of the main criticisms to be leveled against the 
sects is the way that their hermeneutic was or quickly became 
wooden and stultified.

In view of the theme of this essay certain things emerge from the 
study of sociology. They are,

(i) What model of the Church do we operate with?
(ii) What is the attitude of the church to society?
(iii) The question of authority.
(iv) The future.
3.3 THE SOCIAL TEACHING

(a) Introduction

The esteemed Yale professor of theology and ethics, H. Richard Niebuhr wrote his Ph.D. dissertation on Troeltsch in 1924. His interest in him was to continue for the rest of his life, and he was glad to acknowledge the influence of Troeltsch on his own thought and work.

I am most conscious of my debt to that theologian and historian who was occupied throughout his life by the problem of church and culture - Ernst Troeltsch. The present book in one sense undertakes to do no more than to supplement and in part to correct his work on The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches. Troeltsch has taught me to respect the multiformity and individuality of men and movements in Christian history, to be loath to force this rich variety into prefashioned, conceptual molds, and yet to seek logos in mythos, reason in history, essence in existence. He has helped me to accept and to profit by the acceptance of the relativity not only of historical objects but, more, of the historical subject, the observer and interpreter.(64)

These words are a fair indication of Troeltsch’s aims, and, more than that, they also indicate his relevance for the Church outside of university and seminary walls. Troeltsch was a “practical” theologian/philosopher in that he consciously addressed himself to the situation and the problematic of the Church’s existence in the modern world. His answer, as Niebuhr’s words indicate, was not a simple one. Indeed, if it can be called an answer at all; for, as has been one of the arguments running through this essay, it was not so much his results as his methodology which is of continuing importance. It is in the SUB that his concerns and methodology are ventilated at greatest length. In his Introduction to the University of Chicago reprint Niebuhr points out that

The problems with which Troeltsch the historian, theologian, churchman, and statesman, undertook to deal theoretically and practically have not changed greatly since this book was first published. They have rather increased in intensity. Theology, to be sure, especially in Europe, has turned away from these problems; and with the dominance of greater
interest on its part in the absolute rather than relative character of Christianity, in the church's internal life rather than in its relations to the culture, Troeltsch the theologian passed into eclipse. There are signs, however, that the eclipse is passing and that in theology as well as in the sociology of religion and in history Troeltsch's methods and convictions will again become effective. (65)

The aim of this section is to draw out those aspects of the ST that make it of abiding worth. It will fall into three parts. After these words of introduction, the context of the ST together with how it came to be written and its nature, will be set out under the heading of "The Agenda". The third sub-section will deal with the work itself. This will be done not by an exhaustive examination of the contents and whatever conclusions are drawn, but by highlighting Troeltsch's methodology; in particular certain key ideas/concepts which he developed. These will be considered as tools to work with, whether to interpret history or the present situation, or as suggestions for the future way of doing theology. Then will follow an excursus which will look at liberation theology in the light of Troeltsch's methodology. The "conclusion" will gather things together, not so much as a summary of results but as a suggestion of how future theological work should be done. Troeltsch's work was unfinished but certain presuppositions may be distilled which, while perhaps not giving a basis for certainty, are appropriate for an ongoing hermeneutic which a historicised and sociological world might find useful.

(b) The Agenda

An agenda is a list of things to be done, of business to be considered. In every age the Church has had an agenda: and the agenda involved in one way or another the task of explaining/justifying God in terms amenable to prevailing patterns of thought. For example, in the middle ages the theologians developed the arguments of natural theology to give reasons for faith. In the twentieth century "political theology takes the place of natural theology in the older forms of Christian theology. The theodicy question has lost its old cosmological form. Today the theodicy question of evil and suffering has become a political question." (66) The modern agenda then is
created by the predicament of man: it is, so to speak, set by the
world and presented to the Church. But what is this modern
predicament, and what are the items on the agenda?

In the early part of the twentieth century it seemed to many that
the contemporary situation put a question mark against the nature
and direction of western civilisation. For the Church the issue
was one of survival and relevance. The fact of the decline of the
influence of the Church made more difficult the task of working at
a social ethic for a culture that no longer subscribed to its
supernatural tenets. Now there was more to this than simply
secularisation having its way. It should be borne in mind that
the secularist was also in somewhat of a dilemma. His world was
changing too, and in different ways perturbation was expressed
over the need for an ethic and a value system that would give
cohesion to society. Gilbert Murray referred to a "failure of
nerve" which characterised the breakdown of rationality and order
in the Hellenistic world. (67) It might be going a bit far to use
such language to describe early twentieth century Europe, but
there was a disquiet in the air. This can be seen in the
interpretations of man and his society which make up the modern
agenda.

We should remember that the Enlightenment laid stress on
rationality and order; and when this kind of thinking is applied
to human existence, whether in individual or societal form, it is
wont to encourage a certain security. This kind of attitude had
its heyday in the nineteenth century, more especially when it was
allied with the notion of evolution or progress. Then, when
change was happening so quickly, the future seemed to hold out so
much promise. However, change is not the same as orderly
progress. Everything concerning man and his world was much more
complex. Interpretations were put forward which, in effect, were
protests against the stress on rationality and order, with their
concomitant security and progress/optimism.

Rationality and Order

Early in his career Friedrich Nietzsche raised a prophetic voice
with his delineation of the nature of human existence. In his
first book, Die Geburt der Tragödie (The Birth of Tragedy) he
described the Greeks' genius of measure, restraint and harmony,
which he called the "Apollonian". But, he argued, due notice must be taken of the "Dionysian": that is, the irrational passions that had to be harnessed to make Greek literature possible. His argument was that tragedy was born when the two were held together, but killed by rationalism. The point in this is that the Dionysian element is there in man and is determinative for his behaviour. In man's existence not everything is according to reason and order.

Together with this recognition of the irrational part of man's make up was his atheism: or rather, his pointing out the practical atheism of European man, and its implications. This is vividly portrayed in his parable of the madman who accuses the people, and himself of killing God. (68) This death of God is not a light thing, for if God is not, then everything is permitted. All was not necessarily well and people were fooling themselves because they did not realise that they had killed God nor what this meant. Without the authority of an external point of reference the status of values and morals as traditionally accepted in an ecclesiastical civilisation suddenly seemed precarious. Nietzsche said forthrightly, "There are no moral phenomena at all, only a moral interpretation of phenomena ..." (69). What is important here is not just Nietzsche's honesty and perspicacity but his drawing out of the consequences. His prognosis for European civilisation was one of decline and consciousness of purposelessness that would lead to nihilism. The realisation of all this was a necessary prelude for man to transcend his predicament. it.

This aspect of his thought does not interest us here: what is of interest is his description of the abyss which had opened up with the death of God.

Whether are we moving now? Away from all suns? Are we not perpetually falling? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there any up or down left? Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? Has it not become colder? Is more and more night not coming on all the time? Must not lanterns be lit in the morning? Do we not hear anything yet of the noise of the gravediggers who are burying God? Do we not smell anything yet of God's decomposition? - gods, too, decompose. God is dead. God remains dead. And we have
killed him. How shall we, the murderers of all murderers, console ourselves? That which was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet possessed has bled to death under our knives - who will wipe this blood off us? With what water could we purify ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we need to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we not ourselves become gods simply to seem worthy of it? (70)

"What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we need to invent?" Can we hear echoes of Comte? More than that, Nietzsche sees that it is not enough to kill God: the religious dimension is part of man's make up, he cannot live alone in the world. He also sees the failure of the Church. "We Europeans find ourselves viewing a tremendous world of ruins ... the Church is this City of Destruction: we behold the religious community of Christendom shaken to its deepest foundations - belief in God has been overturned, belief in the Christian ascetic ideal is even now fighting its last breath." (71)

Nietzsche's was a lone, prophetic, somewhat extravagant voice, and before his time. He realised this. "Here the madman fell silent and again regarded his listeners; and they, too, were silent and stared at hymn in astonishment. At last he threw his lantern to the ground and it broke and went out. "I came too early," he said then; "My time has not yet come!"(72)

Security

The Gay Science was published in 1882, the same year that Durkheim passed the last competitive examination of the Ecole Normale Superieure in Paris and began his teaching career. Five years later he was appointed lecturer in social philosophy at the University of Bordeaux. From his perspective as a sociologist Durkheim added another item to the agenda with his notion of anomie. This concept could be used of an individual or a group: it described a situation in which norms of behaviour are absent or unclear or in conflict. A number of writers have found it a useful concept to apply to individuals. In such a case it describes a person who lacks standards and a sense of belonging and obligation, and accordingly rejects social bonds. This leads to a sense of futility and disorientation which, as Durkheim
pointed out in his important work *Suicide*, can be a major factor in one type of suicide. This feeling or condition was foreshadowed by Nietzsche.

Durkheim though, was more interested in the individual in society; and it is in the context of the societal aspects and implications of *anomie* that we should understand his sociological works. Durkheim brought the perspective of a sociologist to the agenda facing the Church. I indicated above that his sociology of religion recognised the cohesive role or function that religion played in society. In this he was really smuggling in a value system which, strictly speaking, as a social scientist he should have eschewed. Not that he did not want to: it was just that some such thing was needed to hold society together. If the existence of *anomie* was something of an indictment against the Church it was also an admission of the failure of secular man. He could not rest secure in his finitude.

**Optimism**

To dilate on the prospects for the future of western civilisation would have exceeded Durkheim’s brief as a sociologist. It was not so with the philosopher Oswald Spengler. If Nietzsche concentrated on man, and Durkheim on man in society, Spengler interpreted the modern situation on a much larger canvas. His two volume work *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (The Decline of the West) was a study in the philosophy of history, which also made a major contribution to social theory. It was published in the (northern) summer of 1918 shortly before the end of the First World War. It seemed to fit the mood of the times and made a great impact. Spengler had a cyclical view of history and said that human societies pass through life cycles of growth and decay like any organism. He took the distinction between "culture" and "civilisation" from Nietzsche and applied it to history. The growth or creative stage of a society he designated as its period of "culture". The later decadent phase, which he labelled as "civilisation", came about with urbanisation. For western society the nineteenth century was the time of "civilisation" and, as the title of his work suggests, time was running out.(73)

Now in nature organisms can regenerate themselves; and some historians and philosophers of history have felt that this is the
case too with the history of societies, e.g. Arnold Toynbee. But Spengler said that the spirit of a culture cannot be passed on.

One misses in these interpretations of human existence a sense of confidence that characterised, say, the Enlightenment thinkers. To be sure Nietzsche advocated a way forward with his will to power - man must create his own values: and Durkheim, for all his functionalism, looked forward to sociology fulfilling the roles previously fulfilled by religion. But neither can be said to carry conviction. It all boils down to a lack of optimism. The way ahead for European civilisation was not clear. What was needed was a recovery of optimism. Such an optimism would only come when order and security were restored/created in men's souls. This was the challenge facing the church: it had to come up with a social ethic that would meet the needs of modern civilisation.

This was the agenda and situation confronting Troeltsch. Though it was not all doom and gloom. In spite of Nietzsche's lament "What are these churches now if they are not the tombs and sepulchres of God?" In spite of the secularisation of the age and the dissolution of what he called ecclesiastical civilisation Troeltsch could still refer to the way that "the old Churches, their world view and their ethics have no longer any firm basis, however strongly the indestructible religious yearning and the need for a fixed point of support make men cling to the remnants of the ancient ecclesiastical world, which still contain no inconsiderable influence." (74) But change was needed to meet the new situation. The Church had to be prepared to organise in such a way as to direct itself towards social problems. "Consequently in the Social Teaching, he had issued a demand for an ethic which would accept the changing world and still penetrate and mold it, but had countered with the question 'where do we find a really penetrating social ethic?'" (75)

As noted above, Troeltsch was primarily a historian, or, more correctly a philosopher of history: and it was as such that he addressed the problem. The ST is, to use his own words, "a history of the ecclesiastical culture of Christianity, a full parallel to Harnack's History of Dogma, in which all religious, dogmatic, and theological factors were seen as the basis of social ethical effects or as the reflection or retroaction of social conditions." (75a) The need to tell and hear stories seems to be
inherently part of the make up of man. The telling of a story though does not come unsolicited or without some kind of prompting. The prompting, or catalyst, which provoked the ST was a book by M. von Nathusius, The Social Responsibility of the Evangelical Church. Troeltsch was asked to review it. He did not think much of it, but it made him acutely aware of his own and general ignorance of the social aspects of religion. The review grew into a work of almost 1,000 pages.

In telling the story of the social history of Christianity Troeltsch was doing something which had not really been done before. Church history had hitherto tended to either relate the institutional history of the church, or its intellectual history. But Troeltsch combined both of these with the insights and analyses of social theory; and, we might add, law and ethics. (76) A reminder that he was a synthetic thinker rather than an analytic thinker. By doing this he was bringing to light the importance of the cultural context and interpreting Christianity in a new way. This not only allowed the Church of his day to see its history in a new perspective, it also gave a greater insight into its present situation and challenge. Troeltsch said,

I found that the more I studied modern problems the more I found that the balance leaned to the side of ethics. If Christianity is first and foremost a matter of practice, then its main problems lie in the sphere of practical life, and it is from this realm that the most complicated difficulties and contrasts arise in opposition to the world of Christian life. Particularly in relation to social ethics the ethics of the churches is out of date. (77)

This was the way forward, to a recovery of optimism, as Troeltsch saw it. It was a question of relevance. The Church's mission in the twentieth century was not an intellectual defence of theology as in the middle ages, but the justifying of religion by providing a social ethic. It was not intellectual atheism that was the problem but practical atheism: and the answer was not to be an intellectual (justification of) Christianity, but a practical Christianity. What then did Troeltsch suggest?
(c) **Methodology**

The single answer to the just stated question is that Troeltsch does not give us a result but a methodology. Moreover, a methodology which opens up all sorts of interesting possibilities for exploring the Church's relationship to society, and how to do theology in a secular age. It is essentially a way of doing history that not only shed new light on the history of the Church so far, but is also instructive and illuminating when used to interpret the Church's present situation.

When referring to a methodology we need, first, to be clear as to what it is. In Troeltsch's case it involved using the insights of social theory, and economics, to explain the history of the Church. The Church has never inhabited a world all by itself, and the interplay and overlap of different universes of discourse gives a truer if more complex picture of its past. If it is complained that this new perspective sounds like an exercise in reductionism then the response must be that just as life cannot be lived in isolation from worldly ("non-religious") factors neither can church history, or theology. *Heilsgeschichte* has always been part of *Weltgeschichte*, and to treat the former in isolation from the latter is to invite the question, at what point does what you say become more than mere assertion? What is the cash value of your statements? The problem really boils down to the familiar secular/sacred dichotomy. It is often the charge of the believer that the secularist has imported this dichotomy into and made it fundamental to his *Weltanschauung*; to the detriment of the sacred. Thus he denies the (role of the) religious/spiritual dimension. But might not the same charge be laid against the believer? That is, when he denies the influence and formative role of secular disciplines on the sacred. Troeltsch would not dismiss one at the expense of the other. His methodology advocated what we might call a "global perspective". His way of doing history involved both an openness to past, present and future, and an openness of relationships to the other disciplines of the life of man. Perhaps a kind of analogy might be drawn with the spirituality of the Fathers. They did not see spirituality as being different from doctrine, or even philosophy.

Second, **can we safely use it?** That is, is the methodology appropriate to the material that it arranges and interprets?
Again, with regard to Troeltsch’s methodology this is pre-
eminently the case. Whatever defects the ST might have in terms
of conclusive results or definitive interpretations of particular
instances or periods, no one can gainsay his demonstration of the
interaction of the Church with society in every phase of its
existence. Not only has the relationship between Church and
society been there but a social ethic has had to be worked out or
propounded. This was so even in NT times: indeed, the
sociological interpretation of (parts of) the NT has become quite
a cottage industry among some Neutestamentlers. (78) However, it
must be added that, generally speaking, church historians have yet
to apply themselves to using Troeltsch’s insights and methodology
to greater effect.

Third, how axiomatic should a methodology be? By that I mean,
should a methodology be rigidly applied all the time, in every
circumstance? The answer to such a question must be no, for then
a methodology would take on the nature of a Weltanschauung and
cease to be a hermeneutical tool. This is the danger, or failing,
of the Marxist methodology. It has proved to be of undeniable
value in giving scholars a useful model for social analysis. Its
usefulness though is vitiated somewhat by ruling out of court from
the beginning alternative analyses and non-economic factors. Its
analysis depends very much of a situation of political oppression
and economic depression. If such is not the case then it maybe
fairly asked if the Marxist methodology is the most appropriate.
Such a caveat could not be laid against Troeltsch. He was much
influenced by Marx but also criticised him. Instead of an
economic infrastructure determining the superstructure he insisted
upon a dialectical interrelationship. This allows for a
flexibility and openness in his methodology that prevents it from
hardening into a kind of determinism the way that Marx’s does. It
can, of course, be argued that the religious or spiritual
dimension that Troeltsch gives equal play to, falls short of
proof. This is perfectly true. By the same token though it
remains a factor which falls short of disproof. Until it is,
finally, ruled out of court it should remain in contention as a
possibility. It is not an axiom, or set of axioms, that Troeltsch
has given us but a modus operandi.

