

BOOKS BY J. STANLEY GLEN  
*Published by The Westminster Press*

*Erich Fromm: A Protestant Critique*  
*Pastoral Problems in First Corinthians*  
*The Parables of Conflict in Luke*

# ERICH FROMM: *A Protestant Critique*

by  
J. STANLEY GLEN

THE WESTMINSTER PRESS  
Philadelphia



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LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOG CARD No. 66-21807

Published by The Westminster Press  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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## *Foreword*

Erich Fromm's criticism of the Christian religion, and particularly of its Protestant form, is essentially a Marxian criticism translated into the language of psychology. It is predominantly a Marxian social psychology and therefore implicitly philosophical, but it is in the process of becoming conservative and mystical. In its association of Protestantism with capitalism and with the ethos of the middle class, it reflects the Marxian mission to unmask what is regarded as the social and political significance of religion. The only difference is that Fromm restricts himself to authoritarian religion, of which Protestantism is presumed to be the most representative type.

The fundamental significance of such psychology, not only in its narrower scope as a criticism of Reformation Protestantism but in its wider scope as an implicit criticism of Evangelical Christianity in every period of history, must be recognized. The popularity of Fromm's views is enough to warrant a careful study, but there are two additional reasons that necessitate such recognition. The first is that the churches are presently so preoccupied with internal conversations with one another that they seem to have little inclination to deal with the kind of criticism that Fromm makes of their faith and theology. For the most part, they have been indifferent to him. The second is that the social and psychological sciences have shown no inclination to verify Fromm's claims on the basis of Biblical and Reformation source material. Generally speaking, they have accepted at face

value what he has said of both. They have been indifferent to the essential meaning of the Christian faith and its theology.

The writer realizes that a cross disciplinary study is always a rather hazardous undertaking. There are many difficulties in venturing into a field other than one's own. There is the necessity of preserving a balanced judgment both in relation to what one represents and what one opposes. The more polemical the study, the more necessary this becomes. There is the further problem of focusing and arranging the subject matter so that it does not become so comprehensive that it obscures important issues.

The present study is not intended to be a comprehensive appraisal of Fromm's whole psychology, as if the objective were that of one psychology examining another point by point. This book is primarily concerned with the bearing of his psychology upon the message and theology of Protestantism in its classical form and the wider implications this has for Evangelical Christianity. Such a study naturally includes a consideration of what he proposes as a substitute religion. The bibliography reflects this definition of aim in that it is selective rather than exhaustive. An attempt has been made throughout the study to see the relevance of Fromm's criticisms while at the same time maintaining over against them what seems most essential in the Christian faith. Since his criticisms really pertain to the center of the Christian faith—to its gospel—their relevance largely consists of a fresh and penetrating insight into what theology chooses to call legalism. Thus his positive contribution to theology is essentially that of provoking a discussion of the old issue of the law and gospel in a new and particularly modern context.

The writer is grateful to the Board and the Senate of Knox College for a period of sabbatical study in which he was privileged to use the library resources of Union Theological Seminary and Columbia University, New York City. He is indebted to Professor Allan L. Farris in the Church History Department of Knox College for valuable suggestions and to the librarian, the Reverend George L. Douglas, for his assistance in

securing necessary references and clarifying some of the terminology.

He is particularly grateful to Mrs. James Carruthers, who gave so generously of her time in the typing and retyping of the manuscript even to the point of using some of her vacation for this purpose. Finally, he wishes to express gratitude to the one whose patience and encouragement has been largely responsible for the development and completion of the study—his wife, Winifred.



## 1: Introduction

SINCE emigrating from Germany in the early 1930's, Erich Fromm has become one of the most influential and popular psychoanalysts in America. "No psychoanalytic thinker approaches him," says E. J. Friedenberg, "in the power and consistency of his effort to apply the values and insights that derive from his position as a therapist to major social and political issues. . . . [He] has become to a degree both the conscience of the psychoanalytic movement and its most articulate and consistent advocate of social policy."<sup>1</sup> This will at once suggest why his thought is so widely recognized and is helping to shape the mind of contemporary American society. It will suggest why his publications are sold in the hundreds of thousands and appear on the shelves of university libraries and on public newsstands alike.

The extent of his appeal indicates that he is articulating the hidden, unexpressed thoughts and feelings of large numbers of people. He is saying for them what they cannot say for themselves. He is interpreting the way in which they experience themselves in modern society and giving them answers that seem relevant to their situation. To understand how this happens, we have to consider the period of history in which his writings have been most popular in America. This is the period of almost a quarter of a century from the publication of his *Escape from Freedom* in 1941 until the publication of *The Heart of Man* in 1964. We have to ask what significant events and social changes

have occurred during this period and what effect these have had upon American society.

A survey of the period will begin with the Japanese attack upon Pearl Harbor in 1941 as the outstanding event, because this signified the entry of America into World War II. The intensity of the war effort that followed during the next few years involved enormous social and economic adjustments. There was an unprecedented development of wartime economy involving tremendous internal movements of population which uprooted great numbers of people from their familiar home surroundings. There was a sharp increase in urban population, with a corresponding increase in centralization and organizational control. Toward the end of the war came the explosion of the first nuclear bomb, which signified not only the end of an era but the potential destructiveness of future warfare. This shocked the imagination of millions of people all over the world. With the end of the war came the readjustment to a peacetime economy, and in the two decades that followed, an unprecedented economic expansion and prosperity. This was due partly to the stimulation of the economy by the cold war that hung over American society as a constant threat and necessitated a high degree of military preparedness. It meant that the social changes which began with World War II did not cease with the coming of peace but continued in what amounted to a virtual transformation of society. All of this was interspersed with such events as the Korean War in 1949, the Suez crisis in 1956, the Congo crisis in 1960, and the Cuban crisis in 1962. In the midst of it came the launching of the Russian Sputnik in 1957. This signified not only a superiority of scientific knowledge but a horrible awareness of the possibility of nuclear destruction by means of intercontinental ballistic missiles. The effect upon the public mind was tremendous, for everyone could see that it meant the end of North American isolation and the security it represented.

The appeal of Fromm's psychology is related to the deeper effect that these various events and social changes have had upon the personal life of the individual. Since these have contributed

so largely to a feeling of insecurity and insignificance and of being caught in a situation from which there is no escape, they have resulted in a serious impairment of individual freedom. This concerns the malaise or deterioration of character of the mass-minded individual who lives and works under the influence of a vast, impersonal, managerial society. As one who is in danger of virtually becoming an automaton because he passively conforms to the almost mechanized requirements of his superiors, he is much more of a selfless person than a selfish one. And since selflessness is socially acceptable because it is conducive to cooperation and "togetherness," and for this reason considered good, the individual finds his freedom impaired even by the common conception of goodness.

Fromm, however, sees such selflessness not as goodness but as a serious defect of character or as a loss of self. Indeed, his description of it bears a resemblance to the Biblical conception of loss of soul. Recalling Nietzsche's statement that God is dead, he says that man is dead. This means that the individual is incapable of being himself. His thoughts and feelings are not his own, and he is no longer the subject of his action. He is alienated from himself and others and is therefore basically lonely.

This interpretation of the impairment of individual freedom has a wide appeal. In a society in which such freedom has been generally accepted as one of the highest values, there is a deep concern over anything that tends to threaten it. This pertains not only to the threat of the world situation from the outside but also to the threat of the changed situation from the inside. Ordinarily the focus of public attention is on the threat from the outside with less, if any, attention to the threat from the inside. Any serious possibility of the latter tends to come as a surprise. But when the threat from the inside does come, as Fromm's interpretation indicates, the surprise adds to the concern, so that an immediate interest is generated over a wide area. And interest is greater still when, as he shows in his *Escape from Freedom*, a similar impairment of individual freedom in Germany prepared the way for the emergence of totalitarianism in the 1930's.

For it is well known how difficult it was for many people to believe that such a serious threat to freedom could come from within a land as cultured and highly developed as Germany. Having had this possibility historically demonstrated, many Americans are prepared to listen to Fromm when he warns of a similar danger in their own land.

This brings us to the point at which his psychology acquires its relevance. It concerns the change in the human situation associated with the emergence of totalitarianism in Germany in the 1930's and similar developments in other lands. His psychology, as well as that of Horney and other analysts, represents the revision of Freud's psychology that this change in the human situation seemed to necessitate. Their feeling was that Freud's psychology failed to provide an adequate explanation of this change. It neglected cultural and sociological conditions as the primary source of trouble and concentrated upon the individual and his instincts.

This was because Freud's psychology presupposed the society of the nineteenth century and its extension into the twentieth century. It was the bourgeois society of Europe and America as it was accepted prior to World War I and, in a considerable measure, prior to World War II. It was the society of *laissez-faire* capitalism in which political and philosophical liberalism was the most acceptable ideological perspective. Its people were characterized as self-reliant, independent, and motivated by what sociologists call the Protestant ethic. In America, they were the people described by Riesman as inner-directed and therefore representative of the society which, from the time of the earliest New England settlers to the most recent years, has held individual freedom in the highest esteem. This does not mean the absence of traditions that had their roots in the medieval and ancient periods and that predefined the values and roles which individuals accepted. It means, rather, that the kind of society which these traditions originally represented was no longer dominant.<sup>2</sup>

The kind of society that Fromm's psychology presupposes is the society of Western Europe and America since the 1930's. It is

the society of these lands as they have been affected by totalitarianism, World War II, and the events of the intervening period of precarious peace in an insecure world. It is the society of increased urbanization, greater centralized control, and the mechanization and automation of more and more areas of activity formerly requiring employment. As the society of monopolistic capitalism, its mass productiveness yields a mass-minded definition of standards and values in the aesthetic, moral, and intellectual spheres of life and a subordination of the creative excellence of the individual. Its people are highly dependent upon outside agencies and invariably conform to popular practice. Their deep desire is to be accepted and liked and to be successful in what they do. In America they are the people whom Riesman describes as other-directed.

The change from the kind of society presupposed by Freud to that presupposed by Fromm and other Neo-Freudians is reflected in the kind of problems that bring patients to psychotherapy clinics. In simplest terms, this is the change from the problems typical of the inner-directed man of the older, more individualistic society to those typical of the outer-directed man of the newer, more totalitarian society. Since the inner-directed man is associated with the nineteenth-century type of bourgeois society, his problems were those with which Freud was most familiar. What necessitated psychotherapy in his case was more frequently a specific neurotic symptom—a phobia, obsession, compulsion, or a physical ailment without an organic cause—that might occur suddenly and that presupposed a relatively well integrated personality. It was the kind of symptom which the strongly self-determinative aspect of the individual's character structure had repressed into the unconscious. In this sense the root of the problem lay in the unconscious, involving an individual who tended to keep things to himself and a society that imposed severe restrictions on the divulgence of things private and sexual.

But with the change in the human situation associated with the emergence of the outer-directed man, the problems that in

his case necessitate psychotherapy are markedly different. These are the product not of repression but of a loss of the determinative aspect of the self that would be capable of repression. There is a loss of an awareness of the self and of those things which are worthwhile in life and which, if achieved, would enhance such awareness. The symptoms are not specific, but vague, confused, and pervasive of the whole personality. There is general apathy and boredom and a feeling that life is more or less meaningless. For this reason the individual is isolated and lonely even though he may live and work in a metropolis.<sup>3</sup>

The influence and popularity of Fromm in the last quarter of a century in America derives from his ability to interpret the origin and significance of these problems of personality that have arisen because of the change from the old society to the new. Only those persons who have acute problems come for psychotherapy. But the great majority who do not come often wonder about themselves and the enormously complex and impersonal society in which they live. They appreciate Fromm's interpretation because it articulates their feelings and analyzes their situation in a manner that appeals to them as relevant.

One of the reasons for this is Fromm's fundamental recognition of the problem of loneliness and the need for relatedness. He sees loneliness not only as a product of the isolation and loss of self-esteem from which the individual suffers in modern society but as a basic problem of human existence in all periods of history. Loneliness arises from the sheer fact of self-awareness as the individual realizes his identity in his emergence from that primary unity which had bound him as an infant to his mother. It has to do with his separateness. But separation without an adequate relatedness becomes a curse. At this point, Fromm's conception has certain affinities with Biblical theology, particularly that of the earlier Hebrew covenantal community. In such theology, harmonious life in community is considered normal, while lack of community or rejection or complete separation is regarded as the worst thing that can happen to a man. Indeed, one of the strengths of Fromm's psychology is that it does

not interpret the modern problem of loneliness too narrowly, as if it derived only from a lack of friendship and affection. He sees it as a problem that also derives from uprootedness, from a lack of significant values, and from the absence of a frame of orientation and devotion. In this sense he is speaking in terms that can be understood by the modern individual, who suffers not only from a lack of wholesome personal relationships but from shattered moral and religious perspectives.

It is very likely Fromm's answer to the problem of loneliness that appeals more than his analysis of the problem itself. He warns against those answers which would submerge the individual still more deeply in mass society; and he offers an answer that promises freedom and a recovery of positive love which derives from the recovery of a capacity to love. On this basis he emphasizes adequate interpersonal relationships and a discovery of the humanity of the self and of others. In a similar manner he emphasizes the need for creative achievement in which, as the subject of his action, the individual is enabled to transcend himself. This not only restores self-confidence, but an appreciation of cultural values and the wonder of nature itself. And if we interpret Fromm correctly, his position has a further advantage. It enables the individual gradually to construct a frame of orientation relevant to his authentic self.

This brings us to one of the cardinal principles of Fromm's psychology—the principle of self-realization. As an optimistic conception of the creative potentialities of the individual, this principle is based upon presuppositions respecting the nature of man belonging to the philosophical tradition of romanticism. It is therefore devoid of the pessimism that derives from the Freudian doctrine of instincts. Its emphasis upon the realization of the primary spontaneity of the self presumes that the self is essentially creative. Even in the establishment of relations with others and in the construction of a frame of orientation, the dynamic and definitive source is this spontaneity. But the self is preserved from the unpredictability of a pure expression of freedom by what Fromm calls the laws of man's being. These laws are in-



herent in man's nature and thus define the rationality that is presumed to be implicit in the spontaneity. In this respect the rationality functions as the humanistic conscience. It is the voice of one's being.

Although Fromm sharply distinguishes his conception of self-realization from the self-initiative typical of the older society with its authoritarian emphasis upon duty and obedience, it nevertheless appeals to all who feel the loss of individual freedom however they may have conceived it. The widespread popular confidence in the freedom of the individual typical of this older society has far from disappeared. The dream of achievement and recognition and wealth that spurred the individual to make the dream come true was not just a dream. It was an ideal which became an accepted definition of the American way of life. A generation of vast economic development, social change, and the constant threat of war has not been sufficient to eclipse this ideal. It has been written too deeply in the lives of men and women and their institutions, and too visibly demonstrated in the achievements of the past for them to forget it so soon. If they cannot find freedom in the old way, they will find it in the new way. If they cannot find it through puritan self-initiative, they will find it through humanistic self-realization. If the outward ideal that beckoned them forward is no longer effective, the inward creativity that impels them to reach beyond themselves is effective. The main point is that Fromm's psychology preserves the original respect for individual freedom even though it reinterprets its meaning. It encourages a new fulfillment of the potentialities of the individual at a time when the individual is so often isolated and frustrated.

But there is another respect in which Fromm's psychology reassures those whose confidence in individual freedom has been shaken. It is the emphatic claim that the source of the trouble is not in the individual but in society, not from the inside but from the outside. If the individual is incapable of being himself, if he is alienated from himself so that he is merely a selfless auto-

maton with no genuine thought or feelings of his own and is profoundly lonely, this is not really his fault. It is the effect upon him of the social and economic environment in which he has lived. It has come from the irrational power, or authority, under which he has lived from the earliest period of his life. It has come from the arbitrary demands of parents and teachers, from the all-powerful requirements of social and economic institutions as part of the vast complex of modern urbanized, industrialized society. All of these have prevented him from realizing his potentialities and experiencing his life as his own.

Such reassurance is welcome to the frustrated individual because it enables him to change his attitude toward himself. Whether it be the major problems that confront him from without or the effects within himself, caused by his unfortunate environment, he is able to see that the source of the trouble has really been from the outside. This agrees so closely with his experience that it is most convincing. In the world in which he lives, all the danger seems to come from the outside—nuclear bombs, the cold war, the population explosion, the demands of big government, the requirements of social status, the incessant din of the advertising and news media, the risk of competition and accident, and many other external threats to his privacy and well-being. Simply to have a psychological explanation of the possibly crippling effects of these various outside powers upon him is itself a source of encouragement.

