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H. EMIL BRUNNER--1914-1928, THE CRITICAL  
PERIOD OF HIS THEOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT  
AND WRITINGS

Short Title

H. EMIL BRUNNER--1914-1928

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty  
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,  
Department of Historical Theology  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Sacred Theology

by  
John David Felt

June 1953

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Approved by

J. A. Fick  
Advisor

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Reader

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Next Protestant theologians are acquainted with Dialectical Theology or the Theology of Crisis. They also know something about the principal representatives of the movement, H. Emil Brunner and Karl Barth. However, surprisingly little scholarly study has been conducted to date concerning the historical background and the development of Dialectical Theology. To the knowledge of the writer no biography of Brunner and no historical study of the development of his theology has appeared in print in English or in any other major language.

In order to contribute to a better understanding of Dialectical Theology, probably the most important and vital theological movement of the twentieth century, the writer will attempt a historical investigation of Brunner's theological development in the light of his life, the influences that molded his theology, and his work. As the title of the study, "H. Emil Brunner--1914-1929, the Critical Period of His Theological Developments and Writings," indicates the investigation is concerned with the first fifteen years of Brunner's theologically productive life, here labeled as the Critical Period.

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### INTRODUCTION

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Dialectical Theology only when it is viewed in its historical context; and secondly, the towering figure of Barth has too often managed to overshadow the accomplishments and the role which Brunner has played in the development of that theology. It is hoped that this study will contribute to a fair estimate of both the Dialectical Theology and Brunner, one of its foremost representatives.

The study at hand is historical in nature. No attempt has been made to evaluate Brunner's thinking from a theological and confessional point of view. Its scope is limited to 1914 and 1928. An introduction to what is here called the Critical Period is necessary, but Brunner's theological development and works published after 1928 fall outside of the limits of the study. A word of explanation concerning the term Critical Period is in order. This designation is not meant to imply that the period from 1914 to 1928 was the most vital in Brunner's life, nor is it meant to indicate a crisis in his theological development. The Critical Period characterizes Brunner's activity during that time. Most of his energy was channeled into critical evaluation of the theological and philosophical systems of the past. By rejecting what was dangerous and false, he made room for a new, constructive theology, which he began to build already during the Critical Period.

The study begins with a brief survey of the nineteenth century Europe. Political, economic, scientific, religious,



and philosophical themes are considered. The nineteenth century supplies the historical context for the ideologies, beliefs, hopes, and predicaments of the early part of the present century. Brunner's description of the twentieth century world is valuable in evaluating the environment in which he lived, against which he reacted and to which he contributed.

A biographical sketch of Brunner introduces him to the reader, touching upon his formative years, the Period of Criticism, the Period of Conflict, the Period of Personalism, and the Missionary Period. Chapters four and five are devoted to a review of the thinking which influenced his theological development. Of the important philosophical systems and ideologies, criticism, dialecticism, Urgeschichte, existentialism, personalism, Evangelical Socialism, and Bergsonian irrationalism come under consideration. The theological emphases of St. Paul and St. John, the reformers Luther and Calvin, the mysticism of Schlegel, Schleiermacher, the rationalistic thought of Ritschl and Harnack, and the dialectical thinking of Karl Barth, Gogarten, Thurneysen, and others, contributed, mostly positively but in some cases also in terms of a negative reaction, to Brunner's theological growth. The following two chapters, six and seven, are of central importance to this study. In chapter six the reader is introduced to all of Brunner's works from the Critical Period. An attempt

is made to demonstrate a progressive line of development in his theology. Chapter seven is devoted to an examination of his periodical literature and occasional articles of the same period, reflecting the variety and scope of his concerns. The chapter deserves attention because it is based on source material not readily available for a student of Brunner in the United States. A chapter on the major themes in Brunner's theology of the Critical Period offers an outline of the principal concepts and symbols with which Brunner deals in the early years of his theological development. These themes have laid a foundation upon which the mature Brunner has continued to build his theology. In chapter nine an attempt has been made to evaluate the importance and influence of Brunner's theology. Due to the dearth of source material and the contemporary character of the subject matter which allows no time for a process of historical sedimentation, this chapter only makes an attempt to suggest certain trends, in no sense claiming to be a comprehensive treatment of the topic. The study concludes with a brief summary chapter.