This is the great value of the ST. It is not so much the results,
even though he has, using his new perspective, given us a
fascinating new portrait of the history of the Church, but its suggestiveness.

(i) Results and Suggestions

In the St Troeltsch reviewed the social history of the Church. It was not a complete social history in that he did not refer to the Orthodox or Anglican traditions, and he stopped at the eighteenth century. But it was still a vast work, and a salutary reminder that social theology - which some are apt to think of as a fairly recent phenomenon - has been part of the Church's existence from the beginning. There never was a time when the question of the Church's relationship to the state or society was not part of the theological agenda. Even in New Testament times, though the nascent Church was independent of direct influences from social movements of late antiquity and the Imperial period, the foundations were laid for subsequent interaction between church and society. It is worthwhile adding in passing that a social ethic was not a dominant concern of the New Testament writers. What concerned them far more was the relationship with Judaism, and the various New Testament books evidence different stages of self awareness. The main passages which touch on the question of a social ethic, such as Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2 are not central to the thought of Paul or the New Testament. (79) The ethic of state loyalty these two passages inculcate needs to be read in the light of a careful interpretation of their respective situations. To apply this woodenly to every situation, which is the danger of the Lutheran doctrine of the two kingdoms, is to display a hermeneutical naivete, if not a political opportunism. Nevertheless, such texts are indications that as time passed the Church would need to define itself vis-a-vis the state rather than Israel.

This is an important point which needs to be spelt out a bit further. Such a development can be clearly perceived in the canonical epistles of the New Testament. Though the answers and advice and teaching given in them are consciously based on theological principles, they were all occasional writings addressed to concrete situations: they were not and ought not be read as pieces of abstract theology. When approached in this way certain characteristics stand out. As just mentioned, there was
the growing consciousness of the Church as an entity distinct from Judaism, and from society.(80) From the sub-apostolic age onwards though the Church was to find itself more concerned with the question of adapting to society. The issue of the Church's distinctiveness became more and more important. In the first few centuries it is probably better to speak of foundations being laid. The attitudes to social values and institutions of society were still being developed. The status of the Church was particularly problematic as it was still not a religio licita.(81)

As the Church moved beyond its formative years into the stage of Mediaeval Catholicism (Volume I chapter II) its relationship with society and the state changed. It was no longer a matter of separation or a state within a state. Rather the relationship became more one of interaction and symbiosis. Or, to use Troeltsch's useful model, it changed from a sect type existence to a church type existence. This is oversimplifying things somewhat, but it is a handy way to view to process at a glance. After Constantine when Christianity not only became a religio licita but the state religion as well, the notion of a Christian Europe became dominant. Church and society were so intertwined as to be to all intents and purposes the same thing: society was a religious phenomenon, the Church was a social phenomenon. To be sure there was opposition to this idea, as witnessed to by the sect movements such as the Waldensians, Franciscans, Hussites, Lollards etc. which objected to the compromise of the Church. But by and large it was the development of the church type which characterised the mediaeval period, and which multiform development Troeltsch traces in the second half of the first volume.

In volume two he traced this development into its Protestant phase. Indeed, one of the things that comes out of his work is that Reformation and post-Reformation church history must reckon with the social dimension. It is all very well to say that the Reformation was a religious phenomenon. It was, moreover, as Troeltsch pointed out, a mediaeval religious phenomenon in that the problems it addressed were mediaeval ones. However, for all its preoccupation with doctrine and religious matters the question of the relationship of the Church to society and the state was far from being a peripheral issue. It was not just that Troeltsch pointed out an aspect of the history of the Church but that he
gave a whole new perspective. This perspective was equally true for each of the three forms of the Reformation: Lutheran, Calvinist, and Anabaptist. Troeltsch explained how each of these forms developed and operated its own particular model of itself in relation to the world. Social theory was used as a hermeneutic to explain the (social nature of the) Church's existence, and thereby to emphasize the problematic and need for a social ethic.

Troeltsch's scope was vast, even with what he left out. He may be, and has been, criticised at different points by specialists in this or that particular area. But his achievement remains. One can only express astonishment at what he accomplished. He brought to the task a wealth of erudition, and a perception and power of synthesis that may not be surpassed given the twentieth century preoccupation with specialisation. The writing of church history will never be the same again. In his "Conclusion" he summarises the results of his survey viz.

Developments in Christian social doctrine since the eighteenth century.

Results:

(i) The three chief types of the sociological development of the Christian idea.
(ii) Dogma and theology conditioned by sociological factors.
(iii) Conception of Truth and Religious Toleration.
(iv) History of the development of the Christian ethic.
(v) Significance of the Marxist method for Theology.
(vi) The permanent ethical content of Christianity.
(vii) The most suitable form of organization for Christian religious life at the present time.
(viii) Christianity and the modern social problem.

I wonder though if "Conclusion" is the correct heading for these final pages. I wonder if another heading such as "Prospects" or "Where Do We Go From Here?" might not be more appropriate. For what stands out in both this short final section and the whole of the preceding two volumes, is not just the extra factors that are brought into consideration but the interaction between the sacred and the secular. There have been, and are, and no doubt will
continue to be, borrowings and influence on both sides.

This, I think, is the key to understanding Troeltsch's contribution. On the one hand there is a certain pessimism. He takes the secularisation of the modern (western) world with full seriousness. We may quote him at length:

With the nineteenth century Church History entered upon a new phase of existence. As a result of the dissolution of the unity of civilisation controlled by a State Church, combined with the development of the independence of modern thought, it has since then no longer possessed a fixed and objective ideal of unity. The result has been that the social philosophy of the Christian community has also suffered an undeniable disintegration ... The relation between Church and State has been weakened, and in some cases entirely severed. (82)

But this is not the whole of Troeltsch. It must be balanced by statements such as,

All these results are of an historical nature. The question, however, naturally arises: Does an extended enquiry of this kind about the Christian world of life and thought really yield nothing more than historical light on the past and on its influence upon the present? Does it not also teach something lasting and eternal about the content of the Christian social Ethos, which might serve as a guiding star for the present and the future, something which would aid us not merely to understand but also to transform the situation .... The Christian ethos gives to all social life and aspiration a goal which lies far beyond all the relativities of this earthly life, compared with which, indeed, everything else represents merely approximate values. (83)

(ii) Ideology and Conversations

The ST made a great contribution to both (church) history and social theory. Troeltsch was essentially a historian who used social theory to interpret the past and the present. In doing so he was working in conscious counterpoint to the two most obvious options open to him for interpreting the past and the present; namely, the Marxian and orthodox Christian views. Both of these
he found inadequate.

First Marx's theory of history. I have indicated above the Marxian understanding that history is determined by economic modes of production; and that this goes together with Marx's analysis of society into class structures. It is pertinent to add that Marx's theory of history was very much a teleological one. He saw history as being made up of different periods. At a certain point the mode of production outpaces changes in the political-legal structure and a time of revolution ensues. The present capitalist or bourgeois stage was marked by class conflict and would be succeeded by the revolution of, and success of, the proletariat. One can clearly see in his schema the ideas of progress and inevitability. This latter notion of inevitability has given rise to some criticism. It is one thing to be teleologically inclined, but if the future is seen as being so determined as to be set in concrete then questions must be asked.

Sir Karl Popper is one who has levelled trenchant criticism at the Marxist theory of history in his *The Poverty of Historicism* and *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. (See above p.18) Popper's target was that form of historicism which reckons that the future can be predicted on the basis of the course of past events, i.e. a kind of historical positivism. Popper saw Marxism as espousing such an idea.

Here though we should draw a distinction between Marx's thought (i.e. what is Marxian), and its later development by disciples (i.e. what is Marxist). With regard to Marx himself there is a certain determinism present in his historical thought. In his historical materialism there is an unfolding of images which in turn generate new images, but this is not necessarily prestated or predictable in toto. The definite ideas are not there. Later Marxists e.g. Kautsky, Habermas et.al. took Marx's ideas and developed them and filled in much more detail; thereby making Marxism much more determined than Marx himself was. If we might put it paradoxically, in Marx we find an open-ended determinism: in Marxism a much more closed determinism.

Not infrequently the sins of later Marxism are ascribed to Marx himself. Thus D. Bebbington refers to I. Berlin saying that in "Marx's thought the pattern of human history is determined
independently of human agency. Forces that are 'impersonal and irresistible' govern the world." Bebbington adds that Marx's dictum "'the natural laws of capitalist production' are 'working with iron necessity towards inevitable results'" is often quoted to this effect. He goes on though to point out that Marx was using a popular style, and that particular passage in *Capital* should not be treated with expository precision. Similarly with Marx's use of the word "laws". He cannot mean that laws inexorably govern the affairs of men ... laws for Marx can be equated with "tendencies" ... A Marxian law is no more than a description of the way in which human possibilities happen to have worked out. Marx did not deviate from his initial premise that man, not fate or law, is the maker of history."(84)

However, this is not to rehabilitate Marx completely. Even if his determinism is somewhat more open-ended than is generally allowed he is still governed by his ideological presuppositions, or paradigm. Compared with Troeltsch, one misses the interaction of ideas, the two way borrowing and influence between infrastructure and superstructure. In thinking of them both as exegetes of human society, both past and present, in Troeltsch we can see a conversation taking place with the material/evidence/records as the different perspectives are allowed to have their say. There is no conversation in Marx, but rather an ideological paradigm.

Second, the orthodox theory of history. By "orthodox" here I mean the orthodox Protestantism that insisted on supranatural causes determining the course of history. Troeltsch's caveat with this approach generally was that it disregarded other causes. It was not that he indulged in a kind of reductionism but that his approach underlined the fact that things historical were far more complex than the orthodox were prepared to allow. Also especially, that *Heilsgeschichte* was part and parcel of *Weltgeschichte*. Many orthodox theologians and biblical scholars wrote as though the events of *Heilsgeschichte* belonged to some kind of Platonic sphere and were exempt from normal historico-critical methods of enquiry. History was determined not by an economic ideology but by Providence. In its way the orthodox operated with a theory of history that was just as insular and doctrinaire as Marx's. And, as with Marx, one misses a conversation with the past, and the present. (85) The values and insights of both options were vitiates somewhat by their
ideological commitments which would not allow for modification.

Troeltsch's approach/methodology on the other hand did not see things in terms of an either/or. Nor, in a way, of a both/and: for both options tend to be mutually exclusive and cancel each other out. Instead we have what I referred to above as a global perspective. In the conversation he engages in there is an inclusiveness. That is, the overlap and interplay and relationships between disciplines. This global perspective involves also an openness. Because it is dealing with society in a historical framework it takes full cognisance of the future as well as the past and present. And there is no room here for determinism or absolutes of his words from the end of his lecture "The Common Spirit":

... With these complex forces it is possible to dam and control the stream of life. But every such control is always, by reason of this complexity, a struggle; it is ever changing.

The task of damming and controlling is therefore essentially incapable of completion and essentially mending; and yet it is always soluble and practicable in each new case. A radical and absolute solution does not exist; there are only working, partial, synthetically uniting solutions. Yet the stream of life is always surging upward and onward. History within itself cannot be transcended, and knows of no salvation except in the form of devout anticipations of the Hereafter .... In history itself there are only relative victories. (86)

These are not the words of a sceptic, of someone who was unsure of or sat lightly with regard to the truth of things. Rather they are the honest words of someone who grasped that things are not as simple and obvious as men might want them to be. Moreover, they herald the necessity for an ongoing hermeneutic: the conversation must continue. Ten years after the ST Troeltsch was still wrestling with the problem. He began his book Der Historismus und seine Probleme by referring to the crisis in historical thought. .... The solution of the crisis, a crisis in the philosophy of history, could only be achieved by a fundamental philosophical treatment of the nature of history and the
question of its intellectual and spiritual aims. (87)

We might add, parenthetically, that neither are they the words of a pessimist. We might refer again to Pauck's words,

At the end of his life, Troeltsch was clearly filled with a certain pessimism. He was not sure whether Western civilisation could bring forth creative reconstructive forces. His mind was filled with dark forebodings: He feared the outbreak of a new world conflict, and the behaviour of certain radical nationalist groups in Germany led him to conclude that possibly Germany might fall victim to a new barbarism ... He was greatly impressed by Oswald Spengler's Decline of the West. (88)

Nevertheless, this should not be the last word; as though Troeltsch had given up on western civilisation. Later in the same volume Pauck includes in an Appendix, Harnack's funeral oration for Troeltsch. In it Harnack quotes from Der Historismus:

Starting afresh over and over again, he made imperishable contributions to the fulfillment of this task, most recently by his great work in historism the first volume of which he completed a few weeks ago. The words by which he concluded this volume are truly his scholarly last will and testament. They demonstrate both the deep earnestness and the modest dignity of his intellectual attitude. They read as follows:

"In order to complete the great task of formulating a new philosophy of history, confident and courageous men are needed, no skeptics or mystics, no rationalistic fanatics and no omniscient historians. A single man cannot complete this work. It is, according to its nature, the work of many, first in the solitude of individual persons then in a broader circle. Only from such circles, a new life will rise and it will derive its common power from different points of origin. The most effective means toward such an end would be a great artistic symbol as the Divina Commedia once was and later Faust. Yet it is a lucky accident when such symbols are given to an epoch, and generally this happens only at the end of such an epoch. But the task itself which consciously or unconsciously presented itself to every historical epoch is particularly pressing for our moment of life. To conceive of construction and reconstruction means to overcome history by history and thus to furnish a platform for new creativity."
To overcome history by history - how often did he tell me in our conversations: "One must accept his destiny, love, and transform it into something better. What one's goal is to be and how one is to reach it is implied in this attitude." (89)

But to return to the topic of this section, and to polarise things somewhat, the choice is between a paradigm or a hermeneutic. With regard to the former, one cannot avoid the suspicion, especially in the light of historical performances, that the Marxian and orthodox options are constrained by their ideological nature. With regard to the latter, there is no denying that any hermeneutic is going to operate with a set of presuppositions: that is just part of our historical and conditionedness. The way forward is to recognise this and to try and understand our own situation as well as that which we are studying whether it be a past history, an ancient text, or a present culture. There needs to be a certain relationship between the interpreter and that which is being interpreted. If something is to be understood there must be an engagement between two sets of horizons (to use Hans-Georg Gadamer's useful phrase), those of the interpreter and what he is seeking to understand. Gadamer compares the analogy of the "understanding" which occurs in a conversation. "... In a conversation, when we have discovered the standpoint and horizon of the other person, his ideas become intelligible, without our necessarily having to agree with him." (90)

Thus Troeltsch's methodology is an invitation to dialogue, and on more than one level. In any dialogue or conversation a good part should be taken up with listening: in the case at hand, to the voices of other disciplines, a past history, or an ancient text. Troeltsch's methodology has enlarged the scope of theology and invited it to recognise the dialectical nature of reality.

(iii) Working Models

A methodology such as Troeltsch's is necessary because neither the New Testament nor the Old Testament gives us a social ethic. If it did then things would be simplified a great deal. This is not to say though that the New Testament has no interest in ethics. Quite the reverse: the ethical implications of the faith are
spelt out in just about every book. But these implications are, to use the useful German word Haustafeln, household ethics. That is, they are concerned with the behaviour expected of members of the household of faith. New Testament ethics are, consciously, for those who are εἶναι Χριστοῦ. It should be added that although they are occasional by nature, owing to the occasional nature of the writings which contain them, there seems to be a certain uniformity. The way that writers such as Peter and Paul and James present their ethical teaching indicates they were drawing on a common tradition. For example, Paul speaks in Romans 6:17 of a Τοίχος ὑπὸ ἀδικίας. As may be expected parallels may be found in Judaism and in pagan writers but the distinctive note struck is that New Testament ethics are for members of the Christian Church.