By this time it will be evident that our explanation of the popularity of Fromm's psychology is that it appeals to what is generally regarded as the American way of life. Since this way of life has changed with the times while retaining its emphasis on the freedom of the individual, Fromm's psychology, with its interpretation of such freedom, has elicited a widespread response. This is probably because his humanism has affinities with the humanistic tradition that has always been one of the contributing factors to this interpretation of life. As a tradition, at some times clearly defined in the language of those best able to influence the public mind and at other times unconsciously ac-

cepted by those whose desire is only that of being human, it has always helped to shape the prevailing conception of freedom.

The similarity between Fromm's psychology and John Dewey's philosophy of education provides a convincing illustration of the affinities of Fromm's views with the popular humanistic tradition in America. As the great humanistic exponent of progressive education, Dewey fought against traditionalism and the imposition of a predefined curriculum upon the child, in a manner akin to Fromm's fight against authoritarianism. He opposed the idea of adult authority being brought to bear on the child through the teacher for the sake of conformity. The aim of education was not that of adjusting the child to an institution whose traditions and values were relatively static. Such an adjustment could not provide the kind of educated people who could take their place in a progressive, democratic society. Dewey defined education as growth in the fullest sense of the child's development. Since growth and life are synonymous, education was identified with life. It was not a preparation for life or for some future situation, but life experienced by the child in the present. This meant that the child was placed at the center of the educational process, and the teacher kept in the background. The actively learning child and the relatively passive teacher in the role of a guide formed the desirable pattern. Under these circumstances, the child's interests defined the curriculum and were regarded as intrinsic to the concept of growth and development.

Without further elaborating Dewey's opposition to traditionalism or his concept of growth which was central to his educational philosophy, it will be evident that they resemble the two cardinal principles of Fromm's psychology. The imposition of something fixed, static, and authoritative from without must be resisted in the interests of the expression of life, freedom, and creativity from within. The assumption is that the latter is the best way to assure that relating of the self to others which contributes to wholesome living and to a more mature and intelligent social order. The importance of the child's learning to do by doing, instead of merely being told what to do, seemed to imply this result.

Dewey, of course, did not interpret growth or the effects of conformity to it in the language of psychoanalysis or in the psychological dimension of depth that the latter implies. But his acceptance of the presuppositions of post-Darwinian naturalism and of the romanticism in the educational theories of Rousseau, Pestalozzi, and Froebel means that his position has a kinship with the Neo-Freudianism of Fromm. This is not inconsistent with the fact that his philosophy of education is less popular than it was, particularly after the criticism of the American educational system following the launching of the Russian Sputnik. Since Dewey did not fully analyze the human personality and the alienating effects of modern society on it, this probably explains a certain lack of realism in its outlook. The fact of its assumption that the growth and development of the child would ultimately harmonize with the democratic process, moreover, was evidence of an implicit conservatism despite its progressive emphasis. Fromm's psychology is more radical, especially in its social criticism. In this respect it is more relevant to the contemporary situation. It can give a more adequate expression to the interest in progressive education than Dewey's philosophy can presently give.<sup>4</sup>

But we cannot overlook the fact that Fromm's psychology also has been criticized for an implicit conservatism not unlike that which we have observed in Dewey's philosophy of education. The importance of the conservatism in the light of our discussion is that it contributes to the popularity of his psychology as it evidently did to Dewey's philosophy. In the context of the American way of life a man can be progressive and humanistic, but he cannot be essentially radical. He cannot call the fundamental presuppositions of this way of life into question. In this sense Fromm's psychology is not essentially radical, but conservative.

This, in substance, is the objection of Marcuse to Neo-Freudianism. His argument is that it ultimately means an adjustment to the established order despite the fact that it says so much against the idea of adjustment. Marcuse argues that the "optional development of a person's potentialities and the realization of his

individuality” is essentially unattainable because the established civilization, in its very structure, denies it. He contends that there are only two alternatives: “Either one defines ‘personality’ and ‘individuality’ in terms of their possibilities *within* the established form of civilization, in which case their realization is for the vast majority tantamount to successful adjustment. Or one defines them in terms of their transcending content, including their socially denied possibilities beyond (or beneath) their actual existence; in this case their realization would involve transgression. . . . Today,” says Marcuse, “this would mean ‘curing’ the patient to become a rebel or (which is the same thing) a martyr.”

Marcuse also contends that “Fromm revives all the time-honoured values of idealistic ethics as if nobody had ever demonstrated their conformist and repressive features.” He accuses him of speaking of “the productive realization of the personality, of care, responsibility and the respect of one’s fellows, of productive love and happiness — as if man could actually practice all of this and remain sane and full of ‘well-being’ in a society which [he] himself describes as one of total alienation, dominated by the commodity relations of the market.”<sup>5</sup> In other words, if these aspects of self-realization do not confront the established order in a revolutionary manner, they inevitably receive definition from this order. They become identified with the ideals that the order accepts and that are adapted to its preservation.<sup>6</sup> Although Fromm sharply disputes these criticisms, there are other considerations which lend support to the claim that his psychology is implicitly conservative.<sup>7</sup> There is his admission, for instance, of the weakness, indistinctness, and relative ineffectiveness of the humanistic conscience. Although he finds the reason for this in other conditions — in the failure to be productive, in the ignorance of knowing how to listen, in the indirectness of its voice — the fact remains that such a conscience is not sufficiently powerful to counteract these conditions in a decisive manner.<sup>8</sup> It hardly impresses one as capable of standing up to the alienating power of modern industrialized so-

ciety. Second, there is the fact that for all his professed indebtedness to Marx, he rejects the authoritarianism necessary for the violence that alone can fulfill Marx’s revolutionary objective. This was the objective of changing society and not merely interpreting it. Fromm is mainly concerned with interpreting it. This is probably the reason why his Marxist tendencies seem not to have detracted from his appeal to so many in America. They detect its essentially conservative nature as a fresh interpretation of their accepted ideals.

Apart from these two considerations, Fromm’s conservatism is further expressed in the religious context in which he places his psychology. At times it is difficult to decide whether his primary interest is in psychology or in religion. Although his religion is mystical atheism, which has an important place within the tradition of humanism, its identity as a religion possesses a certain appeal to those who might otherwise reject it. The fact that Fromm speaks of spiritual things, of the primacy of love, of the importance of the individual, and of idolatry and God seems impressive. Although his religion acknowledges no supreme being, entity, person, or spirit who exists independently of the natural order, its mystical devotion to this order, especially in its higher manifestations, inspires a certain sympathy. This coincides with the widespread popular inclination toward nature mysticism which is probably the oldest religion of man. In addition to this, Fromm’s religious interest involves a lingering fascination for his earlier religious faith as indicated by the frequency with which he turns to the Old Testament and the Talmud for illustrative material. His use of these ancient sources is suggestive of more than the familiarity that would make them the most natural place in which to find illustrations for his present convictions. A deeper motive is evident. He wants his present convictions authenticated by them. He has not been emancipated from them. Even though he is in revolt against the patriarchal aspect of the faith of his fathers, against its conception of the “otherness” of God (transcendence) and of the sacred law that arises out of it, he still seeks its authentication. Since the likeli-

hood of achieving this peculiar objective seems greater with the espousal of mystical atheism than with open atheism, he naturally seeks for mysticism in these ancient sources and declares it to be their most valid theme.

This brings us to another significant aspect of Fromm's popular appeal. Despite the atheistic character of his mysticism, it bears a striking resemblance to the kind of religion which seems to be emerging from the great complex of organized institutional religion as represented by the churches of all denominations. It is similar to what Herberg describes as the "American Religion," Marty as the "New Shape of Religion in America," and Eckardt simply as "Folk Religion." To understand what is happening, we have to recognize the change coming over religious traditions of all kinds. As Herberg shows in his *Protestant — Catholic — Jew*, these three great religious traditions are tending to dissolve and to become more and more alike in terms of a fourth alternative which he calls the "American Religion." This is a religion which is neither Protestant, nor Catholic, nor Jewish but which has characteristics of its own. Marty describes it as the kind of religion that remains after the erosion of particularity. It is generalized religion that suffers from the same loss of self-identity as the individual suffers in mass society. Eckardt characterizes it rightly as a domestication of religious faith and doctrine into folk religion, or a religion for the folks, which is little more than a function of group interest.<sup>9</sup>

It is evident from these three studies of the newly emerging religion that it is a vacuous religion which is devoid of content and therefore with no explicit doctrines or theology. This religion is obviously unconcerned with the intellectual aspect of its faith and, if anything, is anti-intellectual in its outlook. It emphasizes love, goodwill, "togetherness," and practical achievement, and has every confidence in the righteousness of its intentions. It reacts against anything negative and particularly against anything that would call its righteousness into question. It is implicitly nationalistic and finds it difficult to believe that religion and nationalism could be other than complementary.

The God to which it gives its allegiance is as vague and as amorphous as its devotion. As the God in general who is less and less of a being, entity, or person, he is for practical purposes nameless. He is used rather than believed in and, according to Marty's description, is manageable, cozy, and jolly good-tempered. He is captive to the demands of those who use him.

The characteristics of such religion are so similar to those of Fromm's humanistic religion as to make it difficult not to conclude that they are only two varieties of the same thing. Both are evidently forms of mysticism, differing only in the degree to which they have been secularized. The lack of content and intellectual definition characteristic of the "American Religion" is consistent with Fromm's denial of all "theology" and all "knowledge about God." It is in agreement with his contention that "the ultimate aim in religion is not the right belief but the right action." This means, as he indicates, that the traditional emphasis on "believing in God" is supplanted by a feeling experience of oneness with him. The emphasis is on love without interference from thought. It follows, therefore, that the vague God of the new religion is not appreciably different from the nameless, nonparticularized god that Fromm regards as synonymous with the principle of unity behind the manifoldness of phenomena.<sup>10</sup> The only difference in this respect is that the new religion would probably limit him to the unity behind the manifoldness of American society. Needless to say, the emphasis on right action would be the accepted way of responding to such unity. But we can scarcely say that the new religion is aware of the atheistic implications of what it represents. It is not sufficiently self-critical in any intellectual way to realize with Karl Barth that "mysticism is esoteric atheism" and that the difference between it and open atheism is that the latter involves a "blabbing out of the secret" implicit in it.<sup>11</sup> Nor is it sufficiently critical of itself or at least of the direction in which it is going to declare with Fromm that "*God is not a symbol of power over man but of man's own powers.*"<sup>12</sup>

Finally we come to an aspect of this new religion which

should be recognized in view of Fromm's reaction to Reformation Protestantism. This concerns its sensitivity to negativism. We have mentioned already its sensitivity to anything that would call its righteousness into question. Now we have to emphasize its sensitivity to the intellectual aspect of faith and the extent to which it conceives of the intellectual as inimical to faith. It finds difficulty in accepting the negativism implicit in critical thought, no matter how constructive such thought may be. This is best illustrated in the popular overemphasis on such religious themes as confidence, power, victory, peace of mind, and especially positive thinking. The overemphasis suggests an aversion to the opposite of each of these themes and particularly to the opposite of positive thinking.

In a wider sense the sensitivity to negativism is comparable to the way in which the outer-directed personality typical of modern society has rejected the so-called Protestant ethic. This is seen in the fact that the older emphasis on moralism, which entered into the popular interpretation of Christianity, has lost much, if not most, of its appeal. As a result, there is a reaction against the moralizing that has been so generally associated with preaching. The newly emerging religion tends therefore to be less moralistic and, in its popular forms, to appeal to the emotions and to the desire to be accepted and liked and, above all, successful.

But the new religion does not stop with a deemphasis of moralism. It reacts against the message and doctrine of the Christian faith as these have been historically interpreted. It hears the recurrent themes of the cross, sacrifice, judgment, guilt, repentance, self-denial, law, and death, and regards the more positive themes of forgiveness, life, joy, and hope as inextricably bound up with these negative themes. Only on special occasions, such as Christmas and Easter, does it see much evidence of the positive themes breaking out into the open. As a result the reaction of the newly emerging religion against the negative themes of the Christian faith has been sufficiently strong that it has either divested itself of them or greatly modified their mean-

ing. Insofar as these themes pertain to the gospel, it does not want the gospel.

In Fromm's reaction to Reformation Protestantism, as we find it in his best-known publication, *Escape from Freedom*, there is a similar although more explicit and extreme aversion to the negativism of the gospel and of the doctrines that interpret it. The question, of course, is the extent to which this negativism is that inherent in the gospel, or that imported into it by the Reformation or by subsequent Protestantism, or that read into it by Fromm. The gospel under attack is the gospel of salvation by grace alone (*sola gratia*) as interpreted by the doctrines of the sovereignty of God, predestination, and total depravity. Although he focuses his attention upon these doctrines, it is important to realize that his criticism pertains to the center of Reformation faith, namely, its understanding of the gospel. A survey of his arguments soon reveals that they derive from the popular misconception that the grace of God, which properly defines the meaning of his sovereignty as expressed in predestination, can only mean an arbitrary omnipotence. It also reveals that they derive from the popular misconception that the depravity of man means the reduction of him to the lowest possible degradation instead of signifying the evangelical claim that he is wholly in need of Christ. In brief, Fromm's arguments rest upon the assumption that the gospel of grace can be summarized in the formula: "God everything — man nothing."

He then translates the formula into psychological terms, with the conclusion that such a God is sadistic and the submissive believer is masochistic. This expresses in psychological language what he believes to be the typical economic and political pattern of the German Nazi state. The all-powerful God represents the totalitarian dictator, while the completely surrendered believer represents the subjugated citizen. But Fromm does not regard the similarity as coincidental. It derives from a causal connection between them. By concluding with Weber that Protestantism is the religious correlate of capitalism, Fromm makes a further conclusion that capitalism-produced Nazism can only lead to one

result. Protestantism is correlative with Nazism. As the religious correlate of capitalism, Protestantism helped to produce it.

Actually the basic assumption is that the “God everything — man nothing” formula defines an economic pattern that is typical of capitalism. The formula includes the further assumption that the one is inversely proportional to the other, so that the greater God becomes, the poorer man becomes. This is a concept that Fromm derived from Marx, who in turn derived it from Feuerbach’s critique of the essence of Christianity. Marx argued that this concept pertained primarily to economics and only secondarily to religion. In Fromm’s version, at the religious level, God is impugned as an illusory deceiver in possession of something not rightfully his own. He is the divine exploiter, the robber of man, except for whom man would be free. Grace is nothing but the alienated part of man unconsciously surrendered to such a God.<sup>13</sup> In the economic version that Fromm accepts from Marx, the relationship is of the same pattern. To put it in Marx’s words: “The more the worker expends himself in work, the more powerful becomes the world of objects which he creates in face of himself; . . . it is just the same in religion. The more of himself man attributes to God, the less he has left in himself.”<sup>14</sup>

The conclusion therefore follows that the world of objects which the worker creates in the face of himself is capital and ultimately the elite who control it, namely, the capitalists. The relation between the capitalists and the workers thus parallels the relation between the God of grace and the sinner saved by grace. The latter becomes “nothing,” that the former may be all in all. In this sense the gospel, as Reformation Protestantism understood it, is especially suited to serve the interests of capitalistic society. It reduces man to that humility and “nothingness” which makes him amenable to capitalistic exploitation. Its ethic also contributes to this end. In a word, the gospel is particularly effective as an opiate of the people. To express it in Fromm’s language, it enables men to escape from freedom when they should be concerned with the recovery and preservation of freedom.

What we see, therefore, in Fromm’s reaction against the gospel, or what he understands it to mean, is essentially a psychoanalytical version of the Marxian critique of religion. One of the novel features of Fromm’s position is its appeal to the tenets of the American way of life. The fact that it has such an appeal may mean that American society in its preference for a religion of its own, which means among other things a less evangelical form of Christianity, may be becoming less capitalistic and more socialistic. The more American society is persuaded of Fromm’s contention that the historic Protestant interpretation of the gospel is one of the most serious threats to freedom in the modern world, the more it will probably turn away from Protestantism. This will tend to compel a rethinking of the gospel and a reassessment of the negativism that is inherent in it and the negativism that may be extraneous to it.

## 2: *The Revolutionary and the Reactionary Gospels*

TO UNDERSTAND Fromm's attitude toward Reformation Protestantism and, more generally, toward Evangelical Christianity, it is important to recognize that he conceives of its gospel and its theology as fulfilling an ideological function. Fromm is not interested in theology as a body of objective truth that interprets revelation and that can be studied of itself somewhat independently of life. In this respect, theology is of little concern to him, because he believes that in such a form its real significance is obscured. In his judgment, the interpretative norm is not the objective Word of God but the subjective life of man, not exegesis and dogmatics but psychology and sociology. As cultural products, both gospel and theology are to be understood not from above but from below, not from a transcendent, revelatory source but from a human, sociopsychological source.