No comprehensive work has appeared on the topic at hand, as already mentioned. By far the best work on Brunner and his theology, including some introductory material on the development of Brunner's theology, is an unpublished doctoral dissertation, entitled, "The Problem of Revelation and Reason in the Writings of Emil Brunner," by Dr. Dale Moody,

a personal friend of Brunner. Paul King Jewett's Emil Brunner's Concept of Revelation is a fine piece of scholarship, showing an intimate acquaintance with Brunner's early works. The study, however, as the title indicates, is narrowly limited in scope. Most likely, Lorenz Volken, a Roman Catholic scholar, has written the best book on Brunner's theology. His scholarly and fair treatment of Brunner's concept of faith, Der Glaube bei Emil Brunner, makes a major contribution to the study of Brunner's theology. Other works have dealt with Brunner's theology but their contributions to the understanding of Brunner are not sufficient to merit individual mention here. Most of these works appear in the bibliography.

Brunner's own works constitute the major source of information for this study. All his books and booklets which were published during the Critical Period have received careful attention. As the bibliography indicates, also other works of Brunner have been consulted. Due to the courtesy of the National Library of Switzerland (Bibliothèque Nationale Suisse) practically all the periodical literature of Brunner's Critical Period has been accessible to the writer.

Of the secondary authorities, the writer owes a debt to Dr. Dale Moody's work. Also Lorenz Volken and Paul King Jewett deserve special mention. Whenever the writer relies directly on the labors of these men, credit is given

to that effect in the footnotes. The bibliography includes all the books and periodicals specifically used in preparation for the study at hand. No doubt, the writer owes much to many other authors and teachers who have contributed to the understanding of the subject matter indirectly. To them credit is given here anonymously.

ground of their political, economic, cultural, philosophical and theological environment. In this chapter an attempt is made to sketch, of necessity briefly, the heritage and the contemporary scene of the young Brunner.

#### Political and Economic Environment

Swiss Brunner is a patriotic son of Switzerland, a country composed of twenty-two small states.<sup>1</sup> It is difficult to find reasons why a territory so rich in religious, political, social, industrial, physical and linguistic contrasts as Switzerland, should sport more than its share of healthy nationalism.

Swiss history is both intricate and very local. The people usually regard August 1, 1291 as the birthday of their nation. On this day men of Uri, Schwyz and Unterwalden met at Altdorf to form an "everlasting League" for the purpose

<sup>1</sup>Swiss Brunner, Karl Barth and Georg Pfander, in *Handbook of the History of Ideas* (Chicago: Verlag der Junges Kirche des Bundes evangelischer Jugend der Schweiz, n.d.), pp. 511f.

## CHAPTER II

### THE ENVIRONMENT

The theological development of the Crisis theologians in general and Emil Brunner in particular can best be understood if viewed against the background of their political, economic, cultural, philosophical and theological environment. In this chapter an attempt is made to sketch, of necessity briefly, the heritage and the contemporary scene of the young Brunner.

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<sup>1</sup>Emil Brunner, Karl Barth and Georg Thüner, Im Namen Gottes des Allmächtigen 1291-1941 (Zürich: Verlag der Jungen Kirche des Bundes evangelischer Jugend der Schweiz, n.d.), pp. 31ff.

of self-defence.<sup>2</sup> This League became the foundation of the future Swiss Confederation. Its subsequent history is best understood in terms of Switzerland's relationship with the Empire and the Habsburgs, and in terms of federalism based on defensive alliance of 1291 and 1315.