But why no social ethic? The New Testament is the foundational document of Christianity and some of the issues it addresses clearly involve the Church's existence in the Roman world of the day. To answer this we should first observe that a good deal of the New Testament is taken up with the job of defining the Church vis-à-vis Judaism. Then, with regard to the Roman social and political world, there were certain limitations on the primitive church. Probably most members would simply not have been able to have an effective involvement in things civic and political. Few of them would have been Roman citizens for a start. Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:26-29 points out that few of his readers were well born, and this text has commonly been used as indicating that Christianity initially found most of its success among the slave and lower classes. Though this should not be pressed. C.F.D. Moule points out that such a conclusion requires considerable qualification ... In the first place, the passage in 1 Corinthians 1 would probably never have been written had there not been educated Christians in that congregation who were contemptuous about the crudities of others. To some extent, then, it bears witness to the very reverse of the conditions it is often used to illustrate. Next, as for slaves, though many may have been uneducated, we are told that they were by no means generally illiterate. (91)

But apart from all this, it was not a democratic society such as we have today. There were simply not the avenues open for political involvement and responsibility.
Primitive Christianity was not individualistic. There was great emphasis laid on a believer being a member of a group. However, for all this there was the fact that, as the Church found itself distanced more and more from Judaism, its members were frequently seen as being less than sociable by their neighbours. Because of their religious scruples they absented themselves from pagan festival and games, and from swearing allegiance to the Emperor as ΚΥΡΙΟΣ. This insularity led to obloquy and persecution. However, it should be underlined that this was not the result of a deliberate policy of disinterest in the world. Luke displays a positive interest in the Roman government of his day, as does Paul (Romans 13) and Peter (1 Peter 2). The only time the early Church finds itself opposed to the State is when the issue of Emperor worship comes up. Otherwise the stress falls on orderliness and respect for authority. From the perspective of this chapter, what one does not see is some kind of Christian socialism, or, for that matter, of a Moral Majority. This is because they were not viable options.

The most obvious example of this lack of a social ethic is to be seen in the question of slavery. In the nineteenth century Wilberforce, as a Christian, could fight for and secure the abolition of slavery in the colonies. The structures were there for him to do it. But they were not there in the first century. The only alternative was armed rebellion, which did happen from time to time. But the early Church chose not to go that way, as the war of AD66-70 clearly showed. Apart from occasionally purchasing the freedom of individual slaves, the New Testament response, if we may take Philemon as being somehow representative, was to go beyond the structures of society and to teach a new relationship which did away with all barriers.

There are two questions which flow from this, and which have a lot of bearing on the social or political theology of our day. First, was this just a matter of expediency? Slavery was part of the social fabric of the time and to attack it would have been tantamount to rebellion, as well as being doomed to failure. So if the avenues for social or political change are not there then does one look for passive means? (92) Second, does this kind of approach give a mandate for social and political quietude? This century possibly more than any other has seen the Church divided
over this issue. The line is drawn between those who see mission in terms of involvement in efforts directed towards social and political amelioration, and those who stress the primacy of the need for individual conversion.

This is of more than academic interest today. One does not have to have a pessimistic Spenglerian view of the disintegration of western civilisation to be acutely aware that things are not as good as they should be. The lack of an effective social ethic, whether of a capitalist or socialist kind, is obvious; and this is just as much a problem for the secularist as it is a lament of the Church. At the same time there has been an undeniable decline in the influence of the Church. This is not to say baldly that the former is the result of the latter; that would be naive and simplistic. Things are much more complex. Nevertheless these two phenomena are not unrelated, and it was Troeltsch's conviction that an understanding of this relationship was essential for the future of both the Church and western civilisation. As outlined above, the relationship between the sacred and the secular, at least before the eighteenth century, meant some kind of generally accepted approach to social ethics, however much it might have been honoured more in the breach. And certainly the Church muddied the waters from time to time with its excessive claims and inadequate performance.

Now in the twentieth century the Church's task may be seen as a twofold one. Of developing a new social ethic, not just for itself but for civilisation as well. And of establishing a positive relationship with secular civilisation. Troeltsch's work and programme was directed to this end, of bringing about a kind of reconciliation. For neither side can do without the other. Also, the new relationship must be seen in other terms than that of dominance. In the ST Troeltsch pointed out just how much the sacred and the secular interacted with and borrowed from each other of H. Richard Niebuhr's words from his Introduction to the ST.

The picture of history Troeltsch so saw and described is manifold and dynamic; hence The Social Teaching is like a multi-perspectival painting. In one perspective it is a book about the church, presenting a double rebuttal to the Marxian thesis and to the orthodox; in another it is a book about Western history which uses the story of the churches' social
teachings as an illustration of the whole complex process; in still another, it is a prolegomenon to the work of modern social construction or to the effort, as Troeltsch liked to say, of damming the stream of history for a while and of achieving a synthesis of culture, which, of course, again would pass away. (93)

Chamberlain points out;

With the exception of the sociological and historical studies Troeltsch undertook, he rarely dealt with the content of Christianity. Thus Troeltsch's contribution is not just to the theologian's understanding of the living roots of religion in cult and community, the relativities of all theological formulations about God, and the relation between Christianity and culture. (94)

In tracing the relationship between Christianity and culture in the history of the Church Troeltsch isolated certain concepts, viz:

1. Compromise
2. Natural law
3. Church/Sect typology.

In what follows I will define what Troeltsch meant by them and their usefulness when applied to the Church's past history, and whether they are still useful for the job at hand. I add, with emphasis, that they are meant as working models and not as absolute paradigms. They provide focal points around which we may centre our conversation with the past and present.
1. Compromise

In the very early years of its existence the Church was mainly concerned with its relationship to Judaism, and any idea of compromise or accommodation was directed to this end. Those years though were few and the Church soon found itself no longer part of Judaism and having to make its way in a Gentile world. And it did, by showing a remarkable ability to come to terms with the civilisation and its prevailing patterns of thought within which it found itself. Troeltsch was impressed with this ability of accommodation and from it developed the notion of compromise. He saw this not as something peripheral to the history of the Church but quite central: and it provides a basic framework for the ST. In some ways the term is an unfortunate one as it has somewhat negative connotations in English; as though something important has to be given up to effect a modus vivendi. But Troeltsch did not mean it this way. Far from it meaning something second best or a reductionism of some kind, it was for him a positive concept which indicated the interrelationship and interdependence between Christianity and civilisation.

Our understanding of compromise is helped if we consider what it was not. It was not something Hegelian. Though Troeltsch was impressed with Hegel's philosophy of history and the idea of change and progress, he eschewed the notion that history was the Hegelian outworking of the Absolute Geist. While it was history that mattered, and it was history with which Troeltsch mainly occupied himself, in history we have to do with a dialectical outworking of events rather than determined laws of logical development. In the previous two parts of this essay, dealing with the philosophy of history and the history of religions, we saw that in both cases Troeltsch rejected absolutism, whether of a theological or any other kind, as a viable option. In the ST the notion of compromise is an outworking or example of this basic strain of his thought.

Then again compromise was not a case of, or result of, anomie. One can certainly detect, or describe, periods in history when it might be said that a civilisation or the Church was tired or suffered a decline or lack of confidence. But Troeltsch did not mean that compromise fitted such situations as a last resort, or an exercise in survival. He viewed the beginning of the twentieth
century as just such a situation. What was needed he said was not a new absolutism but a new compromise, not to survive the situation but to overcome it.

Troeltsch did not abandon the concept. In the last essay in *Christian Thought*, "Politics, Patriotism and Religion" he said

And if the whole course of history is thus characterised by compromise, it is not likely that the thinker can escape it. He, too, must confess to a compromise even in these days when this presence and need of compromise in all earthly things is weighing particularly heavily upon all our souls. Amongst yourselves, in England, the principle of compromise is less undervalued. Political experience and the influence of empirical systems of thought have given you a different outlook....

It is thus easier for me to confess my adhesion to the principle of compromise here than in my own country. I know of no other principle and I am unaware of any practical thinker who does. It is true, however, that in the use of compromise we have to guard against all precipitate capitulation to the course which presents itself as momentarily expedient, or as the easiest way out of a difficulty, but which may be thus expedient and easy only for the moment, and, once more, we have to guard against any fundamental abandonment of the ideal. Indeed, it is only by keeping this ideal ever before eyes that we can continue to hope and to strive for a better future in the midst of a cold and sinister world. (95)

In Mediaeval Catholicism we have what might be called the first great, comprehensive, compromise. The concept is to be found in the early Church but only, so to speak, in piecemeal fashion. Thus Troeltsch entitles his first chapter "The Foundations in the Early Church." The reason for this is twofold. First, it was a time when Christianity was young, and had a long time to go before it was strong enough to brook no rivals. It was in no position to enter into a great compromise with the Roman civilisation. Then, second, and not unrelated to this, it was a time when Roman civilisation was in decline. Even in apostolic times when the empire still had some centuries left to run there were already signs of the eventual disintegration. Barbarian hordes menaced the borders in the East and in northern Europe, and the influx of
eastern religions, philosophies and cults indicated a decline in confidence in the traditional gods. By the time of Constantine it might be said that Christianity had finally triumphed by becoming not only a *religio licita* but the official state religion. However, there was only a century to go before Rome itself was sacked in AD 410 by the Visigoths.

The reaction of the Church's most important thinker of the time, Augustine of Hippo, illustrates this. The pagans were quick to point out that the 410 calamity happened because of the abandoning of the traditional gods of Rome. Augustine wrote his magisterial *The City of God* to rebut this charge, and also to encourage those Christians who were profoundly disturbed by Rome's fall. Their perturbation was caused by the collapse of the "imperial theology". This was a tendency, which became normative for many, to believe that the empire was upheld by God. The idea stems from the time of Augustine, and was even about before him. D. Bebbington quotes Melito of Sardis petitioning Marcus Aurelius against the treatment of Christians in Asia Minor; "... the greatest proof that the establishment of our religion at the very time when the Empire began so auspiciously was an unmixed blessing lies in this fact - from the reign of Augustus the Empire has suffered no damage, on the contrary everything has gone splendidly and gloriously, and every prayer has been answered."(96)

However, this was not the same as the mutual interpenetration and interdependence of Church and society which Troeltsch meant by his notion of compromise. The Church of Augustine's day, and before, no matter how official it might be had not effected the ecclesiastical unity of civilisation that was to characterise later centuries: Church and society were not yet coterminous.

Neither in theory nor in practice was there any inwardly uniform Christian civilisation; the whole idea was foreign to the Ancient World. The vital difference between the Middle Ages and the period of the Primitive Church was this: the Church of the medieval period did know this ideal, both in practice, and, still more, in theory .... (97)

How did this ecclesiastical unity of civilisation come about? The destruction of the old civilisation left the Church as the only civilising agent. Troeltsch finds the realisation of this in the policy of the Carolingian Empire which used the Church for
bringing about a civilising of state and society. (98) The result was a great increase in the power and influence of the Church. And not only that: it was not so much that the Church dominated society but that it characterised it. If Church and society were not completely one, there was a unity and interdependence that was not there before. Also, and this is equally important, the reforms and centralising programme of Pope Gregory I (c.540-640) made the Church a universal institution such as it had not been before.

The second great compromise came about as a result of and as part of the Reformation. Here though we must add a few riders in the interests of clarification, for it would be misleading to say that this second compromise was a Reformation compromise. The first we need only mention by way of a reminder: namely, that the Reformation was essentially a mediaeval phenomenon in that its principle concerns were traditional (mediaeval) religious questions. New answers were given, but the questions were mediaeval. The social aspects of Christianity were not paid as much attention. Second, and following on from the point just mentioned, the early reformers did not develop a new compromise to suit their new situation but simply adhered to the old catholic one, albeit with adaptions. Church and society were still seen as being interdependent.

Where then did this new compromise come from? It did not come from the Anabaptist stream. Using the church/sect typology which Weber delineated and which Troeltsch took over and developed, the Anabaptists operated with a sect type model of the Church. Thus they were not particularly interested in the idea of compromise as they thought in terms of the Church being alienated or separated from society. And because of the nature of the world, and the nature of the Church as a gathered community of born again believers, was capable of forming a compromise.

This leaves us with the Lutheran and Calvinist streams. Lutheranism, in spite of Luther’s early flirtation with a form of congregationalism, operated with a church type model; but it still failed to effect a compromise. This was because it interiorised the idea of compromise and was content to accept that the state had its own sphere of dominion. This is a very important point and Troeltsch has no hesitation in applying it to describe the
influence of Lutheranism on more recent German history. (99) Here a paradox, or dilemma, surfaces in Lutheran thought.

Luther appeals with great emphasis to the belief that the powers that be are ordained by God, and confirmed in their position by Him. It is a duty of obedience towards God to exercise authority, to obey the Government, and to use authority for the purpose of justice; God Himself bears the responsibility for His institutions, and does not intend them to be interfered with by human sophistry and argument. The practice of government and the administration of justice are offices appointed by Divine command, and Luther describes with great vigour the contrast between the system of law which is carried out from the ruling prince down to the gaoler and the hangman, in which the work of government, administration, and punishment, including hanging, breaking on the wheel, and beheading, is all a service to God, and the non-official purely personal morality, in which, on the other hand, the true service of God consists in loving one's enemies, in sacrifice, renunciation and endurance, in loving care for others, and self-sacrifice. (100)

There are two ways of serving God; in the private, or religious, sphere and the public, or secular sphere. This corresponds to a distinction between private and public morality. And the distinction is adhered to: there is thus no room for compromise. This is all part of, and the reason for, the Lutheran doctrine of the two kingdoms mentioned above, with its concomitant political quiescence.

There is a difference though with Calvinism: here we have the second great compromise of the Church. In describing it Troeltsch picked up Weber's notions of asceticism and calling. I have described these above in the subsection on Weber pp.125ff above. It remains to add in this context that the motivation produced by the concepts of asceticism and calling, and directed to the world as a fit place of endeavour and as a way of glorifying God. Naturally enough the idea of compromise is going to be central to this. And, not unnaturally, a church type model is going to be most effective in bringing this about. Thus it is Calvinism's "ascetic Protestantism" which is the second great compromise in the social history of the Church. And it is still the main force in Protestantism today.
While Catholicism had both the necessary complexity and authority to embrace and to direct the whole of life, ascetic Protestantism has the necessary hardness and flexibility, the religious energy, and the matter-of-fact sobriety, the power to adapt itself to the ethical ideas of the average man combined with doctrinal simplicity, which likewise enable it, in its own way, to dominate the whole of life; and just as Catholicism was connected with the general conditions of mediaeval life, so ascetic Protestantism is connected with modern developments in the political, economic, social, and technical spheres. (101)

However, this is not to say that the Calvinist compromise is suitable for today. The situation is different, and Troeltsch looked for a third great compromise that would overcome the impasse created by a burgeoning secularism and a Church which failed to come to terms with modern society. One of the breakthroughs of the SI was the way that Troeltsch was able to point out the dependence of Christian thought upon the social conditions of any particular epoch. The fact that the mediaeval or Calvinist compromises were not as viable as before was no occasion for despair. Rather this was all part of the nature of things. Society was never a static thing but, like history, ever changing. The compromise of the Church therefore needed to change and be adaptable too. Otherwise its relevance would be vitiated and the Church reduced to anachronism.

There is also no absolute ethical transformation of material nature or of human nature; all that does exist is a constant wrestling with the problems which they raise. Thus the Christian ethic of the present day and of the future will also only be an adjustment to the world situation, and it will only desire to achieve that which is practically possible. (102)

2. **Natural Law**

It may reasonably be said that the idea of compromise is the governing motif in the SI and indeed of Troeltsch's overall programme. The concept of natural law is a good illustration of this.
Natural law is an idea which holds that there is a system of right and justice which is common to all mankind. It developed in the Greek period and is particularly associated with Stoicism, which stems from the beginning of the third century BC. Part of the Stoic concept of natural law was an egalitarianism which was combined with the idea that the natural state of man was one of harmony; though this had been corrupted by selfishness. The task for man was to recover the original ideal. This was to be accomplished by living and thinking according to reason. This was the property of the ἀρχόμενον, or world soul. (103) The concept was the stabilising, directing principle of the universe, it gave deep expression to the Greek conviction of the rationality of the universe.

It was not just the Greeks who found it a useful concept. Subsequent epochs adapted it to suit their own particular ideology. The Roman period accepted it but did not add much. It did though develop the idea of the State being derived from the law of Nature. Fundamental to this was the distinction between the absolute natural law of the primitive state and the relative natural law of things as they are of Troeltsch, "the difference between the absolute and ideal Natural Law of the primitive State and the relative Natural Law of the fallen State can never be overlooked, which means that the whole of the present situation, essentially, falls short of this ideal."(104) It is not too difficult to understand this in Christian terms. This is how Augustine interpreted it: before the Fall man lived freely under natural law, and after it he lived under sin and the relative law. The state belongs to this present deteriorated condition and is therefore seen as both the occasion of sin and a remedy for sin. Troeltsch pointed out that "For this very reason, then, the State had to be placed under the direction of the ecclesiastical authority and a system of thought by which it needed to be purified, consecrated, and controlled if it was to lose the stain of its sinful origin."(105)

It is worthwhile pointing out that the early and mediaeval Church were not really being innovative in this accommodation to prevailing philosophical thought. One can refer to its roots in Judaism where there are examples aplenty. For example, in early Judaism there had been extensive accommodation to Hellenistic thought, and M. Hengel can state that "even Palestinian Judaism
must be regarded as Hellenistic Judaism."(106) In Alexandria the Platonising Jew Philo is especially remembered for his efforts to allegorise biblical stories and truths to make them amenable to Greek (Platonic) thought.