In his insistence upon this kind of interpretative principle, Fromm is really no different from anyone identified with the church who adjusts its message and teaching to his own interests so that these become the standards of what he accepts or rejects. In this case the standards are equally sociopsychological even though they may not be recognized as such. They are determined by the character structure and the economic situation more than they are by anything else. If he lives in the suburbs or in the slums, the differences of outlook and circumstance will determine what he will hear and how he will act. In comparison,

therefore, with the kind of interpretation that is continually taking place in every church and pew, Fromm's interpretation is not unusual. It is only more explicit and conscious and professional than the average.

With these qualifications it can be said that Fromm holds two conceptions of the gospel, which we shall call revolutionary and reactionary. These are names which will suggest that in his opinion the Christian gospel has political significance. Thus, when a conservative type of gospel tends to lead into right-wing politics and a liberal type of gospel into left-wing politics, these are only the more conspicuous examples arising out of a situation in which those who probably think their gospel is neutral to politics are unwittingly favoring the *status quo*.

In his writings it is not difficult to see how these conceptions enter into his thinking. In *The Dogma of Christ*—Fromm's essay on early Christianity published in Germany in 1930—the revolutionary gospel is attributed to the primitive church and the reactionary gospel to the catholic church that emerged from it. In his *Escape from Freedom*, published about a decade later, the revolutionary gospel is his point of departure in moving in upon, and dealing with, the reactionary gospel. The latter is regarded as having dominated the Reformation and subsequent Protestantism and having contributed to the rise of German Nazism. In *The Sane Society*, published in 1956 as a sequel to his *Escape from Freedom*, the same distinction between these two gospels is maintained.

In keeping with his interpretative principle, these two conceptions of the gospel have reference to the two ways in which the Christian religion is conditioned historically. The assumption is that each is relative to the historical situation which is understood from an economic point of view. Obviously there is no recognition given to the possibility that the gospel in its essential meaning is a message objective to history and to economic, social, and psychological conditioning and therefore unconditioned. Instead, the two conceptions derive from the view that Christianity began as a first-century revolutionary movement which by the end of the second century had been transformed into

a conservative movement. Or to use Fromm's phraseology, Christianity began as a religion of the masses and was transformed into a religion of the rulers and the masses manipulated by the rulers. Originally, it attracted the peasants and slaves of Palestine and the Middle East with the one kind of gospel, but with the increasing number of converts who favored the preservation of the established order, it attracted them with the other kind of gospel. In this sense the gospel is relative to economic circumstances and the way in which these shape the mind and the outlook of the people.

The revolutionary conception of the gospel consists of a psychoanalytical interpretation of the function fulfilled in the minds of oppressed people by their belief in Jesus as the Christ. The important question is not the objective truth of this conception but its function or its use. The interpretation begins with an analysis of the adverse social and economic conditions of first-century Palestine with particular reference to the increasing unrest and rebellion following the death of Herod the Great. Attention is drawn to the fact that Palestinian society was generally stratified into three levels, with the Sadducean priestly aristocracy at the top, the Pharisees in the middle, and the Am haarez at the bottom. The latter included the peasants and urban proletariat who, together with the left-wing elements of the Pharisee party (the Zealots), comprised the section of society which supported national, social, and religious revolutionary movements. The relation between them and the middle and upper levels of society was one of mutual hatred and bitterness.

The function which Fromm believes the revolutionary gospel of primitive Christianity fulfilled in its appeal to this lower level of society is clearly expressed in one of his more important sentences: "The bleaker the hope for real improvement became, the more this hope had to find expression in fantasies."<sup>1</sup> The implication is that those who had more hope took things into their own hands and rebelled, but those who were destitute gave up and substituted fantasy for action. There was by no means, of course, a sharp separation between these alternatives because

at times the one intermingled with the other, so that rebellion and fantasy went together. The term "fantasy" is Fromm's term for the psychological equivalent of myth which signifies his complete rejection of the objective reality to which the gospel testifies.

What were these fantasies? At the risk of oversimplification we can say that they constituted what is known as Christian apocalypticism. At the heart of this, as Fromm emphasizes, was the germ of the oldest preaching—the proclamation that the Kingdom of God was at hand. "The content of the primitive Christian message," he says, "was not an economic nor a social-reform program but the blessed promise of a not-distant future in which the poor would be rich, the hungry would be satisfied and the oppressed would attain authority."<sup>2</sup> This would be a time in which the rich, the well fed, and the happy would come under judgment. Jesus is the promised Messiah who has suffered and died for his people, and has been raised and exalted to the right hand of God. He will soon return to establish the Kingdom visibly upon the earth. All who believe in him and have denied themselves and lived according to his commandments will share with him in the glory of this Kingdom.

The focus of Fromm's interpretation may be seen in his claim that such a gospel conceives of Jesus as elevated to the status of Christ and that this conception of Jesus Christ is the oldest of its kind in the Christian tradition. Since the elevation means that God adopts him as his Son in contrast to natural sonship which exists from birth, this conception is known as adoptionism. In support of the claim he cites Acts 2:36, which says of Jesus that God has made him both Lord and Christ. This he interprets as a definite act of exaltation, according to the Semitic idea that the king becomes a son of God the day he mounts the throne. He finds the same idea of exaltation in the reference to the resurrection which in Acts 13:33 is interpreted with the use of Ps. 2:7, which contains this Semitic idea. It says, "You are my son, today I have begotten you." He believes that the same idea is implicit in Rom. 1:4, where Paul speaks of Jesus as "desig-



nated Son of God in power . . . by his resurrection from the dead." He also finds it in the references to Jesus as the prophet whom Moses promised and whom God would raise up (Acts 3:22; 7:37; Deut. 18:15).

In the claim that adoptionism is the oldest conception of Christ which was later supplanted by other conceptions, Fromm finds a special significance. It pertains to the political symbolism with which he endows the whole idea. A man elevated to the status of Christ and who, for this reason, was seated at the right hand of God is symbolical of the masses rising to the point of challenging constituted authority represented by God the Father. The movement from below upward is symbolical of the common people asserting themselves under the leadership of Jesus in defiance of the authority over them. This is how Fromm expresses it. "These people," he says, "hated intensely the authorities that confronted them with fatherly power. The priests, scholars, aristocrats, in short, all the rulers that excluded them from the enjoyment of life and who in their emotional life played the role of the severe, forbidding, threatening, tormenting father — they also had to hate this God who was an ally of their oppressors, who permitted them to suffer and be oppressed. . . . So they satisfied their wishes in fantasy. Consciously they did not dare to slander the fatherly God. Conscious hatred was reserved for the authorities. . . . But the unconscious hostility to the divine father found expression in the Christ fantasy. They put a man at God's side and made him a co-regent with God the father. . . . The belief in the elevation of a man to god was thus the expression of an unconscious wish for the removal of the divine father."<sup>8</sup>

In a similar vein, Fromm interprets the humiliation, suffering, and crucifixion of Jesus as providing such people with a better object of devotion with which to identify. As those who were poor, downtrodden, and destitute, they could not identify adequately with pre-Christian apocalyptic versions of a strong, powerful Messiah. But they could identify adequately with Jesus because in his role as a suffering Messiah, they recognized their own

suffering. "They themselves suffered death on the cross," says Fromm, "and atoned in this way for their death wishes against the Father. Through his death Jesus expiated the guilt of all and the first Christians greatly needed such atonement. Because of their total situation, aggression and death wishes against the father were particularly strong in them."<sup>4</sup>

In Fromm's opinion, this revolutionary conception of the gospel stirred the lower classes of Germany centuries later at the time of the Reformation. Its identity is clear from a statement in his *Escape from Freedom* on the appeal of Lutheranism to the lower classes. "The poor in the cities," he says, "and even more the peasants, were in a desperate situation. They were ruthlessly exploited and deprived of traditional rights and privileges. They were in a revolutionary mood which found expression in peasant uprisings and in revolutionary movements in the cities." Then comes the statement in question: "The Gospel articulated their hopes and expectations as it had done for the slaves and labourers of early Christianity and led the poor to seek for freedom and justice." The identity of the gospel is clarified in the next sentence: "In so far as Luther attacked authority and made the word of the Gospel the center of his teachings, he appealed to these restive masses as other religious movements of an evangelical nature had done before him."<sup>5</sup> Such words and phrases as "authority," "word of the Gospel," "restive masses," and "other religious movements of an evangelical nature" will be recognized as references to the kind of apocalyptic message that Fromm believes had appealed to the slaves and laborers of early Christianity. Insofar as Luther preached this message and therefore focused on the coming Kingdom of God and on Christ who would establish the Kingdom on earth, his gospel articulated their hopes and expectations. Insofar as his preaching overlapped with the emphasis on the return of Christ and the future Kingdom characteristic of the sectarian movements of the time it would have this effect. There is little doubt that Fromm sees a continuity between the alleged revolutionary beginnings of early Christianity in the first century with the millennial sects of the six-

teenth century, and both of these with the Marxian revolutionary movements in the twentieth century. This can be partly understood by his indebtedness to Kautsky as evidenced in *The Dogma of Christ*.

But when the violent action of the peasants threatened the elemental security of German society, Luther called for their suppression. At this point Fromm sees him no longer as their champion but as an ambivalent character who suddenly becomes reactionary and therefore their opponent. He regards Luther's action as typical of the middle class who because they "had privileges to defend against the demands of the poor . . . [were] intensely hostile to revolutionary movements which aimed to destroy not only the privileges of the aristocracy, the church, and the monopolies but their own privileges as well." In accusing Luther of ambivalence, Fromm has in mind the contradictory attitude of the middle class toward the very rich and the very poor and therefore their isolation and insecurity in the freedom they so greatly coveted. He illustrates the ambivalence with two quotations—the one to show Luther's submission to higher authorities and the other to show Luther's hatred of the peasants.

The first of these is from Luther's *Commentary on Romans*: "Even if those in authority are evil and without faith, nevertheless the authority and its power is good and from God. . . . Therefore where there is power and where it flourishes, there it is and there it remains because God has ordained it." (Rom. 13:1.)

The other is from Luther's tract "Against the Robbing and Murdering Hordes of Peasants" whom he wishes suppressed: "Therefore let everyone who can, smite, slay, and stab, secretly or openly, remembering that nothing can be more poisonous, hurtful or devilish than a rebel. It is just as when one must kill a mad dog; if you do not strike him he will strike you."<sup>6</sup>

The ambivalent attitude which these quotations are intended to illustrate—submission to superiors and hatred and domination of inferiors—is regarded by Fromm as a typical expression of the authoritarian character which he attributes to Luther.

This is the kind of character which he describes as sado-masochistic. It is masochistic toward superiors and sadistic toward inferiors. Whether a character as complex and as highly creative as that of Luther, for all that may be said of his peculiarities, can be so easily categorized is more of an open question than Fromm's analysis indicates. His omission of any reference to Luther's strong protest against the nobility for their ruthless suppression of the peasants is an example of what suggests this qualification. When the nobility began to take action against the peasants, they did not know where to stop. This would have suggested that Luther was not as submissive to the nobility or as hateful of the peasants as he is represented. And it would have modified the sharpness of the contrast between the two quotations that have been lifted somewhat out of context. For Luther brands the nobility as "furious, raging, senseless tyrants who even after the battle cannot get their fill of blood."<sup>7</sup>

What we have to recognize, however, is that Fromm's analysis of Luther's character is at the same time his analysis of Luther's religious faith and doctrine. What he says of the one, he says of the other. The same ambivalence, the same sado-masochistic pattern of submission to superiors and hatred and contempt of inferiors, pertains to both. With these observations on Luther he associates both the character and the religious faith and doctrine of Calvin. "Calvin's theology," he says, "exhibits essentially the same spirit as Luther's, both theologically and psychologically."<sup>8</sup> This brings us to the question of the reactionary gospel. The impression that Fromm receives of both Luther's and Calvin's interpretation of the gospel of salvation by grace alone is the same. The doctrine of predestination with which they interpret the meaning of grace and the doctrine of total depravity with which they interpret the meaning of sin antagonizes him. It convinces him that such a gospel, to use the common expression, means: God everything and man nothing. His equivalent of this idea is that it involves the masochistic submission of the believer to an all-powerful authoritarian God and a sadistic contempt of the believer for himself and others. In contrast to the revolu-

tionary conception, it discourages action and convinces man to be satisfied with his poverty and suffering.

In principle at least, Fromm had already arrived at such a conception of the gospel of grace in *The Dogma of Christ*. He did not merely discover it in the Reformation as if it were an innovation of the newly emerging Protestantism. He had seen it in early Christianity and there repudiated it as a reactionary gospel. In his judgment it was the gospel which accompanied the change from a religion of the poverty-stricken masses to a religion of the rulers and the masses manipulated by the rulers. "About the middle of the second century," he says, "Christianity began to win followers among the middle and higher classes of the Roman Empire. Above all, it was women of prominent position and merchants who took charge of the propaganda. Christianity spread in their circles and then gradually penetrated the circles of the ruling aristocracy. By the end of the second century, Christianity had already ceased to be the religion of the poor artisans and slaves. And when under Constantine it became the state religion, it had already become the religion of larger circles of the ruling class in the Roman Empire."<sup>9</sup>

Fromm also speaks of the declining economy of the Roman Empire which necessitated an absolute monarchy and hierarchical system and from which emerged the feudal state. "The social system was stabilized and was regulated from the top and it was imperative to make it easier for the individual who stood at the bottom to be content with his situation. . . . The transformation which Christianity, especially the concept of Christ and of his relation to God the Father, underwent from its earliest days down to this era must be understood in the light of this social change and of the psychic change conditioned by it, and of the new sociological function which Christianity had to assume. . . . The original religion was transformed into another one, but the new Catholic religion had good reason for concealing this transformation."<sup>10</sup>

If we inquire what this transformation was, the answer con-

sists mainly of two important points. First, the expectations that the Kingdom of God would be visibly established on the earth had disappeared. Apocalypticism no longer had any appeal to the church, only to a few sectarian movements. Second, there was a change in the conception of Christ which reversed the direction of the movement of man to God to that of the movement of God to man. To emphasize the importance of the latter, which Fromm says was created by the ruling class and its intellectual representatives, he italicizes the following statement: "*The decisive element was the change from the idea of man becoming God to that of God becoming man.*"

Again he sees this as political symbolism. The idea of God becoming man, or the descent of God from heaven to become incarnate in Christ, is taken to mean the descent or imposition of the authority of the rulers from above upon the masses below. The Christ who has always been God and with God and therefore always in harmony with the Father is the symbol of ruling authority. As Fromm interprets the psychological significance of this doctrine, "the masses no longer identified with the crucified man in order to de-throne the father in fantasy, but rather to enjoy his love and grace. The idea that a man became a god was a symbol of aggressive, active, hostile-to-the father tendencies. The idea that God became man was transformed into a symbol of the tender, passive tie to the father. . . . People no longer expected an imminent, historical change but believed rather that deliverance had already taken place. . . . The formula of passive submission replaced the active hostility to the father."<sup>11</sup> The important point here is the emphasis on passive submission, which is later expanded into a concept of masochistic submission to an all-powerful God and used to interpret the Reformation gospel of grace.

The time in history when Fromm believes that the reactionary gospel was accepted by the church is indicated in a footnote in his *The Sane Society*: "One year after Christianity was declared the official religion of the Roman Empire the dogma was officially accepted that God only manifested himself in the flesh

of a man. In this new view, the revolutionary idea of the elevation of man to God had been substituted by God's act of love to come down to man as it were."<sup>12</sup> This official acceptance of the doctrine of God coming down to man and becoming incarnate will be recognized as the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed of A.D. 381.

Fromm regards the reactionary gospel as interpreted by Luther and Calvin as the most extreme form of its kind. The reason for this, as we have already seen, is to be found mainly in its radical doctrine of sin. What antagonizes him most is the doctrine of total depravity which derives from the exclusive emphasis on grace. If man requires a savior who wholly saves him, the corollary is that he is wholly in need of a savior. Fromm, of course, does not see it this way, nor can we say that Luther and Calvin always saw it this way. Like many others in history, both within and beyond the church, he sees it as a slur on human dignity and as a sign of a deep contempt for man. But in comparison to their reactions, his is so extreme that it qualifies him as historically exceptional. He can only regard the reactionary gospel as thoroughly evil.

His immediate concern is why this gospel should have such a strong appeal. Why was it heard and accepted by so many? What was there about the historical situation at the time of the Reformation that caused the people of Western Europe to be attracted by it? In answering these questions, Fromm is largely indebted to two eminent Europeans—the historian Burckhardt and the sociologist Weber. Both are critical of the Protestant Reformation and provide interpretations of its relation to the social and economic situation of the time.