The Swiss League won its practical independence in 1499, formally recognized by the peace-treaty of Westphalia (1648). The eighteenth century generally witnessed an economic and intellectual development which was tested by a temporary setback during the Napoleonic wars and the lean postwar years. The honor of membership in the "Holy Alliance" (1817) was hardly an adequate compensation for the loss of commercial markets in other European nations.<sup>3</sup> Since the Federal Constitution of 1848, the Swiss scene has experienced a centralization, particularly in the economic life of the cantons. In the second half of the nineteenth century economic prosperity was rapidly increasing due to amazing growth of industry and commercial activity. Progress and prosperity characterized the age. Even when most of Europe was trembling before the shadow of the impending world conflict, Switzerland exhibited its wealth and prosperity at the national exhibition in Berne (1914).

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>3</sup>"Switzerland; History," Encyclopedia Britannica, XXI (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., 1951), 689.

When exaggerated nationalism, imperialism, competitive armament and the diseased European mind finally precipitated a world wide conflict between the Triple Entente and the Triple Alliance, Switzerland managed to remain politically aloof but could not avert grave economic consequences.<sup>4</sup>

No doubt it is correct to say that the World War was a period of trial for the Swiss people from the economic, political, and moral point of view. Even though the Swiss armies did not participate in active combat, they had to be kept ready for possible national emergency. A standing army costs dearly in taxes. The years of privation on the material side were accentuated by constant political unrest which manifested no particular aim or direction.<sup>5</sup>

The symptoms of exhaustion and moral strain of the nation manifested themselves in a general strike on the day when the rest of Europe was about ready to lay down its arms (November 11, 1918).

Switzerland had no voice in drawing up the Treaty of Versailles, nor in the organization of the League of Nations, because it had not participated in the war. It, however, became the first home of the headquarters of the League at Geneva.

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<sup>4</sup>Ferdinand Schevill, A History of Europe from the Reformation to the Present Day (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1941), pp. 650-652.

<sup>5</sup>"Switzerland; History," op. cit., pp. 690f.

The war had dealt as heavy a blow to the psychology of Europe as it had damaged its economic resources. Germany was utterly beaten, downcast and bankrupt. Someone has said that "Germany had become a nation of paupers."<sup>6</sup> The French were "on edge." Their elation at a great victory over the perennial enemy was mixed with the fear that the sweet fruits of conquest might be denied to it by its Allies.<sup>7</sup> If only Great Britain would consent, France was determined "to bleed Germany white."<sup>8</sup> At first it seemed that Switzerland was to escape a postwar crisis. Soon, however, the general European economic crisis spread over its territory, bringing along unemployment and the economic and social evils related to it.<sup>9</sup>

Brunner himself offers an analysis of the post-war situation in a magazine article entitled "Disillusion and Hope in Switzerland." He speaks of "the moral and intellectual fatigue of Europe," of "a heavy, dull atmosphere of resistance which keeps down all energies on the one hand and creates over-nervousness on the other."<sup>10</sup> "Mutual

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<sup>6</sup>Schevill, op. cit., p. 688.

<sup>7</sup>J. A. R. Marriott, A History of Europe from 1815 to 1939, vol. VIII in History of Medieval and Modern Europe (New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1952), p. 570.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 571.

<sup>9</sup>"Switzerland; History," op. cit., p. 691.

<sup>10</sup>Emil Brunner, "Disillusionment and Hope in Switzerland," The World Tomorrow, III, No. 9 (1920), 276.



distrust" obtains everywhere. "The dominant psychological factor is no doubt disillusionment and cynicism."<sup>11</sup> The students lack direction in study and comprehension of the meaning of being. There seems to be "no conspicuous ideal to attract and focus young minds."<sup>12</sup>

Since the war the Socialist party had become stronger than ever before. It not only dominated the parliament but also controlled the administration of the major cities, Zürich, Basel, and Bern. The leaders of the Socialists were affected by the Russian Bolshevists' doctrines but the masses were democrats at heart. The peasants, a numerous class in Switzerland, mostly sided with the middle class and the capitalists.<sup>13</sup>

The attitude of the Swiss people towards America was mixed. The bourgeois circle was generally well disposed towards "our big sister republic." However, many Swiss people were deeply concerned about the fact that Americans were acquiring property in Germany in huge quantities.