The middle ages saw the same pattern with the natural law being identified with the law of God. This compromise reached its most elaborate and thorough form in the thirteenth century with Thomas Aquinas. His formulation of the interrelationship between the eternal law of God, natural law and the human law became normative for the Roman Catholic Church. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries it was revived to provide the structure for the papal exposition of natural rights.

In all of this we should, referring back to the quote from Troeltsch n.100 above, note two things. First, there is the recognition that the way things are is not the way they should be. This is a recognition, or feeling, that constitutes the perduring problem of all ethics, whether personal or social. Description is not enough. Then, following on from this, we see the beginnings of the attempt by the Church to control state and society. In the middle ages this was to lead to the ecclesiastical unity of civilisation. Recognition and acceptance of the natural law may be seen as an outworking of the idea of compromise. But it was never a simple or easy thing, and it is questionable how "successful" the effort was. One would expect that a compromise would result in an amenable symbiotic relationship, but all too often the sanctifying of the "natural" order of things became an attempt to control. Was nature to swallow grace or grace to swallow nature?

Second, by the nineteenth century a reaction to the concept of natural law set in in Europe: this complicated matters. A number of factors contributed to this. Not least was the critical spirit of a scientific age which did not favour unproved hypotheses. It was no longer adequate to argue from a priori assumptions and expect to find solutions to complex social problems. Rather, the emphasis was placed on

An interesting feature of modern natural law (which) was the endeavour to establish evaluative criteria empirically - that is, to derive them from general social experience. Critics contended that this kind of empirical search for common
values - such as the United Nations’ attempts to define human rights - is not the same as the explication of an immutable natural law. But proponents assert that, although their criteria had to be expressions of value judgments, they did not stem from ideologies or emotions. A dispassionate judgment founded on a study of all the available data and opposing considerations was far removed from confessions of faith or spontaneous reactions. In any event, the task that still confronts proponents of the search for common values is twofold: to evolve the values and to win for them a measure of acceptance. (107)
EXCURSUS 2: WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

This echoes Troeltsch’s aim and programme: to find a social ethic for the twentieth century. It also highlights the difficulty. If this quote is taken as representative of secular western thought then the present situation is one of impasse for society as well as the Church. The former compromise involving the idea of natural law gave a common ground and a meeting place for discussion; and it is understandable that some contemporary Catholic thinkers have revived the idea for use in their discussions. Although the above quote does not seem to countenance this. One can understand this being so for post Enlightenment man; for in the past the Church’s understanding of social ethics tended to be authoritarian, and demanded submitting to a traditional code rather than a free response to the dictates of conscience. The situation might be simplified by saying that there was a gulf between Church and society over the matter of ethics, whether personal or social. Today the situation is different: the change from what Troeltsch called an ecclesiastically dominated society to a secular one has not solved the problem of ethics.

Increasingly it is realised (see the above quote) that there is a gulf before both Church and secular man, and that this gulf is the one that must be overcome. The gulf that is supposed to be between them is, if not irrelevant, not nearly so important. Indeed, the way forward might require both to turn the gulf between “end on” so to speak, and see it as being more or less identical with the one before. Putting the problem this way calls for a reformulation of or a more sensitive approach to ethics. A wooden either/or choice between a “natural” ethic and a supernatural theological ethic would need to be shelved. This is not a matter of rejecting one at the expense of the other but of recognising the inconclusiveness of both if they are held in isolation from each other. It also involves recognising the historical conditionedness of ethical thought and thus calls for an openness to the future as well as to the present context.

In view of this the role of the idea of natural law must be carefully delimited. A revival of the idea to provide a series of axioms would be less than satisfactory. However, if the idea was brought into consideration as a kind of working model appropriate
to the twentieth century then this would allow a creative response to new situations: in short, a new compromise. Thoughts "will be necessary which have not yet been thought, and which will correspond to this new situation as the older forms met the needs of the social situation in earlier ages."(108)

In his 1906 essay "Protestant Christianity and Church in Modern Times" Troeltsch drew attention to the situation the Church found itself in at the beginning of the twentieth century.

The old compromise of the Christian ethic with the *Lex naturae* has disintegrated, and nothing remains of the Christian ethic other than either a retreat into pietistic circles, or a seeking for a new, very much more comprehensive compromise, which combines this worldly cultural goods as independent ethical values with the highest religious good, and which hurls overboard the old doctrine of the radical, sinful corruption of all that is natural and all that is extra-Christian.(109)

There are two things to notice in this quote. First, the way that he refers to the compromise of the Christian ethic with natural law: it was, in its time, regarded as a valid compromise but is now no more. This leads to the second point, namely, the challenge to find a new compromise in this area. This new compromise will involve a coming to terms with "non-Christian" ideas or perspectives. For many this will involve a certain risk: it might be seen as the Church having to surrender certain "secure" positions. Surely this would be carrying the idea of compromise too far? In response it must be pointed out that this is what the Church has done in the past. Pannenber for example points out that "Christianity, however, affords the greatest example of syncretistic assimilative power".(110) In his note at the bottom of the page he refers to Hermann Gunkel's designating Christianity as a syncretistic religion, and the protests that this raised. He goes on to defend Gunkel, concluding by referring to the use of the ἄγνωστος concept which "expresses the universal relevance of what happened in Jesus, and the inexhaustible assimilative and regenerative power of Christianity ..... The fact that Christianity is syncretistic to an unusual degree thus expresses not a weakness but the unique strength of Christianity". This is inescapably part of the temporal nature of Christianity which insists on the formative status of certain historical
events. It is also inescapably part of the history of the Church that there are those who lack appreciation of this and tend to treat Christianity as though it were ahistorical. Again of Pannenberg: "The history of Christianity is burdened by a great many dogmatic finitizations which lose sight of the provisionality and historical mutability of all forms of Christian life and thought."(111)

Now Troeltsch was not looking for another "dogmatic finitization", and any criticism of him must bear this in mind. Rather, he was aiming at a methodology, or a working model, that would take due notice of and be appropriate for the modern context in which theology must be done. For all theology is contextual theology. This may be true enough but many in Troeltsch's day were reserved about this line of approach. It is all very well to raise questions, but unanswered or unanswerable questions can be less than satisfying and lead to endless talk which gets nowhere. (112) This reserve, or opposition, to Troeltsch's approach is summed up by Barth,

Troeltsch was a gifted man and, in his own way, a pious man. The same may be said of many of his great predecessors. But it was obvious that with him the doctrine of faith (Glaubenslehre, Troeltsch's dogmatics) was on the point of dissolution into endless and useless talk, and that for all the high self-consciousness of its conduct Neo-Protestantism in general had been betrayed on to the rocks, or the quicksands. It was because we could no longer take part in this that about the end of the second decade of this century we left the ship. For some it was to Catholicism ... for others it meant a fresh beginning of serious theological study on a quite different basis. (113)

But did Barth jump ship too quickly? The retreat to finding the absolute in the Word of God addressing us in the kerygma brought forth Bonhoeffer's criticism that it was a "positivism of revelation". As such it was not really in a position of being able to dialogue with or address itself to the modern situation.(114)

We cannot enter into discussion here as to the accuracy of Bonhoeffer's criticism but Barth was correct in his caveat about things degenerating into endless talk. When the subject has to do
with ethics some kind of comparison or assessment must be made, and therefore there must be clarification about what criterion is referred to. Ethics involves the imperative as well as the indicative, and the imperative works under a sense of obligation to its point of reference, or criterion. Troeltsch recognised this as being part and parcel of the human condition. There was in man, even secular Western man, "the indestructible religious yearning and the need for a fixed point of support."(115) But where is this to be found? Barth and Troeltsch both agreed that history has no place for absolutes, and in their different ways looked beyond history - Barth with his doctrine of revelation, Troeltsch to the future.

Troeltsch unfortunately died before he could fully work out the eschatological dimension of his thought and history, and answer the questions he raised. There have been other scholars since though who have picked up the need for openness to the future, and the importance of eschatological verification, though not always, and this needs to be carefully considered, with the same appreciation of the theological perspective that Troeltsch had. For example, John Hick, who has already been referred to, carried further Troeltsch's relativistic interpretation of Christianity. He announced a Copernican revolution in theology which consisted in a shift "from the dogma that Christianity is at the centre to the realisation that it is God who is at the centre, and that all the religions of mankind, including our own, serve and revolve around him."(116) Hick's work was what Troeltsch prophesied when he spoke about Christianity entering upon a new phase. But Hick and Troeltsch are not to be uncritically lumped together. Hick's Copernican revolution is really a return to the theology of the religionsgeschichtliche Schule. Troeltsch belonged to that school but aimed at moving beyond it. Here I refer to what I said about Troeltsch's relativism in the previous chapter p.82. Troeltsch's relativism was not the same as Hick's. As C. Braaten says, "Hick's version of the Copernican revolution lacks the fullness and complexity of Troeltsch's vision."(117) More importantly it lacks the emphasis on the need for decision or to make value judgments which are to be found in Troeltsch's thought about both history (overcoming historicism) and other religions.

W. Pannenberg on the other hand shows a more subtle appreciation for the complexity and nuances of Troeltsch's thought.
Pannenberg's own work is well known for the centrality it gives to history, that revelation happens in history, and that history is eschatological in character. Thus he speaks of the "proleptic revelation" of Jesus Christ. It is not inaccurate to see in Pannenberg an heir to Troeltsch's way of doing theology: R. Morgan calls Pannenberg "the first contemporary spokesman" of Troeltsch's kind of historical theology. (118) In his Theology and the Philosophy of Science (119) Pannenberg has a chapter on "The Emancipation of the Human Sciences from the Natural Sciences" in which he discusses Troeltsch's contribution. He points out the need for a theology aware of eschatology;

J. Weiss's realisation of the influence of a futuristic eschatology on the message of Jesus and in particular on his idea of the Kingdom of God had been revolutionary, and Troeltsch was perhaps the only systematic theologian who could incorporate it into his theology without losing sight of the real futurity of God. Opposing supernaturalist assertions of an absolute within history, he was able to base his argument on the fact that Jesus himself had consigned "absolute religion" to "the world to come". (120)

This is not an aspect which one lists only under the rubric of "Eschatology". It impinges on the question of other religions, and of ethics. This Troeltsch clearly saw. "... since this ultimate end, as goal and 'highest good', provided the criteria for all values and purposes within history, Troeltsch was able to set it up in opposition to W. Hermann's argument from intentional ethics in their dispute on 'Fundamental problems of ethics'."(121)

Thus Troeltsch, true to his basic orientation as a historian and philosopher of history, sees history as the matrix and context of ethics, and the future rather than natural law as the point of reference. "This thesis of Troeltsch's, which even today has lost none of its central validity, may be regarded as one of his most significant contributions to theology. If from the outset it had received the acceptance it deserves, the theology of this century could have avoided many detours."(122)

But we still live zwischen den zeiten. What do we do while we wait for the future to arrive? The problem and the challenge, of ethics demands something more than just waiting. Barth once said that all his life he had carried on "a conversation with the scriptures". This must certainly be done: I indicated above the
dialogical nature of the relationship of the Church to the Bible. To this Troeltsch would add that the Church needs to carry on a conversation with the twentieth century situation, and with its own tradition. Just as theology is not an abstract enterprise but is done in a context, so too with ethics. If the Church, and secular man too for that matter, is aware of its context, and how it got there, then the difficult task of discerning criteria and making value judgments will be more sensitively carried out. This being aware of context is put another way by N. Lash in his essay "How Do We Know Where We Are?" where he refers to Newman’s phrase "to take a view".

... the requirement 'to take a view' became a kind of shorthand for an entire educational and intellectual strategy... To have a 'view' of some matter is to accept personal responsibility for the perspective opened up by the interplay of data laboriously and dispassionately acquired with the synthesizing power of intellect and imagination. The person who has a view of the matter knows where they stand and why.(123)

Of course, and this was a major tenet of Troeltsch, we never stay in the same place. History is a matter of flux and change. So we will shift ground, hopefully to higher ground where things will be seen a little more clearly. Not absolutely of course, we have not got that much hindsight and all the evidence is not yet in. So it is good to be aware of the options. Lash says:

The options with which we are presented in these matters are often exceedingly stark: either 'all the kingdoms of the world', shown from 'a very high mountain' in 'a moment of time', or the view from the parish pump; either unwarranted metaphysical assertion or unrestrained relativism; either 'absolute knowledge' or 'mere belief'. (124)

As has been mentioned, Troeltsch was not one for thinking such either/or terms. At the end of the ST he said,

There is also no absolute ethical transformation of material nature or of human nature; all that does exist is a constant wrestling with the problems which they raise. Thus the Christian ethic of the present day and of the future will also only be an adjustment to the world-situation, and it will only desire to achieve that which is practically possible. This is the cause of that ceaseless tension which
drives man onward yet gives him the sense that he can never realise his ethical ideal. (125)

Thus it is part of the human condition that the Church must make decisions; decisions which are formed out of the dialogue with the Bible, tradition, and the present situation. Using Lash's terminology it means the Church must be aware of where it is. It should also be aware of what it is: and so we refer to Troeltsch's church/sect typology which he so usefully employed in the ST and which is basic to any consideration of social ethics.

3. Church/Sect Typology

In the chapter "Historical Thinking and Theological Method" I referred (p.38) to the debate between E.H. Carr and G.R. Elton over how far sociological methods were appropriate for the study of history. Whatever one may think of the outcome of that debate it cannot be gainsaid that the writing of church history will never be the same since Troeltsch's introduction of the sociological perspective. Previously church historians tended to confine themselves to writing histories of the Church as an institution, or the history of dogma, or of certain key characters. Indeed, reading all too many church histories leaves one with the impression that there was not much else happening in the world. Troeltsch's contribution though - referring mainly to PP and the ST - showed that things were much more complex. In the first place the Church was part of whatever society it happened to be in; and its relationship to society was a two way thing of influencing and being influenced by. It is fatuous to imagine that it ever had, or ever could exist without some kind of formative interaction going on. The question of the Church's relationship to society was always high on the Church's agenda.

Then there is the fact of historical change and development. This is something that affected the Church in two ways. As society changed so the Church's relationship to it necessarily needed to change. And so the Church itself is subject to change; both because it is part of history and because of its relationship to society. In spite of the fond hopes, and assertions to the contrary, the Church has never been so monolithic or monochrome as church historians have all too frequently assumed. This leads me
to my third point: namely, that the sociological method has thrown a flood of light on the nature of the Church. This is of value for describing the Church, and also for understanding it. I will develop this point shortly. Before that though it is appropriate to delineate the third of Troeltsch's working models which are basic to the ST.

In the ST in particular Troeltsch made effective use of the Church/sect typology. This was an important part of his applying the perspective and methodology of the sociologist to the study of church history. It is also an example of the influence of Max Weber from whom he took over and developed the idea (see above pp.27, 129). Troeltsch described what he meant by these terms thus:

The Church is that type of organisation which is overwhelmingly conservative, which to a certain extent accepts the secular order and dominates the masses; in principle, therefore, it is universal, i.e. it desires to cover the whole life of humanity. The sects, on the other hand, are comparatively small groups; they aspire after personal inward perfection, and they aim at a direct personal fellowship between members of each group. From the very beginning, therefore, they are forced to organise themselves in small groups, and to renounce the idea of dominating the world.(126)

To these Troeltsch added a third type - mysticism. Mysticism is akin to, and might be seen as a development of, the sect type. It too emphasises the need to be born again and of personal holiness. It differs from the sect primarily in its emphasis on the individual to the exclusion of the group. It is worthwhile adding that Troeltsch used the term as a sociological description rather than from the perspective of the psychology of religion. Though of course the two perspectives are not unconnected.

(Mysticism) was, of courses, mentioned incidentally with the later Middle Ages, but its religious nature has not yet been analysed, nor the religious-sociological character with which it is connected. At that stage it was not necessary to go into the question fully, for although even then mysticism was an important factor for theology, for the philosophy of religion, for the history of civilisation and for psychology, the religious and sociological peculiarities and results had
scarcely begun to appear. (127)
Weber also spoke about mysticism in his *Protestant Ethic*, but not in terms of an ideal type.