Fromm adopts Burckhardt's thesis that the transition from the medieval to capitalistic society meant the emergence of a new type of man.<sup>13</sup> The two societies are sharply contrasted. The medieval man is said to have been scarcely conscious of himself as an individual—only as a member of a people, town, or guild. Although he enjoyed little freedom of movement or initiative, he enjoyed security. He knew where he belonged. In time of trou-

ble, he could find solace in the Catholic church. In time of need, he could find assistance in his community or guild. To his church as to these bodies he was bound by the same primary ties that bound him to his home and to nature.

In contrast to the medieval man, the new capitalistic man is said to have been highly conscious of himself as an individual. He was possessed of a spirit of adventure and aware of new and exciting possibilities. He had obtained his freedom—both freedom of movement and of self-initiative—in the economic sphere. But with the exception of the extremely wealthy, this freedom was at the expense of the security that medieval society provided. This was particularly the case with those of the lower middle class, to whom we are told Protestantism had its greatest appeal. Their freedom was obtained at such a risk to security that it was a burden. It increased their insecurity in the form of economic competition, isolation, frustration, hostility, and doubt. The greater the power of the capitalistic market, the more they felt their insignificance and nothingness. As Fromm interprets the gospel of grace, it helped them to accept this situation because it sanctioned in the name of religion a similar pattern—the all-powerful God and the humble believer. It relieved their negative feelings and therefore appealed to them. Viewed as a whole, his adaptation of Burckhardt's thesis with its sharp distinction between the medieval and the capitalistic societies parallels in meaning his theory of individuation. With the severance of the primary ties that bind the individual to the one society comes the relatively pure freedom of the other society which is difficult to bear without looking for an escape.

Fromm uses Weber's theory of the inner dynamics of the capitalistic type of man as a further explanation of the popular appeal of the gospel of grace at the time of the Reformation.<sup>14</sup> This theory interprets the "nothingness" to which the gospel of grace presumably reduces those who accept it. It interprets the "nothingness" as interiorized, or worldly, asceticism, and this agrees with the views of Burckhardt and Nietzsche that Christianity is essentially asceticism.

To indicate what this means, Fromm interprets asceticism as a psychological form of hatred. It is a repressed hatred usually directed against the self, but under certain conditions it can be directed outwardly against others as coercion or destruction. On this basis he compares the situation to which the Reformation appealed with the situation to which Nazism appealed. He sees in both situations a pervasive hostility which to a large extent was socially submerged. This explains his extreme judgment that Luther and Calvin belonged "to the ranks of the greatest haters among the leading figures of history, certainly among religious leaders." It explains his statement that "their doctrines were colored by this hostility and could only appeal to a group itself driven by an intense, repressed hostility."<sup>15</sup> With this emphasis on hostility he finds what he believes to be the essential continuity between the Reformation and Nazism. "We have already noted," he says, "the hostility which pervaded the middle class in the age of the Reformation and which found its expression in certain religious concepts of Protestantism, especially in its ascetic spirit, and in Calvin's picture of a merciless God to whom it had been pleasing to sentence part of mankind to eternal damnation for no fault of their own. . . . In our contemporary scene the destructiveness of the lower middle class has been an important factor in the rise of Nazism which appealed to these destructive strivings and used them in the battle against its enemies."<sup>16</sup>

In his consideration of asceticism as a form of hatred, Fromm associates compulsive or irrational doubt. The doubt and the hatred belong together. Both derive from insecurity. The doubt compels the individual to seek for certainty as a form of security. However, it is not genuine certainty but a neurotic certainty as compulsive and irrational as the doubt for which it is the intended solution. In emphasizing the importance of such doubt in the type of man to which the gospel of grace appeals, Fromm seems to associate Protestantism in religion with Cartesianism in philosophy. In a passing remark that modern philosophy also made doubt its starting point, he is presumably referring to Descartes on the assumption of a similarity with Luther. Both the

doubt and the hatred of the self compel the individual to find security in the all-powerful God and in the case of Nazism in the all-powerful dictator.

This means that the doubt and the hatred are a fundamental negation of freedom. Since it is freedom that Fromm wishes to preserve, he calls into the question the Protestant Reformation and the kind of gospel, teaching, and mode of living it has propagated through the intervening centuries. He does not deny the fact that it has made a positive contribution to the Western tradition of freedom. "There are good reasons," he says, "to praise this side of Luther's and of Calvin's doctrines, since they are one source of the development of political and spiritual freedom in modern society; a development which, especially in Anglo-Saxon countries, is inseparably connected with the ideas of Puritanism."<sup>17</sup> But he does not dwell on this aspect of the Protestant contribution to freedom. He quickly leaves it behind because he is more fearful of Protestantism as a threat to freedom than he is confident of its ability to preserve freedom.

The reason he conceives of it as a threat to freedom is that its gospel of grace as he understands it provides an "escape from freedom" for those who are burdened with the "fear of freedom," if we may so combine the American and the English title of his best-known book. To understand his conception of this aspect of the problem of freedom, we have to recognize that he is under a certain indebtedness to Dostoevsky. This concerns the insight that Dostoevsky has placed on the lips of the Grand Inquisitor in his famous novel *Brothers Karamazov* and that Fromm uses with evident approval: "I tell Thee that man is tormented by no greater anxiety than to find someone quickly to whom he can hand over that gift of freedom with which the ill-fated creature is born."<sup>18</sup> These are the words that the Grand Inquisitor addresses to Christ who centuries after his crucifixion, according to the story, returned somewhat surprisingly and anonymously to Seville. Fromm does not acknowledge that the quotation is a statement of his thesis, but he is probably under considerable indebtedness to Dostoevsky for it. For his whole book can

be regarded as an elaboration of this basic idea of Dostoevsky for whom the problem of freedom was the crucial problem in his doctrine of man. Indeed, what Fromm seems to be saying is that the asceticism to which the Protestant conception of the gospel of grace seems to lead is nothing other than the surrender of the freedom to which Dostoevsky refers.

In recognizing this, however, we ought to be under no illusions as to how Fromm uses this theme in his attack upon the gospel of grace as Reformation theology understood it. Dostoevsky, of course, had identified the Grand Inquisitor with the Roman Catholic Cardinal at Seville who was disturbed by the appearance of Christ among his people. Indeed, Dostoevsky had aimed the whole of the passage at Roman Catholicism in which the three temptations — namely, the desire for miracle, mystery, and authority (Matt. 4:1-11) — represented the threat of its sacramental system to the true freedom which Christ came to give. Fromm aims it at Reformation Protestantism and particularly at Luther and Calvin. In his presentation they assume the same role as the Cardinal in Dostoevsky's presentation. Each fulfills the role of the Grand Inquisitor. Fromm does not tell us this, but a comparison of his argument with that of Dostoevsky easily convinces one of it. Or to be more specific, it is the Christ represented by their gospel of grace whom Fromm really regards as the Grand Inquisitor — the Christ of the so-called reactionary gospel. This Christ tempts men to surrender themselves to him. He is the Christ to whom Luther and Calvin and their followers had handed over that gift of freedom with which they as ill-fated creatures had been born and with which they had been tormented. He is the Christ who is the object of worship and therefore, according to Fromm's conception of particularized deity, he is an idol.

In contrast to such a Christ, Fromm wants a Jesus who is not worshiped but who, in keeping with Dostoevsky's interpretation of his mission in the Grand Inquisitor, confronts men with the difficult ideal of realizing their freedom. Fromm, of course, does not see as did Dostoevsky the danger and the complexity, if not

the sheer impossibility, of such an ideal but holds it forth to his readers as a practical objective with the optimism typical of Neo-Freudianism. He is apparently attracted by Dostoevsky's Christian naturalism — namely, "that hidden in man is a great force capable of saving man and the world"<sup>19</sup> — but he wants an easier form of it. He gives no hint of the fact that Dostoevsky's interpretation of the temptations of Jesus in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1-11) avoids the real issue of the passage — which is to test whether Jesus is the Son of God and not to test his ability to release this force in man. Dostoevsky transforms its Christological theme into an anthropological theme. This is why Fromm's use of it implies a Jesus who is a humanistic liberator and not the Christ of the gospel.

In reviewing the revolutionary and the reactionary conceptions of the gospel and making certain observations concerning their significance, we can begin by recognizing that both are conceived as socially pathological. Both are symptomatic of sick societies. Neither gospel is "good news" in the accepted sense of the term. Insofar as the revolutionary gospel encourages action, it is conceived to be healthier; but insofar as it substitutes fantasy for action, it is more pathological. The reactionary gospel is considered especially pathological because it not only discourages action but induces a selflessness which comes of an unconditional surrender to a higher power that produces contempt for the self and for others. It contributes to exploitation. In keeping with what we have observed, Fromm bases both conceptions of the gospel upon a psychological substratum of hatred rather than love. This is in sharp contrast to the almost universal belief that love is the essential basis of the gospel in any form. Indeed, he makes no reference to love except in the early stage of the reactionary gospel with respect to people experiencing through Christ a tender, passive tie with the Father. But it is a paternalism which keeps them satisfied with their lot rather than genuine love. His lack of emphasis on love probably derives from his concern with the danger of escaping from freedom which he understands as escaping into asceticism. Since he understands asceticism as a form

of hatred, this would explain his conviction that both gospels presuppose a substratum of hatred. He seems to see in Christianity through the ages, especially in the Reformation and subsequent Protestantism, little more than asceticism. There is no inclination to recognize the opposite danger — that of escaping into a form of freedom which is relatively unlimited and in which the wild exuberance of revolutionary destructiveness would have a strong appeal.

It cannot be denied that Christianity began with the lower-class elements of first-century Palestine and the Middle East and gradually attracted the wealthier and more influential, until finally it was recognized as the official religion of the Roman Empire. This is historical fact. Nor can it be denied that over the same period the appeal of apocalypticism and of the return of Christ to establish a futuristic kingdom faded out except among some of the sectarian movements. The orientation was no longer to the future Kingdom but to the church as the present equivalent of the Kingdom in succession to the Christ event in the past as its constitutive source. Nor can it be denied that when apocalypticism flourished particularly outside the Christian faith, it had a tendency to issue in revolutionary action. Indeed, the similarities between ancient apocalypticism and modern Marxianism are well known.

But the impression created by Fromm that the reactionary gospel was relatively late and only officially accepted by the church in A.D. 381 cannot be sustained. Instead, the evidence indicates that such a gospel was early enough to be integral to the New Testament. The most obvious example is the Gospel of John written around A.D. 100 or possibly earlier. Here we find an affirmation of the preexistent deity of Christ and of his incarnation as the initiative of God in becoming man (John 1:1-14). This and other characteristics such as the relative absence of apocalyptic content and its “above—below” orientation qualify it as the kind of gospel which, according to Fromm’s conception, the rulers would most covet for the masses.

Again, the gospel typical of the Pauline epistles written about

the middle of the first century and about a generation after the death of Christ would qualify as a reactionary gospel according to the same conception. There is a similar recognition of the pre-existent deity of Christ (Phil. 2:6; Col. 1:15-16) and of his incarnation as the self-movement of God toward man (Rom. 8:13; Gal. 4:4). There is, however, an adaptation of apocalyptic content and a “now—then” orientation. But these are subordinated to the primary emphasis on the act of God’s love in sending his Son and on the cross as a manifestation of such love as we also have it in the Gospel of John.

A fact of particular significance in view of Fromm’s conception of the revolutionary gospel is that in the material peculiar to the Gospel of Luke (source L) in which Jesus’ concern for the poor, the outcast, and the underdog is more explicit than in any other place in the New Testament, there is no evidence of a revolutionary gospel. Instead, the evidence is in the other direction, as indicated by the emphasis on the divine initiative of God’s search for man. There is little, if any, apocalyptic imagery or reference to the Kingdom of God to come, and the orientation is to the present rather than to the future.

Indeed, it cannot be established that there were two gospels corresponding respectively to the transformation of Christianity from a religion of the poor to a religion of the influential and ruling classes. The New Testament sources do not support the contention that there was an original Jesus who was a political Messiah, who died as a suffering hero, and was exalted in the minds of his people to the status of God. Nor do they support the contention that the portrait of this original Jesus was overlaid with a later dogma of his preexistent deity and a gospel corresponding to it. Fromm’s conception of two different gospels seems to reflect the thinking of the more extreme German liberal New Testament critics of the nineteenth century of whom Schweitzer writes in *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*. It is well known that their quest for an original Jesus who was only a reformer or a revolutionary free of the supposedly later high Christology proved to be inconclusive.

Indeed, the oldest New Testament sources indicate that Jesus rejected apocalypticism or so greatly modified it that any inference that his preaching encouraged revolutionary violence is impossible. It is true that there is evidence of a severe judgment upon the rich in various places in the New Testament as Fromm indicates. But there is a more severe judgment upon the self-righteous and the hypocritical. The emphasis is upon the inner-directed spiritual source of man's inhumanity to man rather than upon the social and economic environment (e.g., Mark 7:20-23). There is, moreover, in the Sermon on the Mount a well-known and conspicuous strain of what could be called pacifism or an appeal to nonviolence (Matt. 5:38-48) that would be incompatible with revolutionary activity.

What Fromm's two conceptions of the gospel represent is more akin to the two ways in which men most commonly attempt to use the message and teaching of the New Testament for their own ends. The poor are naturally concerned with its use to enrich themselves and punish the rich, and the rich are naturally concerned to use it to preserve their riches and their power. And the rich will as readily blame it from their side as the poor will from theirs if it fails to serve their purpose. Indeed, the New Testament does not leave much room to doubt that the attempt to use its message and teaching for such ends is evidence of unbelief. It is evidence of a failure to listen and to learn and to revise these ends. This at once raises the question of the extent to which the so-called practical Christianity and the assimilation of the New Testament message and teaching into contemporary culture is evidence of unbelief. At this point it will be remembered that there is nothing which the concept of use presupposes more than the economic aspect of life.

But there is more to life than the economic, important and often all-consuming as it is. There are the questions of the ultimate purpose of life and of the natural order of existence around and within us. There is the question of whether all of this has any ultimate meaning and whether an individual can therefore have any primary or fundamental motivation. Fromm denies that

there is ultimate meaning to anything. In *The Art of Loving* he says that there is no meaning to life, except the meaning man himself gives to it; man is utterly alone except inasmuch as he helps another.<sup>20</sup> In his *Psychoanalysis and Religion* he speaks of man's aloneness and insignificance in the universe. Following Freud, he asserts that man must educate himself to face reality, that if man knows he has nothing to rely on except his own powers, he will learn to use them properly.<sup>21</sup> The difficulty is to know how man is able to generate meaning out of himself if, as Fromm's naturalism assumes, he is part of nature and therefore by definition meaningless himself. Meaning would then be an illusion.

What Fromm calls the meaninglessness of the natural order around and within us, the New Testament would include under the category of darkness. The New Testament does not assume that man is able to walk in this darkness with such light as he possesses. Nor does it assume that man can face reality and by relying completely upon himself learn to use his powers properly. It does not put any confidence in such stoicism. Instead, it insists that man needs the assurance of the ultimately good purpose of the whole order of existence more than anything else. He needs it as he needs breath and life. In other words, he needs the light that shines from beyond such darkness. Since this in brief is what the authentic gospel of the New Testament signifies, we can see how it transcends the economic problem as such. If there be no ultimate purpose to life, why should a poor man worry about procuring riches or a rich man worry about preserving them. It would be better to give up the illusion of life and to die.



### 3: *Predestination and Depravity*

IT IS COMMONLY recognized that the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century was characterized by a strong and persistent emphasis on the gospel of salvation by grace alone. The crucial consideration was the emphasis placed on the adjective “alone” as indicated by the fact that the Latin term *sola gratia* became almost symbolical of the Reformation conception of the gospel and of its interpretation of Christianity. The reason for this arose in a large measure from the polemical character of the religious situation in which salvation by grace alone meant through Christ alone independently of the priestly mediation of salvation so strongly affirmed by the Catholic Church. But in practice it was impossible to separate this idea of independence from the common and more secular idea of freedom from the Catholic Church as a religious organization and from the feudal system with which it was so closely integrated. As a result the emphasis on grace alone inevitably acquired a certain secular significance.

In addition, the emphasis that was placed upon grace independent of priestly mediation meant a redefinition of the locus of salvation. Instead of remaining in the hands of the priests who invariably conceived of it as happening in the sacramental act, it was located elsewhere. Luther located it in the faith decision of the believer as a positive response to the gospel. This of course tended to be associated with the more secular idea of conscience and private judgment as social and political thought reinterpreted the meaning of faith. Calvin went farther and lay empha-

sis on the divine decision which in his judgment was anterior to the faith decision and conferred on it its unique significance. He saw the locus of salvation mainly in the predestination of God completely out of reach of priests and sacramental mediation. In neither case, of course, was it regarded as inconsistent with the positive meaning of the gospel as defined by the Christ event. On this point Luther and Calvin were most emphatic, as their appeal to Scriptural sources and their commentaries and other writings so clearly indicate.