Brunner states frankly that the Swiss were not delighted to have rich and powerful neighbors.

We Swiss people have seen how difficult it is for a small industrial nation to stand the competition of an incomparably more powerful neighbor. And this

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., pp. 276f.

will be as true of America as it was of Germany.<sup>14</sup>

According to Brunner, a significant social revolution has begun which will dominate until there is no need for it any longer. The age of the self-satisfied bourgeois civilization is over. The only hope is in a radical change. Brunner agrees with Hermann Kutter, whom he has called the Swiss Kierkegaard,<sup>15</sup> that the revolution must originate in a "new awakening of the spiritual forces of justice and love."<sup>16</sup>

#### Forces of Socialism

The roots of the Socialist movement, which were so forceful and existential for the young Brunner, go back into the eighteenth century. Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) and Saint-Simon (1760-1825) both helped the cause in spite of the fact that the former was not conscious of its economic implications and the latter ignored its democratic features.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 277.

<sup>15</sup>Emil Brunner, "H. Kutter," Neue Züricher Zeitung, April 1927, No. 641.

<sup>16</sup>Brunner, "Disillusionment and Hope in Switzerland," p. 277.

<sup>17</sup>"Social Movement," The Cambridge Modern History, edited by A. W. Ward, G. W. Prothero and Stanley Leathes (Cambridge: The University Press, 1910), XII, 758.

There is little doubt that political socialism really began with the work of Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Friedrich Engels (1820-1895). In the English speaking world John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) and Henry George (1839-1897) advocated socialism. The former in his Autobiography predicted that in the society of the future a common ownership in the raw materials and an equal participation of all men in the benefits of combined labour would obtain.<sup>18</sup> All the above mentioned men left conspicuous footprints on the road of economic and political thinking of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

#### Biological Sciences

The study of biological sciences in the nineteenth century led the way toward theories of evolution. Jean Baptiste Lamarck (1744-1829) spoke of biological development due to functional necessity, Thomas Henry Huxley (1825-1895) studied the skulls of men that he thought belonged to prehistoric age and laid the foundations of ethnology, and Charles Darwin (1809-1882) expounded the development of new species as a result of selective breeding.<sup>19</sup> His famous work, The Origin of Species (1859) affected, positively or negatively, the thinking of all

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., XII, 759.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., XII, 772.

future generations. Evolution also invaded the study of religions. Man became really aware of the types of individual religions, their similarities and differences. In this field William James' study entitled Some Varieties of Religious Experience deserves mention here.<sup>20</sup>

The nineteenth century also witnessed the growth of scientific interest in man's mind. The work of Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) an Austrian psychologist and psychoanalyst and the work of Carl Gustav Jung (b. 1875), a Swiss psychologist, was basic in the science of psychology. Jung established a school of analytical psychology in Zürich, the home town of Emil Brunner. The study of psychology exerted far-reaching influence on the late nineteenth and early twentieth century thought world.

#### Religious and Philosophical Thought

It is difficult to determine where one should begin. Let it be said that in the period of Enlightenment the nature of Christianity underwent serious scrutiny. Voltaire (1694-1778), Lessing (1729-1781) and others raised questions that they could not answer.

Was Christianity a corruption of the true religion, as Voltaire charged? Was it the perfected version of the religion of nature, which was accessible to all men in the light of the reason, as Kant thought? Was the historical form of Christianity superior to

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., XII, 775.

natural religion, as Locke thought? Or was Christianity but one phase in the emergence of the final and true religion, as Lessing suspected. Long after these major interlocutors had departed, these questions, and others very similar, continued to disturb the piety of cultured Europeans.<sup>21</sup>

The awakening of historical research in theology in the nineteenth century was probably to a large degree due to three far-reaching cultural forces: (a) a strong pietistic awakening against the indifference of intellectualistic rationalism and frigid orthodoxy; (b) the spread of new interest in the "dark" Middle Ages; and (c) a strong current of philosophy represented by Kant (1724-1804), Schelling (1775-1854), Fichte (1762-1814), and Hegel (1770-1831).<sup>22</sup>

Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), a romanticist at heart, a German Idealist in spirit and a Protestant theologian by conviction heralded in a new era of religious thinking. It is said that Frederick the Great on one occasion remarked: "He did not found a school, but an era."<sup>23</sup> Karl Barth comments: "The first place in a history of the theology of the most recent times belongs and will

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<sup>21</sup> Philip Rieff, "Introduction," in Adolf von Harnack, Outlines of the History of Dogma (Boston: Beacon Press, 1959), p. vi.