It should be pointed out that, as with Weber, Troeltsch's Church/sect typology was not meant to be taken as non-historical or a-historical. Rather, they were ideal types, and this is how Weber intended them to be understood. His ideal type was intended to convey a precise conception of reality rather than some kind of Hegelian ideal force. They were means of classifying certain data from a sociological perspective. He used them as a means of extracting from a variable its essence. In his own words:

The ideal type is a conceptual construct which is neither a historical reality nor even the 'true' reality ..... It has the significance of a purely ideal limiting concept with which the real situation or action is compared and surveyed for the explication of certain of its significant components ... the function of the ideal type is an attempt to analyze historically unique configurations of their individual components by means of genetic concepts. (128)

For Weber ideal types were intellectual tools from which a theory might be formulated. Troeltsch used the concept and took it further; not as a sociologist but as a historian and philosopher of history who made use of sociological tools. The aim of the historian is not simply to describe but also to **understand**. As a historian Troeltsch stood in the tradition of his teacher Wilhelm Dilthey. "The focal point of Dilthey's theory of history - and his most original contribution - is his conception of understanding and interpretation, through which meaning is recaptured." (129) This notion of **verstehen** received reinforcement through the influence of Weber who also stood in the Dilthey tradition in this regard. The difference between Weber and Troeltsch here - and it was one of degree rather than substance - was that Troeltsch was more pragmatic. Weber tended to be an ideas person whereas Troeltsch was more interested in the relationship between theory and praxis. Just as Marx's analysis of society was meant as a prelude or basis for action so Troeltsch's (sociological) understanding of history should be seen in the light of his programme of working out a social ethic for the Church.
For the ideal type is not to be understood as an abstraction but as a working model. The Church does not inhabit a vacuum but is part of a society. It matters a great deal what it understands about itself, society and the relationship between the two. Understanding is going to determine attitude and function or role. Before we turn to an Excursus on liberation theology as the most conspicuous example of modern socio-political theology it is worth pointing out that Troeltsch thought that the church type was best equipped to effect a viable social ethic. The church type recognised the "strength of the secular world and, rather than by either abandoning the attempt to influence it or losing its position by contradicting the secular powers directly, accepts the main elements in the social structure as proximate goods ... The church is built, therefore, on compromise, it is mobile and adaptive." (130) The sect, and mysticism, on the other hand, rejects the compromises of the church and prefers isolation to compromise.

The twentieth century however has seen a decline in the church type and its influence. This should be seen as part of the context of the breakdown of civilisation, increasing individualism, and burgeoning secularism with its anarchy of values. To counteract this Troeltsch suggested the development of a new structure:

In the reciprocal penetration of the three basic sociological forms and their combination into a structure reconciling all these motifs lie (the) future tasks, tasks of a sociological-organisational nature which are more urgent than all the tasks of dogmatics. (131)

Unfortunately Troeltsch did not get around to working this out. He discerned the great compromises in the past but did not get beyond giving a few hints of the direction which should be taken for the future. But has liberation theology picked up where Troeltsch left off?
EXCURSUS 3: LIBERATION THEOLOGY

It is more correct to speak of theologies of liberation than liberation theology. (132) However, for the sake of convenience we will use the singular as is usually done. This excursus will consist of a brief description of and then critical discussion of some of the main issues that liberation theology is concerned with. The critical discussion will involve interacting with Troeltsch's thought.

Liberation theology may well prove to be one of the most significant theological developments of our time. Its great virtue is that it seeks to ground theology in the social context, i.e. to discern the meaning of the gospel through the social context. There is a sense in which all theology proceeds from a social context and, one hopes, is relevant to that context. But it is really only since the nineteenth century that this has been thrown into such high relief and, as far as liberation theology is concerned, makes the social context the point of departure. The basic approach is to interpret the Bible in the light of the social context rather than the other way round.

To interpret the social context Marxist concepts and analyses are used. This not infrequently brings the criticism that liberation theologians are naive if they think they can combine an atheistic ideology with Christian theology and remain orthodox. And there are no doubt a number who, if not naive, have strayed beyond the pale of orthodoxy; their theology having been subsumed by their socio-political Weltanschauung. Nevertheless the liberation theologians are not shy about being Marxist, (133) though with the rider that their Marxism is an instrumental Marxism. They are happy to use its concepts because they provide a useful (true?) analysis of the social context, while at the same time rejecting its ideological baggage. (cf. above pp.117ff) This is analogous to the way that theology has found it convenient, or been forced, to use the philosophical concepts of the age to express itself in a meaningful way. J. Moltmann says that "political theology designates the field, the milieu, the environment and the medium in which Christian theology should be articulated today." (134)

Thus it might be seen as a reasonable and necessary thing that the
liberation theologians are doing; given the socio-economic-political situation in, especially, South America, which is the home of liberation theology. This does not mean that liberation theology is solely a South American phenomenon; and as such an isolated thing or an aberration that affects people outside the main stream of Christendom. There are some 320 million people of diverse political, national, cultural and ethnic traditions spread over an enormous land mass. (135) Moreover it is beginning to export its distinctive concerns/emphases to other countries, especially those countries which are "undeveloped" or have significant minorities or consider themselves to be socially and economically and politically disadvantaged. (136)

P. Hebblethwaite refers to the threefold task of liberation theology.

First came the sociological analysis, borrowed from Marxism, which was designated to uncover the various levels of exploitation and unmask the oppressors. Next came the educational task of making the exploited aware of what was happening to them, and in this enterprise Paulo Freire's "conscientization" or "consciousness-raising" played a crucial role ... And finally came the struggle (lucha) against the oligarchies who were in alliance with the oppressors.(137)

It is this concentration on the disadvantaged which characterises liberation theology. The great concern and claim is that theology/Christianity should not be irrelevant. It has a passionate concern for the "poor" and "oppressed" in society and tries to do something for them - a key word and concept in the vocabulary of liberation theologians is praxis. And the claim is that this is of the very nature of Christian theology. This concern has always been there in theology and the Church, to a greater or lesser degree, but in liberation theology it is indissolubly bound up with a political and economic programme. For example, Troeltsch says that

during the peace of the Imperial period there never were any great social movements, with an equally constructive criticism of social conditions, in spite of the suppression of ancient capitalism by a bureaucratic government, the decline in the slave markets, and the growth of a mixed lower middle class composed of slaves, freedmen and free men.
Indeed it was only thus that it was possible for a movement like Christianity to arise which was essentially philanthropic but not social. (my emphasis.) (138)

The scene is different in the twentieth century though. Since the nineteenth century we have and are seeing great social movements that are calling for theology/the Church to give an account of itself.

Liberation theology is theology concerned with change. Before change can or should be made there should be an understanding of what is to be changed and in what direction. O. Chadwick remarks:

Our world is too big and complex to be understood. Yet we cannot move in it without trying to see what cannot be seen, and so we move with the aid of symbols or stereotypes, names or slogans. 'To traverse the world,' wrote Walter Lippmann, 'men must have maps of the world. Their persistent difficulty is to secure maps on which their own need, or someone else's need, has not sketched in the east coast of Bohemia.' They move not by what is, but by the picture which they form of what is from the little that they understand of what is. (139)

The question we need always to bear in mind is, is the liberation theology map an adequate one? To determine this we need to carefully consider its points of reference, or presuppositions: and so from general comments on liberation theology we turn to these. They are:

(a) Oppression

(b) Religion

(c) Hermeneutics

(a) Oppression

Thesis: "Marxism and liberation theology are ideologies based on a philosophy of oppression."

Like liberation theology, Marxism is a diverse thing and perhaps should also be written in the plural. There are the writings of Marx himself, early and late, and the various developments of
these, often taking on a nationalistic distinctive from country to
country. And, of course, it is developing still; to the chagrin
of the "orthodox" or hard liners. For convenience sake we will be
content to use the term Marxism in a fairly broad way as referring
to an ideology (140) which aims to counter economic and social and
political oppression. It sees this oppression as being the result
of alienation (see above p.109f) In his
Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts Marx sets out four forms of
alienation:
(1) the worker from his product
(2) the worker from his labour
(3) the worker from nature
(4) the worker from his fellow human beings.

It was Marx's contention that the basic cause of alienation was
economic. With the industrial revolution and the rise of the
factory system and capitalism the worker did not get full value
for his labour. The "surplus" value was creamed off by the rising
bourgeoisie. The worker was exploited and his oppression was
institutionalised by the system. The alleviation of all this
necessarily involved a political programme, namely socialism. The
liberation theologians adopted the Marxist ideology, though not
uncritically and not directly. It was usually a Marxism as
filtered through the "political theologies" of e.g. J.B. Metz and
J.Moltmann. If the plant was Latin American the roots were
European. (141)

We cannot pursue this in detail here. What we are primarily
interested in is the viability of the presuppositions of
liberation theology and whether Troeltsch is of pertinence. We
saw above (p.154) that the main methodological concept that he
operated with was that of compromise, and it may fairly be said
that liberation theology operates with this kind of concept even
if it does not specifically say so. It is also worth pointing out
that one of the formative influences on liberation theology, J.
Moltmann, was influenced by Troeltsch. R.C. Walton says that "In
developing his ecclesiology, Moltmann is consciously or
unconsciously in dialogue with Ernst Troeltsch." (142) The
indirectness of this influence may be seen in the fact that G.
Gutierrez in his seminal A Theology of Liberation has references
to Moltmann, and Marx and Hegel and Feuerbach, but not to
Troeltsch. However, Troeltsch was more than just a forerunner of
liberation theology. To examine this statement we must consider the notion of oppression which is so fundamental to Marxism and liberation theology.

The Latin American Situation

In the third world countries there are great areas of poverty and, by Western standards, underdevelopment. Beevon and Pearce, *A Vision of Hope*, document the situation, both historically and in the present, in Latin America. It is a situation ripe for change: but from what and to what. The picture drawn of an iniquitous capitalist system being responsible for the economic and social ills of Latin America is often overdrawn and assertive. It hinges on the assertion that oppression is institutionalised by the system, and that exploitation is inherently part of the system. (143) The West, particularly the United States, was held to be responsible for this. Gutierrez refers to the "more alert groups .... who believe that there can be authentic development for Latin America only if there is liberation from the dominion exercised by the great capitalist countries, and especially by the most powerful, the United States of America." (144) One notes his phrase "more alert groups." In the 1960s President Kennedy launched his "Alliance for Progress" programme. The key word, or idea, in this was development. Latin American countries were seen as being underdeveloped. The aim was to forestall potential revolutions of a socialist/communist type by improving economic performance and alleviating economic, and presumably social, distress. But the programme was too often read as underlining the political and economic hegemony of the United States: the Latin American states were victims of economic colonialism. The notion of development was seen as little more than a band aid approach intended subtly to maintain the status quo. (145)

There is no doubting the fact of poverty and underdevelopment in Latin America, nor that the involvement of the United States and right wing governments has been exploitive, nor the fact that change is needed. Nevertheless some caveats may be raised. First, there is the question of the system and economic performance. M. Novak provides a kind of polar opposite to many of liberation theology's presuppositions. He severely criticises the notion that a wealthy United States is responsible for the poverty in Latin America. His argument is that the success of the
United States is due more to the attitude and vigour of its
democratic capitalism than to its wealth. He points out too that
Latin America is far from lacking in resources. (146) As with
most polar opposites the issues are clarified; though the reality
would perhaps be better seen as embodying something of both
explanations.

Second, a set of values has been smuggled into the discussion; for
the ideology of both Marxism and liberation theology has made a
virtue of poverty: "... it speaks for the poor who are implicitly
the 'good' against the rich who are the 'bad' ..."(147) No one
would cavil with the idea that the poor should be helped and that
it is a good thing if compassion is "built in" to a political or
social or economic programme. But Marxism and liberation theology
not infrequently use poverty as a kind of tool or ideological
weapon in their advocacy of a socialist society. Their logic says
that if there is poverty it is caused by the system; so you change
the system. But what do you do with poverty in a
Marxist/socialist system? This is the dilemma of the
Marxist/liberationist analysis and programme. For it cannot be
denied that there is poverty and oppression in non-capitalist
countries that are outside the political/economic hegemony of the
United States. This is why Stalin is an embarrassment to the
Marxist cause. Marxism and liberation theology affects to answer
a cry for justice: it is not clear though that they have clearly
thought through what oppression and justice mean. This is the
main burden of W. Pannenberg's criticisms of liberation theology.
(148)

However, it is not Pannenberg's critique nor these two caveats,
which concerns us here. Rather it is the, implicit, critique
contained in Troeltsch's methodology, and here I refer to his
notion of compromise. He looked forward to a new compromise which
would meet the agenda posed by the twentieth century situation.
But he did not mean his notion of compromise to be taken in a
wooden ideological way, as though a new compromise would be
something that would remain fixed for all time following. He was
too sensitive to the flux and change of history, and the
consequent need for openness. A compromise was a working model.

One misses this with the theologies of liberation. The use of
Marxist concepts is a selective one and adapted to Latin American
situations. But are they really aware of what Marx did not foresee viz. the rise of a numerous middle class; the welfare state; and that workers under a capitalist system could be materially so better off. The issue is a complex one. The real question is whether oppression is due to the system. Here I refer to the word ideology as used in the "thesis" above (p.184). Though it is in itself a neutral and descriptive word it raises questions when used of liberation theology. For there is about liberation theology's analysis and programme an air of assertiveness that suggests that what it says is axiomatic: it is almost as though what it says has the status of a natural law. One misses the conversation with the present situation, its presuppositions, and the Bible, which is there in Troeltsch.

Any set of ideas which concerns the human condition ought properly be regarded as provisional. This goes for religious ideas too. And it is to the question of religion, or the Church, that we now turn. The history of Latin America is shot through with the presence of the Church, and liberation theology is not secular theology. It claims that its emphases are a legitimate expression of the gospel.

(b) Religion

Thesis: "Traditional religion - i.e. the Christian religion - has manifestly failed to meet the needs of the victims of the industrial revolution."

There are two aspects of religion i.e. Christianity, which in particular, caused Marx to reject it. One is individualism, or the privatisation of faith of Latourette's comments above p.116. The other concerns the traditional link between the Church and social order which lead to the Church being seen as a defender of the status quo. These aspects are why Marx called the criticism of religion was the premise of all criticism. The privatisation of faith, in its pietistic form, took man's attention off his present condition, and the Church's defence of the status quo helped preserve an iniquitous system. Concerning the former, he properly emphasised the social aspect/nature of man. And concerning the latter his criticism demands that the Church question its relationship to the state, or society. These two
aspects and their corresponding criticisms form the basis of modern political theologies, especially liberation theology.

However, these criticisms do not lead liberation theologians to reject religion as Marx did; and they do not find his methodological atheism a problem. What interests them in particular is the sociological aspect of his thought, and the insistence on the need for action/praxis rather than theory. They are impatient with the "idealism" that has been characteristic of western theological thought, and, because of this, they are not slow to criticise the Church's role in the past. Thus, they essentially agree with the thesis above, that traditional religion has failed to meet the needs of the victims of the industrial revolution. Certain questions though need to be asked about this way of reading the Church's past and present. However, before that the following points are made.

(i) Religious individualism. It may be readily granted that the Church/Christianity is a social phenomenon, and that pietism has frequently been concerned with personal salvation than the social implications of the gospel. By the same token though religion/faith is inescapably personal or individual; and there have been pietistic Christians, e.g. Wilberforce, Shaftesbury, whose personal/individual faith was the mainspring of their social concern.

(ii) The religious undergirding of society. It is not difficult to find examples in history of the Church seeing its role of providing cohesion to society being identified with advocacy of the status quo. There have been though, significant examples to the contrary. Beeson and Pearce for example tell of the often heroic efforts of Roman Catholic clergy and organisations who opposed right wing and exploitive regimes in South America. Liberation theology engages in a selective and tendentious reading of history if it states that the Church has been the mainstay of order (149); meaning by this that it has uncritically supported right wing regimes. One might add that this is true of the left as well as the right. Liberation theology must face the criticism that it is advocating and identifying itself with a new kind of establishment. This leads to the next point.

(iii) The prophetic role of the Church. This role refers to the
Church's duty to speak out against what it perceives as the wrongs in society; whether social, political, moral or economic. This is what the prophets did in the Old Testament. However while the prophets were members of Israel and spoke to Israel they did so from the margin of society. If a church is integral with or coterminous with society, "established" we might say, can it speak with the prophetic voice that the liberation theologians raise? (150) This has interesting connotations for what model of the Church we might like to work with or see as being more valid. I will pick up this question in my third criticism below.

(iv) The market place. This is increasingly a pluralistic and secular age, and the modern Church must preach its message in a market place of competing opinions, and values. With regard to Troeltsch, H. Richard Niebuhr said that "His practical, moral concern in the presence of pluralistic, centrifugal modern civilisation is evident throughout his total work."(151) At the same time though he affirmed the centrality of a religious dynamic to history. This brings us to the following questions.