It was probably inevitable that their emphasis on the grace with which a man is freely forgiven should lead both more and more into the doctrine of predestination. The Scriptural connection between such grace and the purpose of God from the beginning and throughout the ages could scarcely have any other result. It was largely a matter of how strictly they would interpret it. But this was also to involve them in another doctrine. The emphasis on grace alone carried with it the implication that a man wholly saved by grace must therefore be wholly in need of it. As this worked out, it led to the doctrine of the total depravity of man. With the same desire to exclude priestly mediation and with it works of merit as defined by the church, a strong emphasis was placed upon man's inability to save himself. The sharpness of debate and controversy and the atmosphere of persecution and bloodshed gave to this a more negative connotation than it should have had. As a result the more positive reasons for affirming the gospel of grace alone and the proper meaning of total depravity that it implied tended to be obscured.

A popular impression was created that the gospel of grace alone, interpreted by the doctrine of predestination and correlated with the doctrine of total depravity, simply meant “God everything—man nothing.” Predestination was taken to mean that everything has been fixed by God in advance of human decision so that the latter is somewhat of an illusion. In this sense it was taken as the equivalent of fatalism. In a similar manner, total depravity was taken to mean that man is totally devoid of freedom and responsibility and is merely a puppet in the hands of a god

who predetermines his fate. As one who can contribute nothing to his salvation, he is by definition hopelessly bad.

The unfortunate character of this popular impression that seems always to arise to some extent when such a gospel is preached has been clearly expressed by Karl Barth. He declares that "God everything—man nothing" as a description of grace is not merely a "shocking simplification but complete nonsense." "The omnipotence of God," he says, "is not a force which works magically or mechanically and in relation to which man is an object. . . . It is a matter of God's omnipotent mercy. . . . To be sure, there is compulsion. . . . But the compulsion is not mere compulsion. It is not abstract. It is not blind and deaf. . . . We have to realize that mere compulsion is basically evil and demonic."<sup>1</sup>

In order to provide a better perspective in which to understand this impression it will be helpful first to consider briefly what the gospel of grace means in the positive sense. This will serve to suggest the primary intention which Luther and Calvin had in mind. For this purpose we can deal (*a*) with the meaning of grace interpreted by the doctrine of predestination, (*b*) with the meaning of sin interpreted as total depravity, and finally (*c*) with the nature of the relationship between God and man.

*a.* The term "grace" has reference to the gratuitous goodness of God in his power to create, sustain, restore, and liberate. The gospel of grace has reference to the love of God manifested in the forgiveness of sins offered freely through Christ. This involves not only the undoing of what is wrong but also the restoration of what is right. Predestination as the English word to interpret the priority of such goodness to all human goodness bears an unfortunate connotation. It suggests an arbitrary pre-determining instead of the initiative of divine love that knows man before man knows God and that takes its freedom in his life even while he is weak, asleep, sinful, or in the grip of death. In this latter respect, predestination means that God is for man and not against him. It is his comfort at all times and especially under evil and adverse circumstances.

*b.* The term "sin" as implied in the gospel of grace will be better understood in its meaning as guilt. Such guilt refers primarily to objective guilt as distinguished from feelings of guilt. Perhaps the best illustration of what it means is that of the convicted murderer whose guilt is real and not a feeling or a complex which can be dispelled by psychotherapy. His crime is a real act involving another person who has been killed. His deed has receded into the past, where it is temporally objective to him and cannot be brought back into the present to be undone. Yet it conditions his present. Though past, it is affecting his present inasmuch as he is responsible for it. In this sense he is no longer free in relation to it, for it hangs over him. Before he acted, he was free in relation to it, but once he had committed his act of killing, he was no longer free to change it. If he had all the free will in the world at his command, he still could not change it. In relation to his crime, his will is in bondage. Moreover, his guilt is possessed of a total quality. It is not his hand or arm or an impulse or complex within him which acted against his will. It was he that acted, so that he is guilty—he in his totality. In relation to his crime, he himself is therefore totally guilty or, as we might otherwise express it, totally depraved. It is only when we see sin as objective guilt in relation to which the will is no longer free and which affects a man totally that we begin to see the kind of problem which the Protestant Reformers had in mind when they emphasized that only the grace of God could resolve it.

*c.* As a further comment on the positive aspect of the gospel of grace, it is important to understand that grace and guilt are two different kinds of relationships between God and man. They are not substances, or forces, or third factors between God and man which have an independence of their own. To use recent terminology, they are interpersonal relationships. For this reason we can say that the theology of the Protestant Reformation is primarily relational rather than substantive. This helps us to understand why it can conceive of a believer as a saint and a sinner at the same time and of a man as made in the image of God and yet depraved. The whole man in his relation to God defines the

totality, not the whole man in his substance considered independently of God.

Moreover, the relationship of grace is understood paradoxically, which means that the opposite happens to what is to be expected on the basis of simple logic. Indeed, the term "paradox" was a popular term at the time of the Reformation. To take the most obvious illustration, it means that the omnipotence of God does not reduce a man to nothingness as would ordinarily be expected. Instead, it liberates him. The reason for this is that such omnipotence is expressed as forgiveness and not as force. In this sense, forgiveness is always paradoxical. It does the opposite to what strict justice on the basis of a calculative logic requires.

With this simple, brief account of the positive aspect of the gospel of grace before us, we can now consider Fromm's extremely negative account and try to see how he has arrived at his conclusions. It may assist us in understanding his preoccupation with the negativism of the Protestant Reformation and of its message and teaching. In doing this, we will deal (a) with God and his grace, (b) with man and his sin, and finally, somewhat briefly, (c) with the nature of the relationship between God and man.

a. In regard to the first of these items, it can be said immediately that Fromm has little or no conception of the meaning of grace. He sees the action of the omnipotent God only as one of arbitrary force that compels man to submit and that reduces him to nothingness. At times, however, he speaks as if he would break through this authoritarian conception to an adequate understanding of grace, but at the critical moment he draws back. In *The Sane Society*, for example, where he associates grace with the sacramental system of the Roman Catholic Church in what is one of his most explicit insights, he comes close to it, but it makes no difference to his understanding of the gospel. Indeed, in his description of this position, he goes so far as to say that "only God by an act of grace can save man and he saved him by becoming man in the person of Christ who dies the sacrificial death of the Saviour. Man through the sacraments of the church becomes a participant in this salvation — and thus obtains the gift of God's grace."<sup>2</sup>

In another somewhat isolated reference, he comes the closest of any place in his writings to an understanding of grace — and this, surprisingly enough, in speaking of Luther. It concerns Luther's characteristic theological affirmation that man is not saved by works but by the grace of God through faith in Christ. Fromm sees this as a matriarchal component in Luther's theology corresponding to the love that a mother gives to her child before it is able to do anything to earn or merit such love. It is an unconditional kind of love that the mother freely gives without thought of return. In this respect, his analogy is correct. This is what grace is like. But he refuses to recognize that it characterizes Luther's gospel and theology. The most he admits is that it is a hidden element submerged by a strongly patriarchal and authoritarian structure. Since he insists that patriarchal or fatherly love is of such a nature that it must be earned or merited, the conclusion naturally follows that he believes that the doctrine of salvation by works characterizes Luther's gospel and theology.<sup>3</sup>

Associated with this is another fact that has an important bearing upon his lack of understanding of the meaning of grace. It is the total omission from his writings of any reference to the central place which the doctrine of forgiveness has in Reformation theology. In his treatment of Luther and Calvin he completely ignores it, as if they accorded it no place in their teaching. He provides no hint that it was basic to their understanding of faith. The impression which is thereby created is that the God in whom they believed is devoid of mercy. He leaves no doubt of it when he says that "Calvin's God, in spite of all attempts to preserve the idea of God's justice and love, has all the features of a tyrant without any quality of love or even justice."<sup>4</sup>

This agrees with his representation of the doctrine of predestination as equivalent to the philosophical doctrine of determinism. Accepting the popular cliché that this doctrine is the most important, if not the central, doctrine of Calvin's system — which is a debatable assumption — he leaves Luther's version of it aside and concentrates on Calvin's as the more radical of the two. On the basis of a rigidly deterministic conception of Calvin's doctrine, he makes certain psychological deductions that could have

been as easily made from any determinism without reference to Calvin or to theology. The psychological function of the doctrine of predestination, he contends, is to generate the feeling of individual powerlessness and insignificance. It serves the purpose of degrading man to the status of a powerless tool (man nothing) in the hands of an all-powerful God. But since there must be a reason for the reduction of man to such a status — some explanation of the necessity of imposing such a doctrine upon him — Fromm makes the further deduction that it serves the purpose of silencing the irrational doubt within him. The logic follows the alleged dynamics of the process. Since there must be something within or underneath or some “force” from below which requires this predestinating “force” from above to reduce it to “nothingness,” the obvious answer is that the “force” from below is irrational doubt — irrational because as a “force” it requires a counterforce to subdue it. But why is it important that the irrational doubt be silenced? What is positively achieved by means of the predestinating “force” from above? The answer to this is the next claim in the sequence of deductions: that it achieves absolute certainty — a certainty which he contends is as irrational as the doubt that is silenced. But this is not all. In order to relate the sequence of deductions to his major interest, he emphasizes that Calvin’s doctrine has one important implication. Its division of people into two types — the elect and the damned — finds “its most vigorous revival in Nazi ideology: the principle of the basic inequality of men.”<sup>5</sup>

In saying this, Fromm has in mind Calvin’s doctrine of double predestination — that some are eternally damned while others are eternally saved. He can only attribute such a doctrine psychologically to a deep contempt and hatred of other human beings. The doctrine provides the context in which he accuses Calvin along with Luther of being one of the greatest haters among the leading figures of history, certainly among religious leaders, and whose God is arbitrary and merciless. There is no doubt of what he means when he adds that such a God “destined part of mankind to eternal damnation without any justification

or reason except that this act was an expression of God’s power.”<sup>6</sup>

*b.* The Reformation doctrine of the depravity of man seems to have aroused Fromm’s indignation more than the doctrine of predestination. We at once detect this in his acknowledgment that his *Escape from Freedom* is a book devoted to freedom as a burden and a danger. This particular interest is in “that side in Luther’s and Calvin’s doctrines in which this negative aspect of freedom is rooted: their emphasis on the fundamental evilness and powerlessness of man.”<sup>7</sup> As he develops this theme, it becomes increasingly clear that what he says of their doctrine of depravity amounts to an exposition of the second half of the “God everything — man nothing” formula. For just as he was unable to appreciate that the first part of the formula signified grace, so he is unable to appreciate that the second part signifies the negative correlate of grace. Instead of seeing that sin is only defined in terms of grace and is therefore not a moral category, he interprets it from the same legalistic, deterministic approach as before and attributes to the Protestant Reformers a doctrine of sin as a law of man’s being. We can see this in his claim that Luther’s doctrine of man “assumed the existence of an innate evilness in man’s nature, which directs his will for evil and makes it impossible for any man to perform any good deed on the basis of his nature.”<sup>8</sup> In accusing Luther of holding that man has an evil and vicious nature, he adds the observation that “the depravity of man’s nature and its complete lack of freedom to choose the right is one of the fundamental concepts of Luther’s whole thinking.”<sup>9</sup> He thus attributes to Luther a view of man as evil in nature or being and therefore as ontologically evil. It is as if man had been created evil.

In support of this contention he quotes a passage from the opening section of Luther’s *Lectures on the Epistle to the Romans* which is a statement of the purpose of the epistle. It is “to destroy, to uproot, and to annihilate all wisdom and justice of the flesh, may it appear . . . ever so remarkable and sincere.” Luther is further quoted as saying that “what matters is that our justice and wisdom which unfold before our eyes are being

destroyed and uprooted from our heart and from our vain self." Since Fromm takes this to mean the natural gifts or talents of man and therefore the ontological endowment of man, he assumes that these are being destroyed and uprooted in the interest of reducing man to "nothingness." He is all the more convinced of this when, a little farther along in the same passage, he is able to quote Luther as saying that "God wants to save us not by our own but by an extraneous (*fremde*) justice and wisdom, by a justice that does not come from ourselves and does not originate in ourselves but comes to us from somewhere else. . . . That is, a justice must be taught that comes exclusively from the outside and is entirely alien to ourselves."<sup>10</sup>

With this passage from Luther's *Lectures on the Epistle to the Romans*, Fromm associates what he describes as an "even more radical expression of man's powerlessness given by Luther" in his *The Bondage of the Will*. It is the comparison of the will of man to a beast that may be ridden or directed either by God or by Satan but that has no power to choose the rider.

"Thus the human will is, as it were, a beast between the two. If God sit thereon, it wills and goes where God will; as the Psalm saith, 'I was as a beast before thee, nevertheless I am continually with thee' (Ps. 73:22-23). If Satan sit thereon, it wills and goes as Satan will. Nor is it in the power of its own will to choose, to which rider it will run, nor which it will seek; but the riders themselves contend, which shall have and hold it."<sup>11</sup>

Turning to Calvin, we discover that Fromm condemns him as strongly for his doctrine of the depravity of man as he condemns Luther. He accuses Calvin of exhibiting the same spirit as Luther, both psychologically and theologically. His objection is that Calvin roots religion in the powerlessness of man with self-humiliation and the destruction of human pride as the leitmotif of his whole thinking. He accuses Calvin, as he does Luther, of an "emphasis on the evilness of human nature, the uselessness of his will and of his efforts." "Calvin," he says, "placed the same emphasis on the wickedness of man and put in the center of his whole system the idea that man must humiliate his self-pride to

the utmost; and furthermore, that the purpose of man's life is exclusively God's glory and nothing of his own. . . . Once man was ready to become nothing but the means for the glory of God who represented neither justice nor love, he was sufficiently prepared for the role of a servant to the economic machine — and eventually a 'Führer.'"<sup>12</sup>

The main quotation on which Fromm bases his accusation against Calvin is found in the seventh chapter of the third book of Calvin's *Institutes*. It summarizes the meaning of the Christian life, with the emphasis on self-denial. He construes it as a classic illustration of the kind of humiliation by which man reduces himself to nothingness before the all-powerful God:

"We are not our own; therefore neither our reason nor our will should predominate in our deliberations and actions. We are not our own; therefore, let us not propose it as our end, to seek what may be expedient for us according to the flesh. We are not our own; therefore, let us, as far as possible, forget ourselves and all things that are ours. On the contrary, we are God's; to him, therefore, let us live and die. For, as it is the most devastating pestilence which ruins people if they obey themselves, it is the only haven of salvation not to know or to want anything oneself but to be guided by God who walks before us."<sup>13</sup>

This is understood to mean the suppression of all the natural spontaneity and creativity of man — all that would represent his experience of himself as himself. It is taken to mean the negation of the natural potentialities of man, including what Calvin would regard as the natural gifts of man.

c. Our consideration of Fromm's conception of the relationship between God and man in Reformation theology can be brief. It has already been largely anticipated in what has been said of his conception of predestination and depravity. He obviously regards it as an interplay of "forces" in which the infinite "force" of God reduces man to an infinitesimal "force" or nothingness. The most characteristic fact about his understanding of the relationship, and one that needs to be especially emphasized, is that the "force" of God is inversely proportional to the "force" of

man. It means that the greater the one becomes, the less the other becomes. This carries with it the subtle implication that God is always against man, as can be seen from the fact that the "force" of the one is always at the expense of the "force" of the other. Thus by definition Fromm has settled in advance that the relationship must be authoritarian. This was settled at the moment he decided that the doctrine of predestination was only a religious form of the philosophy of determinism. But his conception of the relationship as an interplay of "forces" made it even more authoritarian because it reduced the relationship from the interpersonal to the subpersonal, if not to the impersonal.

It is now appropriate to offer certain criticisms of Fromm's interpretation of the doctrines of Luther and of Calvin. To a greater or lesser extent, these have already been anticipated. But there is need for elaboration as well as for attention to some further criticisms of major importance. By following the same order of topics as we have before, we can begin with the most obvious of these and the one on which there would be general agreement among Reformation scholars. This concerns (a) his complete equation of the doctrine of predestination with the philosophical doctrine of determinism. On this question a quotation from Reid's introduction (1961) to Calvin's treatise on predestination will be at once illuminating. "Predestination or predetermination," Reid says, "is not determination simply by a greater power, but is different in kind from mere determination and therefore a fortiori from determinism." It is "quite different from fate. . . . Philosophically, when we deal with the relation of a finite magnitude to a greater but also finite magnitude, the independence of the one is conserved only at the expense of the other; when we deal with a really infinite magnitude and its relation to a finite magnitude, this is no longer the case. Theologically, God is not simply the magnification of man and His qualities are not simply the qualities of man increased to the power of n. If this were true of Him, then predetermination would be merely determination on a greater, grander scale. . . . But just because He is really infinite, the Predestination of which He is the author does not rob

man of his independence and therefore of his responsibility."