<sup>22</sup> James Westfall Thompson and Bernard J. Holm, A History of Historical Writing (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1942), II, 567.

<sup>23</sup> Karl Barth, Protestant Thought From Rousseau to Ritschl (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959), p. 306.

always belong to Schleiermacher and he has no rival."<sup>24</sup>  
 Brunner completely agrees with that statement.<sup>25</sup>

August Neander (1789-1850), under the influence of Schleiermacher's romanticism, inspired Protestant historiography to new life. Karl August Hase (1800-1890), an idealist, explored the field of interrelationships between fine arts and Christianity and called attention to the study of comparative religions.

There is little doubt that Ferdinand Christian Bauer (1792-1860), the father of the Tübingen School of historical theology and the father of history of dogma, was strongly influenced by the speculative Hegelian philosophy and von Ranke's critical methods of scholarship.<sup>26</sup> Bauer and the Tübingen School treated Scriptural documents just as any secular historical material. They regarded dogmas as ideas which were assembled, developed and adjusted to each other in a long historical process.

Closely related to the Tübingen School of thought but not identified with it was Albert Benjamin Ritschl (1822-1889). Ritschl flatly denied the theories of a special divine inspiration. In its place he emphasized the ethical

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>Emil Brunner, Die Mystik und das Wort (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1924), p. 29.

<sup>26</sup>Thompson and Holm, op. cit., II, 562.

and experimental nature of religion together with un-philosophical but scientific historical research. Adolf von Harnack (1851-1930), the outstanding Church historian and interpreter of dogma for the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was strongly influenced by Ritschl's thought.<sup>27</sup>

In the early part of the twentieth century the influence of Ernst Troeltsch's (1865-1923) Religion-Geschichtliche Schule became prominent. According to it religion knows no absolutes; Christianity is just one of the religions and Jesus is the founder of just one religion which may be eventually superseded. It is to the credit of Troeltsch that he himself considered Christianity superior to the religions of the East.<sup>28</sup>

#### Brunner's View of the Twentieth Century

Particularly in his early writings Brunner offered a picture of the thought world of the day. He correctly recognized the complexity and the variety of thought patterns of the twentieth century. There was little new in

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<sup>27</sup> Adolf Harnack, Thought on the Present Position of Protestantism (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1899), p. 56.

<sup>28</sup> Ernst Troeltsch, Protestantism and Progress: A Historical Study of the Relation of Protestantism to the Modern World, translated by W. Montgomery (Beacon Paperback edition; Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), p. vii.

the nineteenth century, according to Mackintosh, "the most notable ever traversed by the Christian Church."<sup>29</sup> Taking a long look back into history Brunner remarked in his American lectures of 1928:

The present ideology of the West is the thought of the Enlightenment, the partly idealistic and partly naturalistic rationalism which in the last three hundred years has involved itself in Christianity, caused its inward disintegration and generally weakened it.<sup>30</sup>

The naturalism that reigned in Brunner's time was basically anthropocentric.<sup>31</sup> A deliberate pursuit of culture<sup>32</sup> and self-conscious humanism<sup>33</sup> manifested the reigning spirit of secularism.

The individualism of the Romantic School and the naturalistic doctrine of evolution have given birth to "relativist historicism of the present day" (1927).<sup>34</sup> Sadly

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<sup>29</sup>Huge Ross Mackintosh, Types of Modern Theology (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937), p. 1.

<sup>30</sup>Emil Brunner, The Theology of Crisis (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929), p. xxii.

<sup>31</sup>Emil Brunner, Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1921), p. 4.