1. Tendenz or Kompromis?

How do we understand history? I indicated on the previous page that a caution must be placed against liberation theology's reading of history. It is a shortcoming of liberation theology that it is wont to use this tendenz to support the legitimacy of its own role. It so identifies its programme with a Marxist-socialist ideology that it is guilty of the same sin of supporting a political programme. It thus cannot speak with a truly prophetic voice. The prophets spoke from the margin of society. It is questionable if liberation theology's espousal of socialism would give it that freedom in the case of a socialist regime. A socialist critique and a prophetic critique of a socio-economic situation may well need to say essentially the same thing; but that does not mean that they are the same.

It is here that Troeltsch's notion of compromise is again useful. For his notion of compromise does not mean the theological perspective being subsumed under or identified with a socio-politico-economic one. Rather it means recognising the ongoing interaction between Church and society: of the Church both influencing and being influenced by society. It means recognising
too the pluralism that is endemic to twentieth century society and
civilisation. (cf Niebuhr's quote above.) This is not amenable
to what W. Pannenberg calls "the new millenarianism of political
liberation" (152), but it is a far more realistic understanding of
the provisional nature of history. It does not lock things into
an ideological paradigm but sets the scene for ongoing
conversation, which better suits the dialogical nature of reality
than assertions from the left or right, the Church or the secular
world.

2. The Function of God

Here I pick up the word legitimate used on the previous page.
Liberation theologians criticise the Church for not only siding
with oppressive and exploitive regimes but, in the interests of
order, and self interest, of legitimating or allowing itself to be
used to legitimate such regimes. Their approach is to say that
God is on the side of the poor in history and that therefore God,
or the Church, should legitimate liberation. There would be few
who would not want to understand God as being concerned with the
poor and needy. But the liberation theologians are saying more
than this. It is one thing to be concerned with the poor: it is
another to use God to legitimate a left rather than a right wing
programme. Or, putting it another way, it is one thing to work
for a just society: it is another to absolutise one form of
society. I will develop this point in (c) Hermeneutics below.
Here though the point being made is that liberation theology has
in effect domesticated God by tying him to a particular socio-
politico-economic programme.

We may emphasise this criticism by referring to certain elements
in Troeltsch's thought. First, there is the question of
influence. According to Troeltsch this is a two way thing between
Church and society. Liberation theology, on the other hand, aims
at a (kind of theocratic) domination of society by the Church (cf.
above p.98f). Quite apart from the question of the validity of
absolutising one form of society, the posing of the issue in terms
of legitimation presents an either-or picture that does not do
justice to the complexity of either history or the situation in
Latin America. To this must be added Troeltsch's point about the
weakness of Christianity in the modern, increasingly secular,
world. It is "no longer capable of producing or sustaining a
Church-directed civilisation." (153) (cf Pannenberg's remark that "The principle of pluralism in politics as well as in religion indicates that neither any man nor any woman is God." (154)) Nor, we might add, is any political or economic theory.

Second, there is the question of freedom. God, and religion, are incorrigibly interventionist. This may be seen in the biblical record which purports to relate the saving acts of God in history; and is part and parcel of the sovereignty and freedom of God. Liberation theology because of its being influenced by the Marxist ideology of history, compromises this sovereignty and freedom. But Troeltsch stressed the openness of history refusing to absolutise any part of it. I have spelt this out in some detail in chapter 1 "Historical Method and Theological Thinking" and refer the reader to the exposition and arguments there, especially pp.40ff.

This leads to the third point, namely, the question of relativity. Troeltsch's espousal of the historico-critical method involved a recognition of the relativity of history.(155) For explication of Troeltsch's understanding of historical relativity I again refer the reader to chapter 1 of this essay, especially pp.16ff.

For Troeltsch the important thing was to take everything into account. Thus while the historical method relativises everything it does not do so "in the sense that it eliminates every standard of judgment and necessarily ends in nihilistic scepticism, but rather in the sense that every historical structure and moment can be understood only in relationship with others and ultimately with the total context, and that standards of values cannot be derived from isolated events but only from an overview of the historical totality." The historical totality of course involves the future as well as the past and present, thus standards and value judgments must be recognised as provisional.

These three elements contain the seeds of a critique of liberation theology. They do this not by providing an alternative answer but suggesting a different methodology, a methodology which involves conversation rather than assertion. To refer to Pannenberg again, "there still remains the necessary question of how provisional models and solutions for restructuring the social system of human life in secular society as well as in the church can be derived
from the centre of the Christian faith." (156)

(c) Hermeneutics

Thesis: "Liberation theologians insist that theological reflection must begin with the historical situation rather than scriptural exegesis."

Liberation theologians relate the Bible, or, more correctly, parts of the Bible, to their present situation. Now this is a fine and necessary thing; and every preacher proclaims the relevance of the Bible. But to do this honestly one must, using Gadamer's terminology, interpret and get in focus both horizons; the horizon of the text and the horizon of the interpreter. And it is here that the liberation theologians have come in for some criticism. The present situation is interpreted according to Marxist categories, and selected texts from the Bible introduced to endorse what is more or less a Marxist programme. Enough has been said about the interpretation of the "horizon" of the interpreter, namely, the Latin American situation. The aim of this section is to investigate liberation theology's interpretation of the horizon of the text.

1. Words

"Christ came to achieve justice, the hour awaited by all mankind has tolled ... The word evangelion ('the great news') makes absolutely no sense if we are not yearning, with all the hope of mankind, for the definitive liberation, the total realisation of justice ..." (157) As in any movement, or theology, there are certain key words and concepts; and, as the title suggests, for liberation theology it is liberation, or freedom. In Europe it is called political theology, but the Latin Americans chose liberation theology because it better described the need of their situation. By liberation they mean economic liberation from a capitalist oppressor, and political liberation from right wing regimes. The adoption of socialism and a Marxist economic programme as a panacea for socio-political and economic ills has already been noted. What also needs to be noted is the tendentious and cavalier use of language. In the New Testament the words free and freedom are certainly used (e.g. John 8:36 "If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed." Romans 8:21,
"The creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God"), and are obviously significant. It is equally obvious and significant that they are not referring to political or economic freedom.

The liberation theologians thus concentrate on a few texts from the Old Testament; the key one being that of the Exodus event. There, we are told, we have the model and mandate for the struggle to achieve economic and political freedom. The Exodus is certainly fundamental for the history of the Jews, but was it really a case of liberation the way the liberation theologians describe it? The time in Egypt is certainly spoken of as a time of bondage but in the Old Testament narrative the contrast between "slave" and "free" does not really play an important role. Indeed the idea of freedom as a theological idea does not have much prominence in the Old Testament at all. Certainly the modern idea of political freedom is not really what is being portrayed or advocated. What is stressed is the destruction of the Egyptians and the call to migrate to and settle in the promised land. Moses is instructed to tell Pharaoh, "Let my son (Israel) go that he may serve me." (Ex. 4:23). The horizon of the text is not political and economic freedom for a disadvantaged group but the call to worship the true God.

2. Relevance

The fact is, and this must be said cautiously, the Bible is not always, or immediately, relevant. Every Sunday all over the world there will be any number of occasions when a preacher will "use" a text to assert his thoughts about an ethical or current situation. If he follows a lectionary he will shape the text, like a nose of wax, to fit the situation, when the text might not have anything to say to that situation at all. At a less parochial level, when the issue is a major fundamental ethical or political one such as liberation theology addresses itself to, the cry for relevance should not force an answer. In 1975 E. Schweizer (158) pointed to the "ethical pluralism of the New Testament" and argued for a basic openness to diversity within the Church with regard to different social and political decisions combined with a basic unity with regard to the general vision of the good to be reached. It cannot be said that liberation theology has distinguished itself by such an openness to
diversity.

3. Principles

Liberation theology uses a Marxist analysis and programme as a kind of Procrustean bed to fit biblical passages onto. In doing this it transgresses against the following basic principles of scriptural exegesis. First, as just mentioned, it is (narrowly) selective in its choice of biblical texts (159); misinterpreting the text and changing the meaning of words. It also pays a lot less attention to the New Testament than one would expect a Christian theology to do.

Second, it is guilty of a certain "woodenness" in its exegesis, betraying a lack of appreciation for the diversity within the Bible and the central dominating themes. It is these major themes such as the kingdom of God, which covers a wide range of biblical concerns, that are more suitable as a hermeneutical key than a tendentious interpretation of the Exodus. For the hermeneutical key to interpret scripture should be recognised as a central theme of scripture. L. Goppelt wrote "The ministry of Jesus revolves around a fascinating term 'The Kingdom of God'. Everything else is related to it and radiates from it." (160) To say a similar thing of liberation theology's interpretation of the Exodus is to say something that is not verifiable and which distorts the horizon of the text. Any bringing together of the two horizons is going to be artificial. As exegesis also involves interpreting the horizon of the interpreter then modern presuppositions need to be identified and analysed. Liberation theology's presuppositions are neither as objective as it claims, nor does it question them. (161)

To refer to K. Barth again, all his life he had "carried on a conversation with the scriptures." Now a conversation involves listening as well as talking, and Barth criticised Troeltsch, and others, for not listening to what the men of the past were saying. (162) This is not an entirely correct criticism of Troeltsch; I think it is rather that he and Barth were listening to different things. However, my third point here is that the function of exegesis is not to indulge in a wooden typology but to "listen" to what the text says. This brings me to the final question of this excursus: does Troeltsch have anything to say to us about
hermeneutics, anything that might be of pertinence to liberation theology or any other political or social theology?

The answer to this is, yes. Hermeneutics is a fairly recent invention, and in its modern delimited sense was not around in Troeltsch's time. Nevertheless, in Troeltsch's work we can see a preoccupation with the fundamental issues of hermeneutics. Briefly, the main points are as follows:

his recognition of the historicisation of existence emphasised the fact that history has no place for certainties, or ideologies;

because history is always in a state of flux and change any standards and values were to be understood as provisional;

this was not meant as a counsel of despair but as an invitation to dialogue, and this is of the essence of the (historical and) hermeneutical task;

he recognised the plurality of universes of discourse. A description of the human condition, whether individual or corporate, needs to take this into account;

he displayed a remarkable ability, and achievement, in his accomplished handling of various disciplines and bringing them together in a multi-perspectival vision.
NOTES


2. See chapter 1 "Relations between Western Philosophy and some Extra - Philosophical Factors" of his Philosophies and Cultures, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1980, pp.1-19. In universities this phenomenon is seen in the growth of Interdisciplinary studies. The purist might bemoan the loss of clear boundaries but the recognition of the overlap of universes of discourse is an acknowledgement that human existence, whether seen from a secular or religious perspective, is a complex thing. In the nineteenth century this tended to be a fact of academic life even though the term "interdisciplinary studies" was not used: there was not the degree of specialisation that there is today.


7. B. Wilson, Religion, p.13

8. From his The Philosophy of History p.104 quoted by C. Brown, Philosophy, pl21f.


11. "My interest in theology as such continued to be nourished by eager reading of the Christliche Welt, Zeitschrift fur Theologie und Kirche, the works of Troeltsch, etc. but In the
industrial village of Safenwil it had to give place to other things. 'My position in the community led me to be involved in socialism, and especially in the trade union movement'. Class warfare, which was going on in my parish, before my very eyes, introduced me almost for the first time to the real problems of real life. The result of this was that my main study was now directed towards factory legislation, insurance, trade union affairs and so on, and my energies were taken up in disputes sparked off by my support for the workers, not only in the neighbourhood but in the canton.' So specialist theological books now gave way to books on economics." E. Busch, Karl Barth, SCM, London, 1976, p.69.


13. B. Wilson, Religion, p.3.

14. cf P. Tillich, Perspectives, p.234 "Troeltsch's method was thus a two way street. On the one side was the understanding that all doctrines are dependent on social conditions and cannot be understood apart from these social conditions. This was the Marxist side ...." 


17. N. Lash, A Matter of Hope, p.5

18. P. Tillich, Perspectives, p.115f.


20. cf the quote from P. Tillich, Perspectives, on p.110f.


27. The phrase appeared in Marx's essay, "Introduction to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law": It reads in full, "Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, the soul of a soulless environment. It is the opium of the people". It should be noted that Marx's words, when not taken out of context, convey the impression of a wistfulness rather than condemnation.


29. K. Marx, "Theses", p.64.


34. K. S. Latourette, *Christianity in a Revolutionary Age*,

35. N. Lash, A Matter of Hope, p. 154. Lash says "Even if, as we shall see, his criticism of religion was more sensitive, less crudely uncomprehending, than Lenin's, the only religion that he, personally, ever embraced, seems to have been exclusively an affair of the head: no biographer of Marx would need to devote so much as a paragraph to his 'spirituality', or to the experience of prayer. Perhaps we could say that Feuerbach and others helped Marx to make in his head a move that he never needed to make with his heart."


42. B. Wilson, Religion, p. 3.
The ghost of Comte still, apparently, lurks about. cf W.S.F. Pickering. "From the time of Comte, the dominant and exclusive presupposition has been that social life, solidarity, social institutions, and so on, are capable of explanation without resort to spiritual factors. Hence sociology is rational and agnostic ... All contemporary sociology implicitly and explicitly excludes the divine, or if it does include it, it denies or disregards its operative force on society."


43. S. Lukes, Emile Durkheim. His Life and Work: A Historical

44. Quoted by S. Lukes Emile Durkheim, p.73.

45. O. Chadwick, Secularization, p.7.


48. M. Charlesworth, The Golden Bough and After... One Hundred Years of the Scientific Study of Religion, University of Tasmania Press, Hobart, 1977, p.16f, refers to the four main issues which emerge from Durkheim's theory of religion: 
   "(1) the identification of religion with its social function; (ii) the
   sacred and profane dichotomy and the definition of religion in
   terms of ultimate values; (iii) the symbolic character of
   religious beliefs and rites; (iv) the methodological paradox which
   confronts the scientific investigation of religion in that it is
   an attempt to express the supra-rational in naturalistic terms."


50. There is in Weber an integrated perspective, the need for
    which I have alluded to above and which is a dominant trajectory
    running through the whole of this essay. I mean by this an
    overall view which includes and enters into dialogue with the
    religious perspective. Marx had an integrated perspective in that
    in his thought philosophy, economics and social theory, and
    history combine; but he did not have any time for the religious
    perspective.

51. W. Pauck, From Luther to Tillich, p.121f. On the following
    pages Pauck gives an insightful description of the friendship and
    collaboration between the two men.

52. Ernst Troeltsch, Deutscher Geist und Westeuropa, ed. H.
    Baron, J.C.B. Mohr, Tübingen, 1925, p.249: quoted by W. Pauck
    From Luther to Tillich, p.122

53. R. Robertson, "Max Weber and German Sociology of Religion"
in N. Smart et al. eds., *Nineteenth Century Religious Thought*, p.281. On page 288 Robertson refers to "the master question concerning the origins of the modern ethos of instrumental rationality exemplified in the secular spirit of modern capitalism and modern bureaucracy guided all of Weber's subsequent endeavours."


A little later Lowith adds: "We should not be misled by the fact that Weber himself, emphasising the critical side of his statements on economic materialism, occasionally gave his basic conception an anti-Marxist character, and referred to this spirit as if it were an 'ethical infrastructure'. He immediately retracted the misleading sharpening of his view: 'no such simplistic doctrinaire thesis should be maintained' as that the capitalist spirit .... could only have arisen from specific influences of the Reformation, or indeed that capitalism as an economic system is a product of the Reformation.' Towards the end of his study Weber stated even more clearly that he had not intended 'to replace a one-sided "materialist" with an equally one-sided "spiritualist" causal account of culture and history.


60. See above p.29.


63. P. Avis, *Church*, p.57.


65. *ST*, p.11


74. *PP*, p.27f.


76. In his foreword Troeltsch, in dedicating his work to the Philosophical Faculty at Greifswald and the Law Faculty at Breslau, remarked on "how clear a connection exists between philosophy and law and the general subject of this book." ST p.121

77. ST p.19f.


82. ST, p.991.

83. ST, pp.1004, 1005.

84. D. Bebbington, Patterns, pp.124-125.


86. Christian Thought, p.128f.

87. H.G. Drescher, ETFT, p.28.

88. W. Pauck, Harnack and Troeltsch, p.91 n.62.

89. W. Pauck, Harnack and Troeltsch, p.124f.


92. A kind of parallel might be drawn with Ghandi. Ghandi is often thought of, and portrayed - as in the recent movie on him, as being a saintly advocate of non violence. Leaving to one side the question of whether he was a saint or not, it should be borne in mind that Ghandi was a skilful politician who was only interested in Indian independence. He used non-violence as a tool because it was the only one open to him. One wonders how successful he would have been if Germany or Russia had been the colonising power and not England.