These are Reid's comments on Calvin's doctrine, which in sharp contrast to Fromm's interpretation leaves man secure "in that degree of independence which permits of responsibility being attributed to him."<sup>14</sup> As for the inversely proportional relationship between God and man, Reid repudiates it in a manner which leaves no doubt in our minds that it is not characteristic of Calvin's doctrine. "It will not do," Reid says, "to think of God and man as so related in their activity that the less God does the more man has to do and vice-versa."<sup>15</sup>

A similar position on predestination is adopted by Haroutunian in his volume on Calvin in the Library of Christian Classics. "God's predestination," Haroutunian says, "remained a mystery to Calvin and was affirmed not as a doctrine of determinism arrived at by observing the 'causes and connections of things' but by fixing the mind and heart upon the Word of God. . . . Determinism has nothing to do with the mystery of evil. On the contrary it explains the mystery away. Predestination as Calvin understands it is inseparable from that same mystery and the very ground of courage for living with it. . . . Predestination therefore meant to Calvin hope in a world where 'determinism' could have produced only despair."

Haroutunian calls attention to another important factor for a proper understanding of Calvin's doctrine of predestination and one that, as we shall see, provides a further contrast with Fromm's interpretation. "This doctrine," Haroutunian says, "cannot be understood properly except in relation to the suffering church." In saying this, he points out that it "was inspired by the need of the Protestant churches for knowledge of the continuity between the gospel they believed and for which they suffered and the promises of God made from the beginning and through the ages. Like the early church, like evangelist and apostle, the Reformer took great pains to establish the antiquity of the gospel he preached. A church under persecution was plagued with profound doubts. Excommunicated ex-Romanists, subject to enemy power, deprived of home and goods, in exile and at death's door,

these poor people who lived in anxiety and despair, subject to miseries from which even the dregs and criminals of society were exempt, had nothing to sustain them but the promises of God. They were invited by Calvin to turn their eyes to Abraham and Moses and Noah and David, to the great deliverance of God, to the mysterious workings of his 'secret purposes,' to the manifestation of his wisdom and power, rooted in his eternal purpose and his predestined end—all established in Jesus Christ, crucified, risen, ascended and at the right hand of God the Father Almighty."<sup>16</sup>

In contrast to this, Fromm sees only the situation created by the newly emerging capitalistic society. He sees the doubts arising only from capitalistic exploitation. His complete silence on the suffering and the persecution carries with it the suggestion that these were of no significance either in the creation of doubt or in the formulation of the doctrine of predestination. His idyllic representation of medieval society carries with it the suggestion that it could not possibly have inflicted suffering and persecution upon anyone. In this way he creates the impression that the doubt experienced by the Protestant churches was more irrational than it actually was. For if it were recognized that the doubt derived mainly from suffering and persecution, it would be more understandable. It would be seen as a rather natural response which could be expected under the circumstances. But in the absence of any reference to suffering and persecution and on the basis of an economic interpretation, it is as irrational as the exploitation that allegedly produced it.

As we have already seen, Fromm takes particular exception to Calvin's doctrine of double predestination, which divides people into two types—the elect and the damned. As a doctrine that is often misunderstood and to some extent is vulnerable to criticism, it may be said that Fromm seems not to have discovered how Calvin tried to qualify his entire doctrine of predestination. He is unaware of Calvin's forthright observation that "the perdition of men depends upon divine predestination in such a manner that the cause and matter of it is found in themselves." He is unaware

of Calvin's further observation that "man falls, therefore, according to the appointment of Divine Providence, but he falls by his own fault."<sup>17</sup> He does not know of Calvin's assurance that God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked and desires that all men should be saved.<sup>18</sup> Instead, he takes Calvin's statement of God foreordaining some to eternal life and some to eternal damnation, lifts it out of its context, makes no effort to understand its meaning or the polemical situation to which it was relevant.<sup>19</sup>

In fairness to Calvin we first have to say that his emphasis was always on the positive aspect of double predestination—upon God taking the initiative in seeking, laying hold upon, choosing, and forgiving men. He left the negative aspect suspended, as it were, in the air—recognizing it but at the same time more or less appalled at its significance and careful not to be presumptuous about it. What he meant by God foreordaining some to eternal damnation may be suggested by an oversimplified analogy between such action of God and that of a political state. Assuming that the law of the state makes murder a crime, there are two possibilities. The state can rescind its law and make every murderer innocent, or it can retain its law and make every murderer guilty. But in doing this, it foreordains every murderer to execution or life imprisonment but without being responsible for their crime. Similarly with God—he can rescind his law and procure salvation for all. But he rejects this possibility because his grace would then be lawless and therefore completely permissive of evil. Indeed, it would ignore the problem of evil. Thus we return to the observation of Haroutunian that predestination as Calvin understood it is inseparable from the mystery of evil and the very ground of courage for living with it.

What should be finally emphasized is the polemical situation in which Calvin developed his doctrine and which no doubt contributed to those negative aspects which have often been the subject of criticism. His primary purpose was that of interpreting and defending the gospel of grace (*sola gratia*). The critics with whom he had to contend were casting doubt upon this gospel and discrediting the faith of those who believed it. In this situa-

tion his doctrine of predestination was his defense. Again to put it in an oversimplified form, his critics were asking in effect the old and typical questions: If salvation is by grace alone, why are not all men saved? If God saves by his grace (free favor) alone, why does he not bestow it upon all men equally? If, however, he saves only some, does this not mean that he rejects others? In attempting to answer such questions, Calvin was confronted by a twofold difficulty. He had to affirm that salvation was by God's grace alone, but without God being responsible for man's decision. In other words, he had to avoid a determinism which would have denied both the freedom of God to be *for* man and the freedom of man to be a responsible being. His other difficulty was his knowledge that the grace of God was in some mysterious way selective because, while some believed, others did not believe. Since every selection is at the same time rejection, this meant that the grace of God was also at the same time some kind of rejection. Again the problem was that of avoiding the determinism which would have destroyed the freedom of God to be *for* those who were rejected and their freedom to be responsible for their rejection. Calvin, of course, did not follow the logic which we have used to interpret his thinking, but in his use of Scripture, to which he always appealed, he covered similar ground. This does not mean that he found final answers or that he always succeeded in avoiding the extremes he recognized as dangerous. But it does mean that he had the courage to interpret and defend the gospel of grace.

Consideration should now be given to Fromm's accusation that Calvin's doctrine of predestination with its distinction between the elect and the damned found its most vigorous revival in the Nazi principle of the inequality of men. By this he means the Nazi idea of the German as divinely endowed and chosen to lead as distinguished from Jews and other races presumably destined to submit to the stronger. As a preliminary comment on this accusation, Fromm should be reminded that Calvin obtained his doctrine from the Bible and as much from the Old Testament as from the New Testament. Indeed, if we allow the rigid deter-

minism which Fromm reads into his accusation, we would have to say that it was the Old Testament Hebrew conception of the chosen people that found its most vigorous revival in the Nazi idea. He could have said that the Hebrews, like the Calvinists, "quite naïvely thought that they were the chosen ones and that all others were those whom God had condemned to eternal damnation." For when the Hebrew conception of the chosen people is perverted into a nationalism and therefore out of harmony with the essential meaning of election in the Old Testament, it provides a precedent for those who identify salvation with their particular nationalism.

What is evident is that Fromm has confused the Biblical idea of the chosen people upon which Calvin's doctrine depends with the common and obviously nationalistic idea of divine favoritism. This is clear from his later publication, *The Art of Loving*, where, in speaking of the patriarchal period of the Old Testament and the way in which the God of the patriarchs elected them, he makes this revealing statement: "I assume he [God] is just and strict, that he punishes and rewards; and eventually that he will elect me as his favourite son; as God elected Abraham-Israel, as Isaac elected Jacob, as God elects his favourite nation."<sup>20</sup> Election is here conceived merely as the *favoritism* of the patriarchal father toward one of his sons — probably the eldest — or toward all his sons as distinguished from his daughters. This is all that Fromm sees in the Biblical doctrine of election. It is nothing more than the reaction of such a father toward the son who caters to his wishes. It is clearly something earned or merited by the son or the believer, as the case may be. In other words, God elects those who earn or merit his election, as the Nazis or any other nationalistic body would readily agree having regard to their conception of divine patronage and the qualities with which they think they please their deity. By his emphasis on such a condition of divine election, Fromm only succeeds therefore in showing that his conception is totally different from that of the Bible or of Calvin. In them the election is of grace and therefore gratuitous, without consideration of merit. Calvin would have been scandal-



ized by the claim that what he taught was otherwise.

b. With respect to Fromm's interpretation of what Calvin and Luther believed concerning the sin of man, part of the difficulty arises from the fact that he does not recognize that they were concerned with the problem of objective guilt. This will explain, for instance, Luther's point in his *Lectures on the Epistle to the Romans* on the necessity for a justice that does not originate within ourselves but from the outside — a justice that is entirely alien to ourselves. Recalling the illustration that we used earlier of the objective guilt of the convicted murderer, only a justice that is from the outside and is entirely alien to him could overcome his guilt. In Luther's understanding of the term, this would mean divine forgiveness. Considering the murderer's bondage to his guilt, no justice or righteousness from within him could suffice. Only the forgiveness of God from the outside, which would be alien to his guilt, would be able to liberate him.

Something similar can be said of Luther's illustration in his *The Bondage of the Will* on the comparison of the will of man to a beast that may be ridden or directed by God or by Satan but that has no power to choose the rider. Again recalling the illustration of the convicted murderer, we saw how in relation to the guilt of his crime his will was in bondage. All the freedom of will that he could command of himself could not remove the guilt. At this point he himself was like a beast that was being ridden by Satan — the beast being the power of his guilt. His only hope for the removal of his guilt was that God's forgiveness would be more powerful than Satan and remove the burden of guilt from his back and substitute itself in its place. Luther's pictorial language of man ridden like a beast either by Satan or by God is best understood as the metaphorical representation of the nature of objective guilt. The same could be said of Luther's conception in his *The Bondage of the Will* to which Fromm refers that the only free will possessed of man is "not in respect to those which are above him but only in respect to those things which are below him." Recalling the illustration of the murderer's guilt, we could clarify this saying in a similar manner. With respect to his crime,

his freedom has lost one of its dimensions. He is not free in respect to those who are above him — that is to say, the law or the legal authorities or God, who are above him and hold him guilty. He is free only within the context of his guilt, which limits it to those things which are below or under him or it. He can act only in this one direction. Prior to his crime, he was free to act in both directions.

What should be emphasized is that Luther's rejection of free will was not absolute, as if it applied completely to the whole range of daily life and to natural spontaneity. For in the words of a modern interpreter of Luther: "Luther does not deny at all what most people nowadays mean when they speak of Free Will. In the first place he goes a great deal further than many modern philosophers and psychologists in the room he leaves for psychological freedom."<sup>21</sup> He recognizes that man can eat, drink, beget, rule, and initiate freely the innumerable activities involved in normal living. His concept of the bondage of the will pertains only to God, not to the dominion God has given man over daily life; only to salvation (existential), not to man's responsibility (essential) over the things of the earth that comes of being created of God. In a word, it only applies to his guilt before God from which the only thing that can liberate him is the forgiveness of God.

It is difficult, of course, to speak of objective guilt without running the risk of suggesting that the guilty man is in essence evil. The confession of a murderer that he himself as a personal agent is guilty gives to his guilt a whole quality which applies to him totally. It is not the same with feelings of guilt which, although felt with a degree of wholeness, are nevertheless a function within the man not yet objectively identified with him as a personal agent. It is true that he as an agent has felt them, but there is a difference between feeling and an objective act. The difference may be suggested by the distinction commonly made between the murderer who would say "I am guilty" and a man with a feeling of guilt who would say "I have a feeling of guilt." It is the difference between "I am" and "I have." The importance of stressing

this difference is to explain the risk that is always involved in speaking seriously of objective guilt and thus suggesting that it pertains to the essence of a man. "I am" suggests essence.

This may clarify the reason why Fromm accuses Luther and Calvin of believing that man is intrinsically or ontologically evil, which of course must be rejected. What they meant by total depravity, as we have already partly explained, was that man is existentially guilty but not essentially evil. It is the difference between existential and essential. The murderer is existentially guilty but he is not essentially evil. He is not evil in essence. If he were evil in essence, there would be no possibility of liberating him from his guilt by an objective forgiveness (divine) corresponding to his objective guilt.

Another basic reason why Fromm accuses Luther and Calvin of teaching that man is essentially evil is that he nowhere recognizes the importance to them of the doctrine that man is made in the image of God. This arises from their firm belief that God the Creator had made man in his own image. They could not believe that man was evil in essence without denying that he was the work of the Creator. To have held what Fromm imputes to them would have been regarded by them as derogatory of the Creator. On this point Calvin is firm and explicit: "Not the very substance (as men term it) of our bodies and souls is an evil thing; for we are God's workmanship. . . . We speak grossly to express that all that is ever in us is shaped in sin. Truly our bodies in their own being are the good creatures of God and so likewise our souls."<sup>22</sup> In a similar manner Calvin warns against despising the natural gifts of man because this would be an insult to the Creator.<sup>23</sup> "He who truly worships and honours God," he says, "will be afraid to think slanderously of man."<sup>24</sup>

It is a matter of regret, therefore, that in the seventh chapter of the third book of Calvin's *Institutes*, out of which Fromm selects his main quotation on Calvin's doctrine of man with the recurrent theme "We are not our own," he ignores the clear emphasis on the doctrine of man made in the image of God. This omission is especially regrettable both because of the assurances he has

given us in the *Escape from Freedom* of the reliability and scope of his method<sup>25</sup> and his later comment in his *Man for Himself* about the importance of the doctrine of man created in the image of God. The comment appears in a footnote with reference to the Old Testament passage on Adam and Eve in the garden. "The idea that man is created in God's image," he says, "transcends the authoritarian structure of this part of the Old Testament and is in fact the other pole around which the Judaeo-Christian religion has developed, particularly in its mystical representatives."<sup>26</sup> How strange that he failed to see this in the seventh chapter of the third book of the *Institutes* from which he is fond of quoting and about which Calvin is emphatic! If the doctrine of man made in the image of God transcends the authoritarian structure of this part of the Old Testament, why does it not transcend the authoritarian structure of this part of Calvin's *Institutes*? If it is the other pole around which the Judeo-Christian religion has developed, why is this not recognized in Calvin? The issue here is that of the psychological significance of a doctrine which Fromm acknowledges to be valid evidence against authoritarianism. It is this which he has omitted.

But there is more to it than this. For in the same chapter we find Calvin expressing the ethic derivative of such a doctrine in tender and beautiful form. "We should remember," says Calvin, "that we must not reflect on the wickedness of man, but contemplate the Divine image in them; which concealing and obliterating their faults by its beauty and dignity allures us to embrace them in the arms of love." In the same section Calvin continues: "For of Christians there is something further required than to display a cheerfulness of countenance, and to render their benedictions amiable by civility of language. In the first place, they ought to imagine themselves in the situation of the person who needs their assistance, and to commiserate his case, just as though they themselves felt and suffered the same; so that they may be impelled, by a sense of mercy and humanity, to afford assistance to him as readily as if it were to themselves."<sup>27</sup> It is rather incredible that such words could come from one who personally

belongs to the ranks of the greatest haters among the leading figures of history, especially among religious leaders, and that he should have recognized so clearly that "divine image" in man which "transcends the authoritarian structure."

Luther also respected man as one who was made in the image of God. This was why he never assumed that man was beyond hope even for all the radical things he had to say of him. Although he insisted that the image was hidden and not available to human experience and therefore a category of man's relatedness to God rather than a psychological category, he never denied or ceased to recognize its ultimate importance. On this basis he conceived of conscience as personal responsibility deep within man's sense of identity. On the same basis he made his peculiar, but well-known remark that God did not create his Kingdom for geese — thereby meaning that man's original nature was appropriate to the Kingdom.

c. With the consideration that we have given to Fromm's view of predestination and election, only one brief criticism remains. It concerns his conception of the relationship between God and man as it obtains within Reformation theology. Enough has been said to indicate that he conceives of it as an interplay of "forces" in which the "force of God" is inversely proportional to the "force" of man. The criticism that we wish to offer is that this relationship in Reformation theology is not understood as inversely proportional but as paradoxical. This is why it comes as a surprise that in speaking of paradoxical logic, Fromm seems oblivious to the fact that it is characteristic of such theology and indeed of Biblical theology. The probable reason for this is his failure to attribute any significant place in such theology to the doctrine of the forgiveness of sins. As we have previously indicated, the act of the omnipotent God forgiving and thus liberating guilty man is a paradoxical act.