<sup>32</sup>Emil Brunner, The Philosophy of Religion from the Standpoint of Protestant Theology, translated by A. J. D. Farrer and Bertram Lee Woolf (London: James Clarke & Co., LTD., 1937), p. 146. Hereafter referred to as The Philosophy of Religion.

<sup>33</sup>Emil Brunner, "Giesbachs Angriff auf die Theologie," Zwischen den Zeiten, VI (1928), 229.

<sup>34</sup>Brunner, The Philosophy of Religion, p. 115.



Brunner remarks that "it cannot be doubted that Relativity dominated the temper of the modern mind to a great extent."<sup>35</sup> Relativity, however, leads to absolute uncertainty. "An age which has lost its faith in an absolute has lost everything."<sup>36</sup>

Man in his anthropocentric approach bows down to science. "Man könnte sagen dass im letzten Jahrhundert die Menschheit das Experiment machte, ob es nicht möglich sei, die Gesamtheit des Lebens durch die Wissenschaft zu meistern."<sup>37</sup> In the second decade of the present century scientific knowledge established itself as the highest court of appeals.<sup>38</sup> The unwritten dogma extra scientiam nulla salus, however, received a severe blow when the cultural structure of the nineteenth century crumbled under the postwar disillusionment.<sup>39</sup> ". . . The terrible shocks which Europe has experienced during and since the war have given rise to a searching and critical reconstruction" of scientific and evolutionistic ideas.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Emil Brunner, "The Absoluteness of Jesus," Union Seminary Review, XLVI (1935), 270f.

<sup>36</sup> Brunner, The Theology of Crisis, p. 8.

<sup>37</sup> Emil Brunner, "Denken und Erleben," Vorträge an der Aarauer Studentenkonferenz 1919 (Basel: Kober, 1919), p. 7.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., pp. 6ff.

<sup>40</sup> Brunner, The Theology of Crisis, p. 92.

The age old theology of feeling which was popularized by Schleiermacher and Goethe has not died in modern times.

It is the ground-plan of all modern philosophies of religion that pretend to recognize mystical experience as the essence of religion and of revelation (Troeltsch, Otto, Scholz, Görland, and others.)<sup>41</sup>

Again:

In its choice between religious philosophical idealism and the Christian faith, modern theology, whether it is Schleiermacher's, Otto's, Ritschl's, Hermann's, or Harnack's, has cast its lot with idealism against faith.<sup>42</sup>

The modern neo-romanites have turned to the study of psychology and the psychology of religion in order to discover the meaning of religious experience. All that was nichtdingliche was classified as seelische and therefore subject to the science of psychology. Psychology was not only applied to religion but also to art, music, and literature. The science of Religionspsychologie was even supposed to discover the meaning of the Scriptures.

Brunner regarded Psychologismus as a complete misunderstanding of spiritual life and above all of religion which fosters a false inwardness (Innerlichkeit).<sup>43</sup> Religionspsychologie cannot teach man what religion is.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>Brunner, The Philosophy of Religion, p. 44.

<sup>42</sup>Brunner, The Theology of Crisis, pp. 11f.

<sup>43</sup>Brunner, Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube, p. 34.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 48.

John Owen summarized strikingly and skilfully the nineteenth century when he said:

If it were required to describe in one word, cumulative and comprehensive, the prevailing and characteristic energy of the nineteenth century, it would be difficult to find a better or more descriptive term than Disintegration. Every human institution, political or religious; every scheme of thought, philosophical, theological, or scientific; every fabric of long accredited belief, or tradition; whatever product of human reason or practical exigency, in short, that can claim apparently or really characteristics of growth and fixity, has either undergone or is in the process of undergoing the most searching investigation and vivisection.<sup>45</sup>

The World War helped to bring the nineteenth century heritage into a state of crisis. The crisis in theology in turn prepared the way for the Theology of Crisis. The time was ripe for Brunner's words: away from Schleiermacher and Ritschl, away from historical relativism and psychological Innerlichkeit.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>John Owen "Introduction," in Adolf von Harnack, Sources of the Apostolic Canon (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1899), p. ix.