93. ST, p.10f.


97. ST, p.201f.

98. ST, pp.218-225.

99. ST, p.575f.

100. ST, p.549.

101. ST, p.691.

102. ST, p.1013.

103. L. Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1971, pp.115ff has a good, brief, description of the concept; and compares it with the use made of it by the writer of the fourth gospel. Among modern theologians Paul Tillich has made the greatest use of the concept, thoroughly integrating it into his theology. See his *Perspectives* pp.xix-xxi, and his *Systematic Theology*, James Nesbit, Digswell Place, 1968.
104. *ST*, p.262.


108. *ST*, p.1012.


112. "Others sat apart on a hill retired.
    In thoughts more elevate, and reasoned high.
    Of Providence, Foreknowledge, Will, and Fate -
    Fixed fate, free will, foreknowledge absolute -
    And found no end, in wandering mazes lost."


114. This being said, one must add that Barth was unwilling to separate theology and ethics: they were interwoven and a continual dialogue must be carried on between them. "No one, he made clear, can flee from the demands of the world into the refuge of the sovereignty of God, or use grace as an escape from works, or allow gospel to preempt concern for law."
    R. McAfee Brown "Good News from Karl Barth" in D.K. McKim ed., *How Karl Barth Changed My Mind*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1986, p.96. On p.99f Brown makes the interesting observation that "as Barth struggles with the biblical message, the content of the
message he hears is remarkably similar to the message liberation theologians hear. As Barth puts it, in words that might just as easily be found in Gutierrez: 'God always takes His stand unconditionally and passionately on this side and on this side alone: Against the lofty and on behalf of the lowly, against those who already enjoy right and privilege and on behalf of those who are denied it and deprived of it.' (C.D. 11/1, 386)

In the same book Eberhard Busch in his memoir of Barth refers to a conversation he had with Barth about his Ethics shortly before Barth's death. Barth said: "I am not quite sure that the parts of the ethics are written in the right way. When I returned from the trip to the United States, I saw I must learn much more than I know. I should study sociology, not to repeat this science, but I need to think about it more." (my emphasis) (p.12)


120. W. Pannenberg, Theology, p.109.


123. N. Lash, Theology, p.62.

124. N. Lash, Theology, p.65.

125. ST, p.1013.

126. ST, p.331.

New York, 1970, p.252 faults Troeltsch's typology in three areas. 
(i) His typology had too few categories to give an adequate picture of all the data.
(ii) His classification failed to discuss adequately the conditions in which various types of religious organisations were most likely to occur.
(iii) He only discussed Christian organisations.
These are reasonable criticisms and they should be borne in mind when thinking of the Church from a sociological perspective. They should not however distract us from recognising the striking and illuminating use Troeltsch made of church/sect typology in the ST and their usefulness for further historical studies.

127. ST, p.691, Troeltsch goes on to say:
"Mysticism meant the rise of a lay religion within the Church, and it greatly encouraged the individualistic tendency of the bourgeois world. But at that time it had no influence upon the life of the religious community, nor had it yet any critical significance in connection with the idea of the Church, or with doctrine. Mysticism was still either under the protection of the Church, or it was connected with the Religious Orders. It never stood alone. Protestant mysticism, on the contrary, learnt to regard itself as the outcome of the idea of the priesthood of all believers, and of the personal religion of conviction, and thus it was able to make an independent stand (my emphasis).


129. H.P. Rickman in his "Introduction" to W. Dilthey, Pattern and Meaning in History: Thoughts on History and Society, Deakin University, Geelong, 1982, p.33.
T. Parsons, Structure of Social Action, Beacon, New York, 1949, pp.483-4 describes Dilthey's explanation of verstehen at greater length.

At the same time, and I guess this in a way reinforces the first and second of Yinger's caveats mentioned in n.126 above, the United States may be seen as an example of a society which is dominated by sects.


133. J.L. Segundo, *The Liberation of Theology*, SCM, London, 1976, p.35 "Latin American theology is certainly Marxist (in the sense that) present day social thought ... is profoundly indebted to Marx."


cf R. Nash "The Christian Choice Between Capitalism and Socialism", R. Nash ed., *On Liberation Theology*, Mott Media, Milford, 1984, p.49 "The foundation of liberation theology is a set of three claims: (1) Christians ought to become politically active on behalf of people who are poor and oppressed; (2) The major cause of poverty, injustice and oppression in the contemporary world is capitalism; (3) Christians should attack capitalism and work to see it replaced by socialism. Although assorted liberation theologians may assert a great deal more than this, it seems fair to say that all liberation theologians agree with these three basic claims."

Nash and most of the contributors to this volume offer a critique of liberation theology. While there are certainly aspects of it that invite criticism and need reassessment one has the impression that the contributors sometimes present a rather too sweeping
condemnation of it.


138. *ST*, p.121.

With reference to the insistence on the need for praxis G. Gutierrez, one of the most significant of liberation theologians, says: "A high-level theoretical and practical confrontation is needed, however, to get away from the well-trodden paths of 'dialogue' and explore the possibilities for creative innovation. To this end, grassroots experiences in social praxis are fundamental. Experiments us to this point have not been of sufficient duration or number. For this purpose what is happening in all of Latin America - and not only in Cuba and Chile - can be regarded as laboratory experiments."


139. D. Chadwick, *Secularization*, p.44.


M. Cranston, "Ideology", *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, vol. 9, pp.194-198 defines ideology as "a form of social or political philosophy in which practical elements are as prominent as theoretical ones: it is a system of ideas that aspires both to explain the world and to change it."

In Marxist vocabulary it is frequently used in a pejorative way, i.e. as a set of beliefs with which people deceive themselves, though Marx himself did not always use it so. In this essay it is used in a neutral way.

141. J.V. Schall, "Liberation Theology in Latin America" in R. Nash, *On Liberation Theology*, p.83f, quotes A. Fierro:

"The Latin American versions of political theology were deliberately called "liberation theologies." While the two ideas are obviously similar, they are not exactly the same in origin or emphasis. Alfredo Fierro's remarks are worth citing in this context:

A similar (to Germany) turn toward politics soon appeared in Latin America. Its peculiar situation was a general one of inequality within a country and dependence vis-a-vis the
outside world. This fostered a new kind of theological reflection cut off from the earlier dogmatics and essentially found in the process of liberation in connection with exploited peoples. This new theology was usually presented as a "theology of liberation." It was rooted in the social context of Latin American Christians and their public praxis and embodied as critical awareness of their faith. As such it was fully autonomous and autochthonous, not merely a reflection of European theology."


143. J. V. Schall in R. Nash, On Liberation Theology p.78f says that another look at Marxism "seemed to many to be quite logical. Did it not preach 'exploitation' of the poor by the rich as the cause of their ills? Could not its simple and easy to understand theory explain all essential facts? Did it not advocate the strong state everyone in the third world seemed to be looking to justify? What was needed was 'redistribution', the old socialist panacea, an idea that often reappeared in a sophisticated form in Harvard Professor John Rawl's A Theory of Justice. The normal drives and values of the 'people' were not at fault as the ecologists argued but rather political and economic structures conveniently lumped together under the hated 'capitalism'."

144. G. Gutierrez, A Theology of Liberation, p.88.

"Gutierrez traced the stages which the notion of 'development' had undergone: starting life in the capitalist world as a synonym for economic growth, it had been broadened to mean 'an overall social process which included social, political and cultural aspects'. Populorum Progressio makes use of this wider concept of integral development.
But already the word had taken on a perjorative sense in Latin America. Gutierrez rejected 'development' because it had come to mean reformism and modernization, a mere tinkering with the works, which did not begin to touch the inter-locking international system of trade which, on this analysis, was permanently weighted against the poorer countries."
"Clearly, the resources were available. Latin America is rich in oil, tin, bauxite, and many other important minerals. Its farmlands and tropical gardens are luxuriant. Why, then, didn't Latin America become the richer of the two continents of the New World? The answer appears to lie in the quite different nature of the Latin American political system, economic system, and multicultural system. The last is probably decisive. Latin America might have been economically active, progressive, and independent. Indeed, Latin America had the advantage of remaining outside World Wars I and II. It might long ago have placed the United States in its economic shadow. It might yet do so, if it were to organize itself to use its own great wealth in an appropriate way. Yet its Catholic bishops do not blame the Catholic church, the systems of political economy they long supported, or the past values and choices of its peoples. They blame the United States."

147. J. V. Schall in R. Nash, On Liberation Theology, p.95.


149. One would expect this to be so, otherwise the Church would be, in a sense, denying the incarnation. It is no accident that in the Old Testament the Hebrew word tsedek, usually rendered righteousness, carries with it the connotation of order. Yahweh demands that Israel be righteous i.e. that they comport themselves with order, see J. Scullion "Righteousness" in Anchor Dictionary of the Bible (forthcoming).
See too Chadwick, Secularization, pp.138ff for further aspects of church and society.

150. For an interesting discussion of the case for establishment, (in the case) of the Church of England, see J. Habgood, Church and nation in a Secular Age, Darton Longman and Todd, London, 1983.

151. St, p.8.

152. W. Pannenberg, "Sanctification and Politics", 
Christian Spirituality, p.55. This whole chapter is a trenchant critique of liberation theology. It is not without interest in this regard that Pannenberg is probably the most outstanding contemporary theologian who has been influenced by Troeltsch's historical way of doing theology.


154. W. Pannenberg, Christian Spirituality, p.61. Pannenberg was speaking of the Puritan revolution in England when the Presbyterians tried to impose their own form of religious uniformity on the whole country, but his remarks are apposite for the questions that liberation theology raises.

155. See his article "Historiography" in Hastings vol. VI, pp.716-723.

156. W. Pannenberg, Christian Spirituality, p.56.


159. J.A. Kirk, Liberation Theology. An Evangelical View From the Third World, John Knox, Atlanta, 1979, pp.95ff, 147ff has a detailed and valuable discussion on the (reasons for) the use of the Exodus texts.

    cf J. A. Kirk Liberation Theology, p.176f.


162. K. Barth, Protestant Theology, p.22.
CONCLUDING UNSCIENTIFIC POSTSCRIPT

The Unfinished Task

After the first world war the theological scene saw the demise of Protestant liberalism and the rise and dominance of neo-orthodoxy (or the theology of crisis or dialectical theology) which was associated especially with Karl Barth. One should also perhaps mention the existential theology of Rudolf Bultmann. Among other things neo-orthodoxy stressed the unique and special revelation of God in the scriptures and the transcendence of God. As a consequence of this new apprehension of the nature of theology Troeltsch's understanding of the theological enterprise was relegated to the theological wilderness; there to remain until a more opportune time. There are indications now that this time has arrived, and that there is a revival of interest in Troeltsch. But why?

One reason is, quite simply, that of Troeltsch's erudition and scholarly achievement. By any standards he was a remarkable scholar, and his thought merits serious critical attention. Then there is the time that he lived. He lived through the heyday and decline of classical Protestant liberalism, and was closely associated with it: see above pp. 54ff on his involvement with the religionsgeschichtliche Schule. However, in spite of this association he should not be understood as being representative of Protestant liberalism. There are crucial aspects of his thought which transcend this being categorised so. And it is these aspects which have led to his being studied again, for he taught theology a new way of seeing things. His value is not that he was representative of or summed up a theological movement but that his way of doing theology was prophetic of today's context, and suggestive of future application as well.

What then was his contribution? As mentioned above, it was not so much his results as his methodology. This involved recognising anew what has been the case since apostolic times: namely, that theology must be done in an intellectual context, indeed in sometimes more than one context. What we need to bear in mind here is that theology is not a "pure" discipline. On the one hand it has to express itself in prevailing, philosophical, thought
patterns. On the other hand there is the overlap of universes of discourse. Recognising this fact, Troeltsch's approach was what we might call an interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary one. As Pauck said, he was a synthetic rather than an analytic thinker. (1) This made for a certain complexity, but that is the nature of things anyway. We should also note that Troeltsch did not deal with different areas of thought at different times in his life, as though each belonged in a watertight compartment. It is better to read him conscious that there are certain themes and interests present throughout. In his writings there is an interaction and an inter-relatedness.

This essay has concentrated on the areas of the philosophy of history, other religions, and social theory. There are other areas, such as the psychology of religion, which are important for theology and in which Troeltsch did significant work. But the first mentioned three, it may be fairly said, form the context and the agenda for theology in the latter half of the twentieth century. Each one asks penetrating questions of theology, and poses issues that the Church has to deal with in daily life as it struggles with the question of relevance. Troeltsch recognised, raised, and struggled with these issues the best part of a century ago.

There is a sense in which Troeltsch's programme was not new as theology and the Church has always had to come to terms with new patterns of thought. The newness of his way of doing theology is, first, because of the new disciplines, just mentioned, which form the theological agenda. The philosophy of history and social theory are quite recent inventions. And while there have always been other religions it is really only over the last century that theology and the Church have begun to adopt a more realistic attitude to them. The religionsgeschichtliche Schule and modern missiological studies have recognised and insisted that they must be taken more seriously. Second, there is the question of how one approaches these other disciplines. What determines the course of investigation - declaration or dialogue? (2)

Putting things another way, for the purposes of comparison, we might say that Barth's theology was a restatement of orthodox, Reformation, theology, which was a theology "from above". Troeltsch's theology was "from below", and was more a statement in
the light of new knowledge and new disciplines. This was not just a matter of being presented to the Church and theology to justify itself. Troeltsch's programme aimed at meeting this. This is why we should think of him seriously as a theologian, in spite of Barth's remark about his move to a chair of philosophy at Berlin in 1915. Though we may justifiably think of him as being primarily a philosopher of history, or of his contributions in other areas, it was the theological task that he had in mind. This involves, not least, that of communication. An analogy may be drawn with missiology. A good deal of missionary training, and later work in the field, involves cross cultural communication: this is not just a matter of learning a language but understanding a culture. In a world which was becoming increasingly secular Troeltsch, in his way, was engaged in cross cultural communication.

H. Richard Niebuhr said that Troeltsch "has helped me to accept and profit by the acceptance of the relativity not only of historical objects but, more, of the historical subject, the observer and interpreter."(3) This is part of the "other culture" that is twentieth century western civilisation, and which followed the dissolution of the unity of Church based civilisation that characterised European civilisation before the eighteenth century. Dilthey spoke of an anarchy of convictions, and Troeltsch clearly stated his aim of overcoming this: see above p.56f. It should be added that there was an urgency about this. Troeltsch was disturbed by what he saw as the alienation and anomie of western civilisation, and the ineffectiveness of the Church in the face of this. What was needed was not a repetition of the traditions, or the traditional message, of the Church, but a new social ethic. This was not an optional extra but something that involved the relevance and, hence, credibility of the Church.

Thus, a positive way to understand Troeltsch's contribution is to see it not as an exercise in reductionism or demolition of Christian truths but as recognising and setting the agenda for twentieth century theology. Moreover, as also suggestive of a realistic way to come to terms with this agenda. He did not aim at repeating given "certainties"(4) but at opening the way for responsible and constructive action. Henceforth theology will need to operate not only with a new agenda but with a new set of
presuppositions viz. truth

the future

hermeneutics

(a) Truth

Presuppositions are apt to determine not only conclusions but also methodology. With this in mind we refer to Troeltsch's understanding of truth, which is to be seen not so much in one work on the subject but in his overall approach. It was an understanding determined in large part by his conviction of the nature and meaning of history. Everything human is set within history, which is always changing. At the end of his life he wrote "History within itself cannot be transcended ... In history itself there are only relative victories"(5) He wrote these words not as a sceptic but as one who felt that he was testifying to the truth.

A truth which, in the first instance, is a truth for us does not cease, because of this, to be very truth and life. What we learn daily through our love for our fellow men, namely, that they are independent beings with standards of their own, we ought also to be able to learn through our love for mankind as a whole - that here too there exists autonomous civilizations with standards of their own ... In our earthly experience the Divine Life is not One but Many. But to apprehend the One in the Many constitutes the special character of life. (6)

Pauck quotes some words of Troeltsch from W. Koehler "Truth is always polymorph, never monomorph; it manifests itself in different forms and kinds, not in different degrees."(7) This kind of statement, and attitude is not calculated to win approval from those who trade in certainties and work within the bounds of a narrowly revelational theology. But Troeltsch did not have his eye fixed solely on a "pure" theology based on the Bible. Rather he worked with full appreciation of other and new disciplines. H.G. Drescher refers to

His generous ability to hold theological thinking widely open ... (This) ability to relate his work to other disciplines is once again becoming most relevant, and it is his permanent contribution to have demonstrated that theology is an open discipline which lives by cooperation with other sorts of
intellectual endeavour. The problem of the open and historical character of the basic criteria of theology, a responsibility which must be accepted in all theological work, found in his writings an exemplary expression which will continue to have significance for the future of theology. (8)

How far one goes along with Troeltsch is going to depend a good deal on the understanding of truth that one operates with. For the sake of comparison we might polarise the issue thus: on the one hand there is the Greek understanding of truth which saw truth as involving that which was not subject to change. In Platonic terms it is not a quality belonging to existent things but to the timeless and immaterial. Most of our western tradition has, broadly speaking, followed this Greek understanding which had as its aim certainty, or objectivity, and thereby a certain security. However the revolution in historiography in and since the nineteenth century has pointed out that this model of truth might not be the most appropriate one for the study of history, or theology.