Such a failure is unfortunate in view of Fromm's own acknowledgment of the psychological significance of forgiveness. His comment on Isaiah's superb reference to divine forgiveness, "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow,"

is clear and unequivocal. Speaking of such forgiveness, he says that it "expresses the very opposite of authoritarian philosophy."<sup>28</sup> But if it is the very opposite of authoritarian philosophy, it must give to the gospel and the theology of the Reformation, to which it is basic, the profoundest antiauthoritarian significance. For the gospel of grace alone is a radical conception of divine forgiveness that gathers up into itself and fulfills the essential meaning of this text from Isaiah.

To this point in our discussion the contention has been that Fromm's interpretation of Luther's and of Calvin's theology is extreme. He has made the most of the popular impression that the substance of such theology is "God everything — man nothing." But in spite of this contention it cannot be maintained that Luther and Calvin were entirely free of responsibility for creating such a popular impression. They were men of their time, involved in the sharp polemics of a religious situation that was marked by social upheaval, persecution, and bloodshed. As a result, a certain negativism found its way into their interpretation of the gospel and of the Christian faith that must be recognized. It would be wrong not to recognize it and therefore not to recognize the element of truth that is in Fromm's interpretation.

Again we begin with the doctrine of predestination and in particular Calvin's version of it. As a number of scholars have noted, there is a certain respect in which his doctrine is less of an interpretation of the gospel of grace than of the abstract, arbitrary decrees of God that are of the nature of law rather than of gospel. This concerns a tendency to derive his doctrine of predestination antecedent to Christ in the eternal decrees of God the Father. What this signifies is expressed in an observation by Reid that the "weakness is evident in a chance phrase which Calvin is at least once betrayed into using (*Institutes* 3:22:1): '*gratiam istam Dei praecedat electio.*' Thus election precedes grace." Since the God and Father of Jesus Christ is a God of grace, Reid asks, "Who then is this God who determines man's election before grace becomes operative?" In the same study he provides what seems to be the answer. He is "a God into

whose counsels Christ has not been admitted and the inner recesses of whose wisdom Christ has not illuminated." In other words, Calvin's derivation of predestination from the decrees of God is illustrative of a law that is prior to grace (gospel) and that helps us understand the somber side of his doctrine, particularly that of double predestination. At the most, Christ's relationship to predestination in Calvin's doctrine, according to Reid, is limited. More specifically, he is the one who bears the message which divides the elect from the nonelect. He is the source of the assurance of the elect. Moreover, the election that he receives he can transmit to others, and indeed he is the author of election in common with the Father. But Calvin accords these roles less significance in his doctrine. They are less developed. Speaking of the latter, Reid says that had it attained in Calvinism the place of importance which its character entitles it, there is little question that much of the controversy over predestination would have been avoided.<sup>29</sup>

Another way of expressing the same criticism is to say that Calvin was inclined toward two conceptions of predestination which he did not reconcile with each other — the one Christological and the other philosophical. The one was intended to give assurance and consolation and would be in accord with Haroutunian's emphasis on predestination as a doctrine designed to strengthen the faith of a suffering and persecuted church. The other was a product more of his iron logic and philosophical concern to vindicate the justice of God. In parallel with this tendency toward two different conceptions of predestination and possibly as a result of it, Calvin's conception of responsibility suffers from a certain one-sidedness. While he tends to ascribe no responsibility to the elect for their salvation inasmuch as they are saved by grace alone, he ascribes a distinct responsibility to the nonelect for their condemnation.<sup>30</sup>

From these criticisms it will be apparent that the place of the law (decrees of God) alongside of or anterior to grace is the problem that is implicit in Calvin's theology and beginning to emerge as a problem that is unresolved. This probably accounts

for the negativism more than any other reason. A particular example of the subtle influence that it has upon certain aspects of his theology is provided in Barth's criticism of his doctrine of repentance.<sup>31</sup> It concerns an overemphasis on the negative or what Barth describes as "a curious overemphasis of *mortificatio* at the expense of *vivificatio*" which is not justified from what is understood of repentance (*metanoia*) in the New Testament. The quality of joy and freedom and triumph that is characteristic of New Testament repentance is not conspicuous. "What we have called the divine call to advance," says Barth, "is in Calvin so overshadowed by the divine summons to halt that it can hardly be heard at all. The result is that his presentation is not merely stern, as is inevitable, but sombre and forbidding." The explanation of this overly negative emphasis in repentance Barth finds in the use of the law that kills as that which initiates the movement of conversion. It is an awareness of sin which has its origin in a fear of God which presupposes a concept of law that "cannot be regarded as identical with the 'law of the Spirit of life.'" "This abstract law," says Barth, "has never yet led man to conversion, even by killing him, let alone making him alive. It has no power to do either. For it is not the living God or His quickening Spirit which places man under this law."

In Luther and Lutheran theology, the tendency of giving the law a place alongside of or anterior to the gospel is derived from what is called the second use of the law. This is the use of the law to convict the hearer of his sin in advance of preaching the gospel of forgiveness to him. The impression is not infrequently created that the preacher is more concerned with sin than with forgiveness. At the same time the law under these circumstances acquires a particularly negative connotation not unlike that which Barth attributes to the abstract law that kills. It does not have the more positive connotation that it would have if it had been defined by the gospel in terms of the discipline necessary for the ordering of life and therefore as the negative aspect of love.

In what Calvin calls the third use of the law we have a similar problem which is subsequent to the faith decision rather than an-

terior to it. Here, instead of the law used to convict the hearer of his sin, it is used as a guide for his ethical life. At this point Calvin's ethic differs from the Lutheran ethic of love which has a certain disdain for rules and principles and in this sense aims to be creative. Instead, Calvin's ethic is more clearly defined and appeals more directly to the Ten Commandments and the Old Testament tradition as the guiding signs for the conduct of the man of faith. As time went on, this emphasis on the law tended to harden into a legalism that was attached to the gospel of grace and became anything but an ethic of grace. As it tended to harden, it led to that ethical rigidity typical of late Puritanism which had so much in common with that essentially secular ethic eventually described by sociologists as the Protestant ethic.

## 4: *Ascetic Faith and Assurance*

FROMM's interpretation of what Luther and Calvin meant by faith is consistent with his basic understanding of their doctrine. Instead of the personal connotation of trust, confidence, and grateful response characteristic of faith as they knew it, he construes it to mean man's submission to the interplay of "forces" represented by the familiar formula "God everything—man nothing." As another deduction from this formula, it is entirely negative.

Such a conclusion is confirmed by gathering together the various statements scattered through the *Escape from Freedom* that have to do with faith. To begin with an extreme example that is already familiar, we are told that the "conviction of man's rottenness and powerlessness to do anything good on his own merits is," according to Luther, "one essential condition of God's grace. Only if a man humiliates himself . . . will God's grace descend upon him."<sup>1</sup> A few pages farther we find what may be regarded as an expansion on this statement. It is more of a psychological elaboration of its meaning with the same emphasis on faith as a passive quality. Here we are told that Luther did more than bring out the feeling of insignificance that already pervaded the social classes to which he preached—he offered them a solution: "By not only accepting his own insignificance but by humiliating himself to the utmost, by giving up every vestige of individual will, by renouncing and denouncing his individual strength, the individual could hope to be acceptable to God." We

know that Fromm is here speaking of Luther's understanding of faith because he goes on to identify it as such and to add his own psychological qualification of it. "Luther's relationship to God," Fromm continues, "was one of complete submission. In psychological terms, his concept of faith means: if you completely submit, if you accept your individual insignificance, then the all-powerful God may be willing to love and save you."<sup>2</sup>

Fromm attributes the same negative quality to Calvin's understanding of faith by means of the familiar quotation from the seventh chapter of the third book of the *Institutes*. The assertion that we are not our own, which runs like a refrain through the quotation and which finds its complement in the assurance that we are guided by God without knowing or wanting anything of ourselves, is accepted as proof of this negative quality. The same representation of Calvin's conception of faith is implied in the further claim that Calvinism offered a solution to certain elements of the middle class by teaching them that by complete submission and self-humiliation they could hope to find new security.

But there is a difference between Fromm's treatment of the negative quality of Luther's conception of faith and that of the negative quality of Calvin's conception. In his treatment of Luther, the difference can be detected in the emphasis he places upon the inward and passive acceptance of the negation. There is a more explicit emphasis on rottenness, powerlessness, and insignificance, and in addition, an emphasis on the recognition of these as an essential condition of God's grace which does not appear at all in his treatment of Calvin. In both quotations relating to Luther that we cited above, reference is made to such a condition of grace. But in the treatment of Calvin nothing is said of these negative qualities as such a condition. There is a shift of emphasis from the subjective to the objective, from what is a condition of grace to what is a consequence of grace partly reflecting the authentic difference between the two Reformers. This includes the psychological function that he has attributed to Calvin's doctrine of predestination and particularly self-discipline and compul-

sive work as ascetic proofs of being chosen of God. If Luther is seen as exemplifying ascetic faith, Calvin is seen as exemplifying ascetic assurance. If Luther is seen as one who is anxiously demeaning himself to merit the grace of God, Calvin is seen as one convinced of having received it but anxiously disciplining himself to prove it. The difference is only a matter of the perspective with which one views the phenomenon of faith, which in Fromm's analysis seems to be an assumption that remains beneath the surface. In either case he represents the grace of God as conditional upon man's negation of himself. In the one case he states it explicitly, in the other case he implies it.

What he really means by man's negation of himself as a condition of grace comes out clearly at a later point in the discussion. In one of those revealing statements in which an author sometimes exposes in a sentence or two his basic thoughts on a subject he summarizes his opinion of what Luther and Calvin taught the average believer: "They taught him that by fully accepting his powerlessness and evilness of his nature, by considering his whole life an atonement for his sins, by the utmost self-humiliation, . . . he could overcome his doubt and anxiety; that by complete submission he could be loved by God and could at least hope to belong to those whom God had decided to save."<sup>3</sup> This is perhaps the most explicit example of Fromm attributing to Luther and Calvin a doctrine of works as a condition of grace. In this case he clearly represents the works as designed to elicit the pity of God. Indeed he does more than this. He represents the whole life of the believer offered as an atonement for his sin. This can only mean that the ascetic sacrifice of the believer is substituted for the sacrifice of Christ. Furthermore, it is a psychoanalytical insinuation that by self-punishment a believer atones for his sin and merits the eternal salvation of God. At this point it will suffice to say that nothing could be farther from the mind of Luther and Calvin and from the theology of the Reformation. Even in Calvin's austere interpretation of repentance, which Barth describes as an "overemphasis on *mortificatio* at the expense of *vivificatio*," there is no suggestion of it as a condition of grace.

In Fromm's treatment of the negative aspect of faith in Luther and Calvin, there is an obvious dependence upon Weber's well-known theory that associates the Reformation and more particularly Calvinism with the rise of modern capitalism. Although Fromm is harder than Weber is on Luther, he concentrates on Calvinism in the same manner as Weber except for a tendency to read the tenets of Calvinism back into Calvin to an extent not characteristic of Weber. With these qualifications it can be said that Fromm's interpretation of Protestantism is only an extension of Weber's theory. As a general indication of Weber's theoretical position, this will assist us in understanding why he seems to attribute ascetic faith to Luther and ascetic assurance to Calvin. The common factor is asceticism in Weber's meaning of the term, but extended in scope and elaborated psychologically.

As a rationalist, Weber was disturbed by the belief of both Luther and Calvin in what he regarded as the double God. On the one hand, there was the gracious and kindly Father of the New Testament who was reflected in the writings of both and in the mind of Weber evidently as the benevolent Father of the nineteenth-century liberal Jesus. On the other hand, there was the hidden God (*deus absconditus*) of Luther and the transcendent God of Calvin who, for Weber, seemed incompatible with such a benevolent Father and presumably contradictory of the New Testament conception of deity. Both conceptions seemed to represent an unnecessary emphasis on the mysterious and irrational that would cloak in darkness the eternal purpose of God and the destiny of man. For Weber it was entirely a question of which conception of God achieved the ascendancy — this mysterious, irrational one or that of the gracious, kindly Father of the New Testament. In the case of Luther, he believed that it was the "gracious, kindly Father" who had achieved the ascendancy because Luther had avoided reflection on metaphysical questions as useless and dangerous. But in the case of Calvin, he believed it was the idea of the transcendent God which had won out and which in effect had substituted the Jehovah God of the Old Testament for the kindly Father of the New. As an interpretation

which failed to see that both aspects of deity pertain to the God of the Old Testament as well as to the God of the New Testament, it explains Weber's aversion to Calvin and Calvinism in contrast to his somewhat lenient attitude toward Luther and Lutheranism.<sup>4</sup>

It appears that Fromm has been influenced by Weber's bias in these matters but without ascribing to Luther and Lutheranism the same degree of positive achievement. There is no evidence that he shares with Weber the recognition that the Lutheran faith "left the spontaneous vitality of impulsive action and naïve emotion more nearly unchanged," or that he agrees with Weber that Luther himself "could live in this atmosphere of openness and freedom without difficulty and as long as his enthusiasm was powerful enough." Nor is there as much as an echo in his writings of the opinion of Weber that "the simple, sensitive and peculiarly emotional form of piety like their free and spontaneous morality is the ornament of many of the highest types of Lutherans."<sup>5</sup>

With respect to Calvin and Calvinism, Fromm takes up into his argument the full weight of Weber's bias as well as the psychological interpretation upon which it depends. There is the same concentration upon predestination with the same misconception of it as a deterministic doctrine in which God decrees the fate of men before their birth. There is the same superficial, rationalistic treatment with no more appreciation of it as the mystery of divine grace and freedom than in Weber. There are the same facile arguments and the same facile deductions. The conception of what faith means for a Calvinist is the same as in Weber. It is the confidence that he is a chosen one together with an inordinate desire to prove it by the disciplined achievement of material success as a sign of divine favor. Weber has made the point, of course, that for this purpose "the law appears to the Calvinist as an ideal norm of action," while "it oppresses the Lutheran because it is for him unattainable. In the Lutheran Catechism it stands at the beginning," he says, "in order to arouse the necessary humility, in the Reformed Catechism it generally stands

after the gospel.”<sup>6</sup> If Fromm is aware of this distinction, he does not acknowledge it, but his treatment of faith agrees so closely with that of Weber that the distinction is recognized in effect. It is the implicit distinction that he makes between ascetic faith and ascetic assurance—the one corresponding to the law antecedent to the gospel; the other, to the law subsequent to the gospel.

The strong and elaborate emphasis that Weber places upon the psychological significance of Calvinistic discipline as a means of confirming divine election provides the real basis of Fromm’s argument. When we find Weber speaking of the “unprecedented inner loneliness of the single individual,” the “inner isolation,” “the destruction of spontaneous impulsive enjoyment,” the “hatred and contempt” for the neighbor, and the disciplined control of the whole of life in the interest of work, all designated as characteristic of the psychology of Calvinism, we know the likely source of Fromm’s ideas. If it be true that in Fromm’s psychological interpretation of Calvin and Calvinism he seems to display an animus suggestive of some early unfortunate experience with Christians of this tradition, it is probably a reflection of Weber’s influence. It is Weber who has set the tone and touched it in places with a sarcasm that gives his theory of the ethics of Calvinism a psychologically biting edge. It is Weber who has postulated the “destruction of the spontaneity of the status naturalis” by Calvinistic asceticism—a theme basic to Fromm’s whole system under the title of authoritarianism. And it is Weber who has emphasized that the psychological effect of the doctrine of predestination was extraordinarily powerful.<sup>7</sup>

Considering the extent to which Fromm is indebted to Weber, it is a matter of surprise that he fails to acknowledge it and that he offers no critical comment of any kind. At the point of greatest emphasis, where he contends that the assurance of Calvinistic faith is related to certain qualities rooted in the character structure—“compulsion to work, passion for thrift, and the readiness to make one’s life a tool for the purposes of an extra personal power, asceticism and a compulsive sense of duty”—

traits which, as he adds, “became productive forces in capitalistic society and without which modern economic and social development are unthinkable,”<sup>8</sup> he is completely convinced. He accepts these qualities and discusses them in what amounts to an uncritical exaggeration of Weber’s emphasis on hard work and self-disciplined achievement as the visible signs of assurance by which the Calvinist is said to have known that he was chosen of God. Fromm is unrestrained in his emphasis on its importance. “In Calvinism,” he says, “this meaning of effort was part of the religious doctrine. Originally it referred essentially to moral effort, but later on the emphasis was more and more on effort in one’s occupation and on the results of this effort, that is, success or failure in business. Success became the sign of God’s grace; failure, the sign of damnation.”<sup>9</sup> Speaking of its historical significance, he adds that “this new attitude towards effort and work as an aim in itself may be assumed to be the most important psychological change which has happened to man since the end of the Middle Ages.” “There is no other period of history in which free men have given their energy so completely for the one purpose: work.”<sup>10</sup>

But curiously enough, Fromm considers no other conditions that might have contributed to this important change. He says nothing of the powerful secular incentives to work—the influence of new geographical discoveries, new markets and industries, new inventions and products, new opportunities and rewards—nothing of the whole complex of new enterprise and vast possibilities that increasingly stirred the imagination of strong, healthy people into action. He says nothing of the changes in philosophical outlook that had to do with the industrial revolution and its antecedents and for convenience might be generally subsumed under the term “secularism.” He says nothing of the fact that Weber based such a conception of work largely upon evidence from late Puritan sources particularly from the post-Restoration period in English history and upon the secular creed of the American Benjamin Franklin. He says nothing of the increasing secularism contributing to these Puritan sources so that



Puritanism was ceasing to be Puritanism and in the pure secularism of Benjamin Franklin had no significance at all. He says nothing of the fact that with the exception of Holland, Calvinists and Puritans were a religious minority and barred from government positions and liberal professions and compelled by such circumstances to devote themselves to business. Nor does he recognize any possible overgeneralization or exceptions to Weber's theory even though Weber himself had only regarded it as a tentative theory which he had never intended to be taken as seriously as it was.<sup>11</sup> Instead, Fromm seems to have accepted it as a firm foundation on which to erect the superstructure of his own psychological elaborations. Nothing seems to have restrained him from projecting his psychological analysis back into Calvin and his sociological analysis back into the society in which Calvin lived.

As far as Calvin is concerned, there is no basis in his teaching for the conception of work or of moral action as a means of proving that a man is chosen of God. An eminent German Calvin scholar, Wilhelm Niesel, puts the matter clearly: "If works are helpful in permitting the believer to attain a secure knowledge of his election then somewhere in the section on predestination which extends to four long chapters Calvin must have said so. But if we look for such an expression of opinion we shall not find it in the least. . . . The fact that within his exposition of the doctrine of predestination he never by one word supports the opinion . . . but rather flatly rejects the idea ought to give pause to all those who assert that Calvin teaches [it]. . . . It is true that Calvin concedes to Roman theologians that our works may have a certain significance for the conviction that we are saved but only when we have first of all recognized that we are saved by God's mercy. Only if we fail to read carefully what Calvin writes at this point or tear sentences out of their context can we assert that he is here expounding the doctrine that our works serve to confirm us in the assurance of salvation."<sup>12</sup>

The concept of asceticism which to this point has been used to interpret faith and assurance requires further clarification par-

ticularly in relation to the perspective of thinking which it presupposes. No concept ever stands alone as an isolated entity, but is part of a whole which is the frame of reference within which it is to be understood. The same is true of the concept of asceticism as it is used by Weber and Fromm. It presupposes a perspective of thinking that pertains to the whole historical period out of which Protestantism arose. The fact that it is characterized as worldly asceticism is intended to show that in their judgment a significant reorientation of thinking has taken place in Protestantism as compared with medievalism whose asceticism is characterized as otherworldly. The fact that worldly asceticism is said to pertain to the whole body of believers as compared to that of medievalism, which only applied to monks, is again a question of reorientation.

But more important as a further indication of the perspective of thinking definitive of worldly asceticism is the exclusive manner in which it is associated with Protestantism. It is tied up so intimately with Protestant doctrine and with the gospel interpreted by this doctrine that one would believe that it could not occur independently of them. At the same time it is so dissociated from medievalism and the Catholic Church and from the Renaissance that one would believe that it could not occur within them. It is not sufficient to argue that such exclusiveness pertains only to ideal types when the conclusions from it are inconsistent with historical fact. What lies behind it is the conception of an exclusive association of Protestantism with capitalism and therefore a corresponding desire to exempt medieval society, the Catholic Church, and the Renaissance from any responsibility for the rise of capitalism. Within this perspective of thinking, one should probably say that worldly asceticism would be better regarded as capitalistic asceticism.

Such a perspective explains Fromm's somewhat idyllic representation of medieval society and his complete silence on any responsibility that Catholicism may have had for the rise of capitalism. It explains his desire to excuse the wealthy nobles and burghers of the Renaissance from any significant contribution

to the rise of capitalism. In this respect, he is merely indicating how much he has been influenced by Weber and Burckhardt, who could not believe that the distinguishing feature of the Renaissance was other than the rediscovery of a purely humanistic man from Greek and Roman antiquity. As the normative man and, above all, the nonascetic man, this humanistic man was not regarded as the prototype of the capitalist. The description that Weber gives of the traditional man would apply to him — a man who “does not ‘by nature’ wish to earn more and more money but simply to live as he is accustomed to live and to earn as much as is necessary for this purpose.”<sup>13</sup>

The exemption of the Renaissance along with the Catholic Church and medieval society from any significant contribution to the origin of capitalism has been responsible for another of those peculiar omissions to which we have become accustomed in Fromm's material. It has compelled him to remain ominously silent in all his writings on the question of Spanish and Italian Fascism, with no explanation of their asceticism or of the authoritarianism in which it was eventually expressed. It has compelled him to ignore the significant fact that in the two nations of Western Europe in which Protestantism has had the least influence and Luther and Calvin the least acknowledgment, forms of authoritarianism have arisen that have been just as ruthless as German Nazism. It accounts for the fact that in the *Escape from Freedom*, Franco and Mussolini are never mentioned.

What a recent interpreter of this whole perspective says of Weber would therefore apply to Fromm. “Weber wondered,” says L. Strauss, “whether the origins of the capitalistic spirit could be found in the Renaissance.” But “he answered the question in the negative because he thought that the Renaissance was the attempt to restore the spirit of classical antiquity, i.e., a spirit alien to the capitalistic spirit.” However, in this assumption Weber “failed to consider a fact of the utmost importance that within the Renaissance an entirely new spirit had emerged, the modern secular spirit. The greatest representative of this radical

change was Machiavelli and there is a straight line from Machiavelli to Bacon, Hobbs and other Englishmen who in various ways came to exert a powerful influence on ‘Puritanism.’”<sup>14</sup>

But there is an aspect of Fromm's indebtedness to Weber and Burckhardt which raises a question of his indebtedness to Nietzsche. This is associated with the fact that there are similarities between his interpretation of Protestantism and Nietzsche's interpretation of Christianity. Nietzsche was a friend of Burckhardt and shared with him the conviction that asceticism was one of the decisive features of Christianity. Weber, according to the interpreter whom we have cited, was the first scholar to come under the influence of Nietzsche. Thus from both sources indirectly, or from Nietzsche's work directly, the possibility of an influence on Fromm is substantial. It pertains to Nietzsche's contempt for early Christianity as a religion which in his judgment subverted the normal will to power.<sup>15</sup> By will to power he did not mean what is commonly meant by the term — ruthless self-determination — but the expression of the primary freedom of the human being or of the instinct of freedom unrestricted by intellectual or moral scruples. Defined in this manner, his concept of the will to power was regarded as the indispensable quality of the hero or genius because only by it was his self-affirmation possible. In this sense, its similarity with Fromm's conception of self-realization or the realization of the potentialities of the self is obvious. Thus, in spite of certain acknowledged differences, it is no surprise that he speaks with appreciation of Nietzsche's doctrine as “a rebellion — against the philosophical tradition of subordinating the empirical individual to powers and principles outside himself.”<sup>16</sup>

Fromm's accusation against the Protestant Reformation is substantially the same accusation that Nietzsche made against early Christianity. It is the accusation that such religion is essentially the product of a slave mentality and inculcates a slave mentality in those who succumb to its influence. The fact that, in the one instance, it is regarded as a preparation for the acceptance of German Nazism and, in the other, as a condition of mind which

encouraged submission to an ancient order of society in which slavery was institutionalized is only incidental. The two accusations are essentially the same. In both instances there is the same severe charge that the Christian ethic involves a reversal or a transvaluation of values that is contrary to nature. Fromm does not use the term "transvaluation," but his charge that the Christian virtues of humility, obedience, self-denial, and self-effacing devotion are in their psychological effect the opposite of virtue is the same as Nietzsche's charge that the same virtues are in reality dangerous vices. Any doubt of this will be dispelled, for example, by Fromm's insistence that Adam's sin, contrary to the traditional interpretation, was not sin but the supreme virtue, viz., man's courage to assert his freedom.<sup>17</sup> Nietzsche could scarcely have made a bolder claim.

An equally striking resemblance to Nietzsche appears in the fact that the slave mentality attributed to the Protestant Reformation is based on a concept of slave resentment toward superiors. There are certain differences which distinguish it from Nietzsche's concept particularly in regard to the nature and origin of the resentment, but the result is the same. A basic hostility is regarded as characterizing the conception of God and man typical of Reformation theology and reflected in the ethical theory derived from it. Luther and Calvin, cast in the role of two of the greatest haters among the leading figures of history, could easily illustrate the most lurid Nietzschean invective against Christian morality. When their doctrines are said to appeal to a group of people itself driven by an intense hostility, the description transforms the earliest Protestants into the counterpart of those earliest Christians whom Nietzsche despised for their alleged servile enmity against their superiors.

The asceticism that presumably characterizes the spiritual life and conduct of all Christians and particularly the vocational life of Calvinistic Puritans is based upon this same resentment. Nietzsche regarded the ascetic life as a life of contradiction—a life in which resentment rules without parallel over life's deepest, strongest, innermost conditions. He believed that it was life

turned against life which out of self-contempt had come to mean that the individual had sickened of himself.<sup>18</sup> In this sense it was a sickness that he regarded as extremely dangerous and contagious. In this sense he emphasized that not everyone who so desires can be a Christian, that no man is "converted" to Christianity—he must be sick enough for it.<sup>19</sup> Toward the end of his famous essay on the meaning of ascetic ideals which seems to have exercised no small influence on the Weberian theory of worldly asceticism, he emphasizes the length to which such sickness can go. He speaks of the extremities of behavior in the Middle Ages and the Reformation period—the frightful mutilations (flagellation) and chronic depressions, the witch hysteria and the delirious death-cravings of large masses whose awful cry, "*Evviva la morte*," was heard over the whole of Europe. He insinuates that in these phenomena the ascetic doctrine of sin had triumphed. It is strangely similar to Fromm's concern over the same cry, "Long live death," in his recent discussion of the love of death as one of the tendencies directed against life. His description of Hitler as an example of the purely necrophilous type would undoubtedly imply that Luther and Calvin as his alleged spiritual predecessors were of the same type.<sup>20</sup> The final step in this direction is described by Nietzsche at the end of his essay—that the sickness can reach the point where in a last, desperate attempt to find meaning for their lives, men will wish *nothingness* rather than not wish at all. Fromm comes near to this in his accusation that Reformation theology insists upon the reduction of man to insignificance and powerlessness—or, in the language of the formula, to nothingness—as a condition of the all-powerful God loving him.

In these interpretations of the final stage of asceticism can be detected a legalistic strain. It has already emerged in Fromm's idea of self-negation as a condition of grace. It now appears in the struggle to find meaning that Nietzsche gives as the final motivation toward nothingness. There is a self-justification here that is basic to legalism, but that at the same time is self-destructive. In other words, according to theological terminology, asceti-

cism is negative legalism. It is the negation of the self by means of the law for the purpose of meriting the *pity* of God. In this sense it is the opposite of positive legalism which may be regarded as the affirmation of the self by means of the law for the purpose of meriting the *favor* of God. In either case the law may be any principle, ideal, or requirement chosen by the individual, or which he may have had imposed upon him.

At this point we are touching upon an aspect of the gospel that is subject to misunderstanding not only by men like Fromm and Nietzsche but by those identified with the Christian faith. It is the failure to realize that the negative correlate of the gospel must derive from the gospel. It is the failure to recognize that the negation must arise out of forgiveness in the sense that repentance follows rather than precedes forgiveness. Or to put it in another way, the negation must arise out of the experience of that unique love designated in the New Testament as the agape of God. It must arise freely and naturally out of such an experience as the individual acquires insight into the way he has offended against it and what there is in him that is contrary to it. The negation is not, for this reason, less rigorous or demanding upon the resources of the individual, but is one that because it is integral to love is *for* him and not *against* him. And he accepts it as such. On this basis, asceticism as an alleged negative correlate of the gospel can only mean that the hearer of the gospel has either not heard it as love or has not responded to it in love. It is his deepest and subtlest defense against the gospel. It means that he has not accepted the forgiveness of the gospel and experienced the freedom which it thereby gives.

Neither Fromm nor Nietzsche has seen this freedom based upon forgiveness as the center of the Christian faith around which everything else revolves. Neither of them has understood what the gospel means. They have seen everything as law with obedience to it in the form of either a positive or a negative legalism. In this respect they have been influenced, no doubt, by what they have seen in the life and work of the church and by what they have experienced in dealing with Christians best known to them. For there is a persistent tendency in the history of the

church to give the law a place alongside the gospel undefined by the gospel. The emphasis here is upon the qualifying phrase "undefined by the gospel." This may refer to the law either as antecedent to the gospel or as subsequent to it; either to convince the hearer of his need for the gospel or as a means of discipline after he has heard it. In either case, the law can easily be subverted into an instrument of asceticism.

Barth has described this tendency as it developed from Melancthon through the sixteenth-century federal theology, through eighteenth-century rational orthodoxy down to nineteenth-century liberalism. It was the English Westminster Confession (Ch. 7), he says, which for the first time gave confessional status to a covenant of works (law) alongside a covenant of grace (gospel) as this dualism had developed in the Herborn school. He points out that in the second half of the seventeenth century this tendency was well on its way with the positing of a *natural law of nature* as the basis of a morality that was regarded as the original covenant of God with man.<sup>21</sup> What this meant, we may add, is that such natural law tended to become identified with the law and practice of the society of the period. There was no clear-cut distinction between the natural and what was customary. On this basis, what is described as the law more and more having a place alongside the gospel undefined by the gospel is the ideology of the period more and more having a place alongside the gospel. And since obedience to the law was regarded as a requirement of the gospel, this meant obedience to the contemporary ideology. In this way a syncretism was taking place in which the gospel was being adapted to the culture or, to use a commoner term, secularized. It was this secularizing trend that worked itself out into the liberal theology of the nineteenth century and the skepticism which often followed it. In other words, the import of what Barth says supports the argument of those who contend that the correlation of the spirit of capitalism with the Calvinistic-Puritan tradition was due mainly to the increasing secularizing of the latter or the waning of its faith.

This possibility is emphasized by another fact — the tendency

of asceticism to develop independently of any religious basis. The best modern illustration is that of Russian communism, which at first was lax on morality apart from political offenses but which in recent years has adopted, to all intents and purposes, a Puritan-like attitude. Sex, family life, habits of eating and drinking, and other types of conduct are subject to a form of self-control that is dictated by an asceticism which in many respects seems as strict as that of Puritanism.<sup>22</sup> Here in an atheistic society, a form of asceticism has arisen that is independent of religion and of an ethic based on religion and of capitalism. Because it is independent of these, it appears to be a form of conduct that has no essential relation with religion of any kind or with capitalism as such. It seems better explained as an expression of secularism in which discipline rather than indulgence is a requirement of the prevailing situation.

If this be correct, the question pertaining to Protestantism is why the law in the form of asceticism should tend more and more to find a place alongside the gospel undefined by the gospel. This is the question that we can put to ourselves in spite of our objections to Fromm's interpretation of Luther and Calvin as exponents of ascetic faith and assurance respectively. It is our question, but one that we have to put to ourselves as a result of his analysis and therefore indirectly his question. Keeping in mind that the law in such a position is both anterior to the gospel and subsequent to it, the question becomes more specific. In the anterior position the law convicts the individual of the sin for which the gospel provides forgiveness. In the subsequent position it defines the life for which the gospel prepares him to live. When therefore the law becomes more and more secularized into conventional morality, custom, and respectability, which amounts to the ideology of a given period and place, the function of the gospel becomes apparent. It provides forgiveness for those who are sorry they have offended against the ideology and it prepares them to live in accordance with its demands. In the performance of such a function we can say that the gospel is in the service of a false god.

But at this point the question becomes quite specific. It concerns the gospel itself. Why does it tend to relinquish its prerogative of defining the sin for which it provides forgiveness and similarly its prerogative of defining the life for which it prepares men to live? Why does it tend to relinquish its responsibility as a critique (judgment) of the ideology (idolatry) and of becoming a liberating power which in committing men to Christ frees them from the ideology? If these are the questions which are being asked both outside the church and within it because of the total situation of ideological conflict in our time, they are emphasized by another fact. According to the New Testament theology of the gospel in relation to law, there is ample precedent for the gospel to fulfill this critical and liberating function.