Objectivity is a fine thing to strive for but in the study of things historical true objectivity is impossible as value judgments necessarily impinge. The subjectivity of the historian, or theologian, cannot be denied. Thus, on the other hand, and in the light of Troeltsch's words quoted on the previous page we might contrast the Greek (objective) understanding of truth with a "subjective" understanding. And refer to Soren Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard is not remembered specifically as a philosopher of history but what he had to say about truth being "subjective" is very relevant to what we are discussing here. For example, consider the title of his main work, Concluding Unscientific Postscript. What does he mean by "Unscientific"? The German word wissenschaftlich, and the Danish videnskabelig, is often translated as scientific though its meaning is wider than our English word. It is cognate with wissen, to know. So Kierkegaard seems to be saying that he is not so much concerned with knowing something, whether it is true or not. Rather truth is concerned with my relationship to what is known.

This is the sense in which Kierkegaard means that truth is
subjective. He does not mean that what I think is true because I think it, a kind of solipsism. He calls subjective truth subjective because it refers to the individual, that is, the subject. (9)

When the question of truth is raised in an objective manner, reflection is directed objectively to the truth, as an object to which the known is related. If only the object to which he is related is the truth, the subject is accounted to be in the truth. When the question of the truth is raised subjectively, reflection is directed subjectively to the nature of the individual's relationship; if only the mode of this relationship is in the truth, the individual is in the truth, even if he should happen to be thus related to what is not true. (10)

We may see something of this in Troeltsch too: in the way that his methodology involves interaction and engagement with the past (the historical tradition) and the present (the cultural matrix). As a theologian Troeltsch was not a disinterested spectator. His historicism was a practical historicism, or an "activist philosophy of history" and consisted of the proposition of a cultural synthesis or programme based on a historical analysis or interpretation of western civilisation. (11)

We cannot pursue the concept of truth further here; it is far too complex. It is pertinent however to make two further observations. The first of these concerns Emil Brunner, a friend, contemporary, and sometimes sparring partner of Barth. In 1937 Brunner delivered a series of lectures at Uppsala on the "fundamental question" of truth. These were published the following year under the title Wahrheit als Begegnung (Truth as Encounter). (12) Prof. A. Runestam of Uppsala suggested the subject "Objectivism and Subjectivism in Theology and the Church". This gave Brunner the starting point for reflection about the biblical conception of truth, and he became convinced that the church's task was still burdened with the Subject-Object antithesis which originated in Greek philosophy. In contrast to the Greek notion of truth being abstract and objective he concluded that the biblical understanding is "truth as encounter". (13) "We are dealing here with God's relation to mankind, a relation which is God's acting in space and time and therefore action in history. God's relation to the world and
mankind is not something timeless, but it is action in history".(14)

Second, as this model of truth is not necessary and certain but at best merely probable, it involves an openness to the future. Pannenberg readily recognises this feature. He insists that we see the significance of Jesus Christ, especially in the context of apocalyptic expectations, in that he constitutes the proleptic revelation of the End.(15) Not to allow for the openendedness of truth, and history, is to be seduced by rationalistic objectifiability and uncertainty. Interestingly, in the light of previous comments about him being a polar opposite to Troeltsch, Barth does not do this. He asserts the eschatological nature of Christianity, relating it, as we might expect, to Christology. Unless there is a second coming, the first coming is left hanging with no purpose, no telos. He takes issue with the Congregation of the Sacred Office for saying that the glorious, visible return of Christ is not a certain teaching of the New Testament.(16) It is a certainty, of course, which is pushed out into the future. Till then we place our bets and wait. (Pascal).

(b) The Future

The point of this understanding of truth is that it accords well with the biblical notion of truth, and also with the biblical notion of history. I have already referred to Troeltsch's teleological understanding of history - see above pp.35ff; and the influence this has had on, for example, W. Pannenberg - see above pp.166ff. Here I only wish to add two further remarks by way of emphasis.

The first is that when we talk about history on a macro scale, we cannot get away from the conviction that it is heading somewhere. This conviction comes to us, in part at least, from the Judaeo-Christian tradition that our culture is heir to. Alternative to this, historical thought in antiquity tended to liken the course of history to the cyclical process of nature. The Judaeo-Christian understanding, on the other hand, saw history as having a beginning and an end (τέλος), with a divine plan operative in between. Furthermore, the τέλος was not thought of as being something that was just tacked on at the end. R. Bultmann says that "in early Christian history is swallowed up in eschatology.
The early Christian community understands itself not as a historical but as an eschatological phenomenon."(17) It is this consciousness of the ἔσχατος or eschaton, this looking forwardness in hope, this longing, that is an indispensable part of Christian history, and theology. The touchstone of faith is the parousia. Troeltsch took seriously this openendedness of history, more seriously than did those whose thought was constrained by a positivist kind of historicism or an ahistorical, "systematic", approach to theology.

Second, and cognate with eschatology, or teleology, is the idea of longing. In Troeltsch, and other writers of his time, we can see a fundamental dissatisfaction with the way that things are: see above pp.131ff. The tension caused by this dissatisfaction is not resolved in history. Rather, it is something that man, especially the believer, lives with. But he longs for the time when it will be resolved. This longing is an indispensable part of history, and theology. This is a question of some importance for the Church as it is part of the Church's business to proclaim the lordship of God over history. The critic of Christianity might say that this sort of talk is really a matter of wishful thinking. And very often he might well be right: the ghost of Feuerbach has not been finally laid to rest. However, the believer, and theologian, does well to recognise this part of the make up of man; though I prefer to refer to it as longing rather than wishful thinking. Wishful thinking has too much the connotation of being divorced from reality. The underlying question must always be, why is it that man is so constructed? Does this part of his make-up require us to believe that there is something external to him that corresponds to it?

The question of how much the theologian is bound by his heritage or tradition is still there of course. In response to this question I think that the idea of longing should be seen against the background of the Enlightenment which twentieth century man is heir to. J. Moltmann says that

In the seventeenth century both sciences of the Enlightenment (i.e. natural science and the rising science of history) still had a deistical trait which endured for a long time particularly in the theology of salvation history and the 'theology of saving facts'. If one wanted to express this process in a formula one might say that the critical history
of the present alienates the past. He goes on to quote Dilthey: "Historical consciousness breaks the last chain which philosophy and natural science could not shatter. Man now stands there completely free." (18)

It seems reasonable to allow the force of these two aspects of modern man: namely, his perceived freedom or coming of age and his "deistical" attitude. This being so we should expect that the idea of longing should dissipate somewhat. However, if anything, the reverse is the case. The sense of dissatisfaction with the way that things are is still there. For example J.B. Priestly expresses perturbation at the state of modern western civilisation and the failure of religion to meet the challenge. His hope is that literature is where man might "find himself totally and touchingly reflected, might then look both outward and inward ... and so bring with it a rich new life ..."(19)

In the history of Christian thought the loss of a sense of longing may be seen as theologians moved away from the aforementioned, biblical, emphasis on the future to a concentration of the present or the past. (20) In ecclesiology it may be seen in the tendency towards institutionalising or absolutising the church. The tension tended to be seen as a matter of a simple contrast between the Church and the world. In theology it may be seen in an ahistorical systematic approach which tends to absolutise certain formulae or doctrines which are part of and characterise a particular tradition. In history it may be seen in the way that, before the nineteenth century in particular, historians lacked an awareness of the flux and change that is of the nature of history, and of the philosophy of history. The histories they wrote were too static. But history is not like that. It has a τιμλος, and it is this τιμλος which gives it meaning.

My point in saying this is that the theologian should recognise the presence and the importance of longing as a presupposition for doing theology in the twentieth century. This presupposition will deny theology the specious luxury of indulging in assertion at the expense of dialogue and argument. It will prevent ossification by underlying the provisional nature of theological formulations. And it will encourage the dialogical relationship of the Church to the Bible, and to society.
(c) Hermeneutics

This "looking-forwardness" does not mean that theology calmly waits for the eschaton. On the contrary, it means more work, and more sensitive work. For its task is not just to repeat old verities but to relate them to whatever the present situation is. This all has to do with hermeneutics, which simply means interpretation (21); and it involves a threefold task for the interpreter. He has to interpret the past, be it a historical event or a sacred text. He has to interpret the present: that is, at least in the sense of being aware of the vantage point from which he "views" the past.(22) Then he must bring about a fusion of the two horizons. This of course is what every good preacher does.

In the twentieth century it has become more apparent that the interpreter, be he theologian or preacher, is engaged in an ongoing task: cf what was said above pp.128ff about the Anabaptists and the need for an ongoing hermeneutic. The reasons are these. First, the nineteenth century saw the rise of the critico-historical method of exegesis and its application to the biblical texts. The aim was to understand what was written against the writer's unsophisticated and prescientific times. This was not unrelated to the aims and work of the Religionsgeschichtliche Schule. Second, and related to this, are the great insights that have been gained on the Bible as a result of new discoveries. The Dead Sea Scrolls of the Qumran community are an obvious example. The point of all this is that scholars are less confident about what they know about the text, and more open to what they still might have to learn. S. Neill aptly quotes a remark made to him by C.H. Dodd: "It is surprising how little of the New Testament there is of which we can say that we know exactly what it means."

Third, there is the changing nature of society. No society has ever been completely static, but the fact remains that in and since the nineteenth century we have seen change happening very quickly. This means that the vantage point of the interpreter is changing; and if he is not engaged in continuing dialogue with this he may find himself not on an eminence but in a thicket.(24) Fourth, reference should be made to the revival of interest in biblical hermeneutics which has been stimulated by existentialist
Theology (cf. for example R. Bultmann, G. Ebeling and E. Fuchs). This is sometimes called the new hermeneutic. Its development is in part due to the influence of historico-critical methodology on biblical studies, to the way that exegesis had become more a matter of relating a text to its historical background and less a matter of asking about its truth as revelation. Existentialist theology and the New Hermeneutic aimed at bridging this gap that had appeared between the biblical scholar and the theologian. It asked the question of a text, what does this mean for us? Thus they sought to relate the gospel to modern man. In this they saw the hermeneutical task as being essentially that of the preacher.

Fundamental to this was an acute awareness of the modern predicament of man and the need to alleviate this. Existentialist theology interpreted this in individual terms and stressed the need for individual decision. However, there is another, corporate, side to the modern predicament. There is a sociological and socio-ethical dimension, and it was to this that Troeltsch addressed himself. At his death he was working at setting down guidelines in the form of a social ethic to meet the modern situation.

But to return to the main point of this subsection, this ongoing hermeneutic is based on the conviction that there is order and meaning in history even though it might not be all that clear, or attainable. Negatively, a critic might respond by saying that such a Weltanschauung is fatuous. Meaning has to be imported into or imposed on the material first: the presupposition determines the results. Now there is a sense in which this might be true enough but the following observations are relevant. It is not a case of operating with a cast iron system. A certain paradigm might be used so as to give what is perceived as a truer explanation of a text or situation. However the recognition of the hermeneutical task is an ongoing one.

It is not so much a result as a working model or methodology. Then there is the question of meaning in history: to say that there is none seems to run against our grain. Why is it that we are so constructed as to expect there to be order and meaning? Everything we do is predicated on this; that there ought to be order and meaning to correspond to this expectation. Finally, even though our paradigms, and efforts, are provisional there is
always open the possibility that one day this will no longer be the case.

Thus the ongoing hermeneutic, which is one of the main presuppositions of theology in the twentieth century, brings us back to a trajectory that has run through this essay, as it did through Troeltsch's thought; namely, the openended and teleological nature of history. Moreover this is better seen not as a problem but as a responsibility which must be accepted. It also brings us back to the great fundamental notion of all theology that is truly biblical - an emphasis on the sovereignty and freedom of God.
NOTES

1. W. Pauck, Harnack and Troeltsch, p.46

2. cf N. Lash, A Matter of Hope, p.5.


4. It is worthwhile referring to the approach of Gotthold Lessing in this regard. How can "contingent truths of history", which are only partly verifiable, constitute an absolute basis for certainty? Only 'necessary truths of reason' can do this, ....." H. Chadwick ed. Lessing's Theological Writings, A. and C. Black, London, 1956, pp.51ff.

See too H. Thielicke, The Evangelical Faith Vol.1, not least for his interesting division of theology into what he calls Cartesian Theology and non-Cartesian Theology.


7. W. Pauck, Harnack and Troeltsch, p.90. The work he quotes from is W. Koehler, Ernst Troeltsch, J. C. B. Mohr, Tubingen, 1941.


9. It is this emphasis on the existing individual, and his need to make choices, that has led Kierkegaard to be called the father of existentialism. Barth was influenced by Kierkegaard initially but later tended to distance himself from him somewhat. "I consider him to be a teacher into whose school every theologian must go once. Woe to him who has missed! So long as he does not remain in it or return to it". "A Thank-you and a Bow: Kierkegaard Reveille", Canadian Journal of Theology, 13 (January 1965) p.7. It is frustrating and disappointing that Barth did not include a chapter on Kierkegaard in his Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century.
10. S. Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, p.178. A.C. Thiselton, "Kierkegaard and the Nature of Truth", *The Churchman* LXXIX 1975, p.87 quotes W. Kaufman that Kierkegaard "tried to live his thoughts". (Thiselton's emphasis) Kierkegaard meant to appeal not to the intellect but to the will. It is not irrelevant in this regard to relate him to Troeltsch's emphasis on the need for decision, and to "overcome history by history". cf H-G. Drescher in *EFT*, p.17.


13. We might compare, or contrast, this with Schleiermacher and Harnack. For all their emphasis on subjectivity one misses really the idea of an "encounter" with a God who stands over against man. For Brunner's criticism of Schleiermacher see *The Divine-Human Encounter*, p.34f. For Barth's, fundamental, criticism see *Church Dogmatics*, vol.11 part 1, p. 9, "Human beings know God in that they stand before God". E. Busch says of this sentence that "If read carefully and interpreted correctly, it sounds a whole range of positive and negative antitheses characteristic of Barth - the repudiation of Neo-Protestant subjectivism. According to it, God is 'something' of the human, so to speak of God means really that we humans once again speak of ourselves in elevated tones. Instead, argues Barth, God is different from us. He remains the one who is ever-against us." *Karl Barth in Re-view*, ed. H.M. Rumscheidt, Pickwick Press, Pittsburgh, 1981, pXV.


15. See F. Tupper, *The Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg*, SCM,

16. K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. III part 2, p.510f. of his *Letters 1961 - 1968*, p.9 where, in answer to a question on eternal life, he defines eternal life and then relates it to the second coming. "We thus wait and hope, even in view of our death, for our manifestation with Him, with Jesus Christ who was raised again from the dead, in the glory of not only the judgment, but also the grace of God. The new thing will be that the cover of tears, death, suffering, crying, and pain that now lies over our present life will be lifted, that the decree of God fulfilled in Jesus Christ will stand before our eyes, and that it will be the subject not only of our deepest shame, but also of our joyful thanks and praise".


20. This should not be confused with the expectation of an imminent parousia which was supposedly held by some of the New Testament writers. The argument goes as follows; and we might refer especially to the work of H. Conzelmann who has been very influential in this regard with his work on the Lucan writings. Conzelmann said that Luke wrote under the pressure of the delay of the parousia; he was the first to realise that the church was going to have to continue for some time and so wrote back into the apostolic age some of the features of his own age to make it appear as if they and been there all the time. Conzelmann has been influential, but also not without his critics. Space forbids us to go into detail, but it may be said that it is not at all clear that the delay of or imminence of the parousia particularly exercised the minds of the New Testament writers the way that it does some twentieth century New Testament Scholars. V. Taylor's caveat regarding the way that some Form Critics were prepared to allow an overly creative role to the early community is appropriate: "If Form Critics are right, the disciples must have been translated into heaven immediately after the Resurrection."

21. See especially A.C. Thiselton, The Two Horizons, for a careful and wide ranging analysis of the thought of a number of prominent modern scholars who have engaged in this task. By way of contrast we might refer to the Princeton theologian Charles Hodge (1797-1878) who at the fiftieth anniversary of his election to a professorship declared with satisfaction: "I am not afraid to say that a new idea never originated in this seminary."

22. cf N. Lash "How Do We Know Where We Are", Theology, pp.62ff.

23. S. Neill, Interpretation, p.92. Neill adds in a footnote: "The word exactly is of course the operative word. The general sense of the New Testament is, happily, open to anyone who reads it with patience and humility."

24. The expressions are Newman's as quoted by N. Lash, Theology, p.62f.
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