<sup>46</sup>Brunner, Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube, p. 4.

### CHAPTER III

#### A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF BRUNNER

Zwei Absichten vor allem leiten und prägen Ihre gesamte Lebensarbeit.---Die erste: Gottes Offenbarung in Jesus Christus in neuer Kraft und Klarheit zu erfassen; ihre innerste Mitte durch die zeitbedingte Verhüllung und durch die Überwucherung moderner Weltanschauungen hindurch wieder zu begreifen; in einem der Heiligen Schrift gehorsamen Denken den Gesamtzusammenhang des Christusglaubens zu durchschauen; und so den Reichtum, die Tiefe und den Entscheidungsernst der biblischen Botschaft neu zur Geltung zu bringen. . . .---Die andere: für diese in ihrem Zentrum neu erfasste Glaubenswahrheit die rechte Gestalt der Verkündigung an den modernen Menschen zu finden.<sup>1</sup>

With these words friends greeted Emil Brunner on his seventieth birthday and also summarized his life.

The world famous Swiss theologian who is known today as a man with a strong personality, sharp mind, deep emotions and a love for good theater<sup>2</sup> comes from humble rural background. Brunner knows that his ancestors were peasants in the Canton of Zürich for centuries, and is proud of it. "I am deeply rooted in the Swiss soil," he is known to have said patriotically. Speaking to a gathering of young people he once said:

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<sup>1</sup>Der Auftrag der Kirche in der Modernen Welt: Festgabe zum Siebzigsten Geburtstag von Emil Brunner (Zürich: Zwingli Verlag, 1959), p. 7. Hereafter referred to as Der Auftrag der Kirche in der Modernen Welt.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 177.

Was immer as gutes gibt kommt von Gott, als auch unser Vaterland. Wir haben keine Bedenken das zu sagen wenn wir an unsere Flüsse und Seen kenken, die unser Land nicht nur uns selbst, sondern auch vielen teuer machen.<sup>3</sup>

Brunner's patriotism is matched by his love of freedom. As the dangers of the Second World War were threatening Switzerland, he appealed to his compatriots to choose freedom above physical comforts:

Wenn aber die Frage lauten wird: wollt ihr lieber hungern, frieren, und frei sein, oder wollt ihr lieber im gewohnten Lebensstil weiterfahren und dafür eure Freiheit und Ehre verkaufen--ich fürchte sehr, dass allzuviel den warmen Ofen und die Bratwurst der Freiheit vorziehen werden.<sup>4</sup>

#### The Formative Years (1889-1913)

Emil Brunner was born in Winterthur near Zürich (December 23, 1889) where he lived for the first four years of his life. He had a Christian as well as a relatively comfortable home. His father was a Bible-teaching school teacher, his mother a devout Christian woman who saw to it that her son knew the reality of God before he was three. When Emil was four years of age, the Brunner family moved to Zürich. There the young Brunner came into contact with

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<sup>3</sup>Emil Brunner, Karl Barth und Georg Thüerer, Im Namen Gottes des Allmächtigen 1291-1941 (Zürich: Verlag der Jungen Kirche des Bundes evangelischer Jugend der Schweiz, n.d.), p. 32.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 39.

Christoph Blumhardt. The spirit and the words of the Blumhardts made a lasting impression on the young lad. Later he confessed that their "combined spiritual power and social passion" became the very roots of his life.<sup>5</sup>

In his high school days Brunner came to know Hermann Kutter, a leader of evangelical Socialism, who catechized him and served as his pastor. "He was the greatest man I have ever met in my life," said Brunner many years later. "When he preached I felt the presence of the living God."<sup>6</sup> Leonhard Ragaz, the founder of evangelical Socialism, was Brunner's professor of Systematic Theology at the University of Zürich. "He was our Rauschenbusch and Carlyle, and taught me more than all my liberal teachers combined."<sup>7</sup> Brunner was graduated from the University of Zürich in 1913 (Lic. Theol.).

#### The Period of Criticism (1914-1928)

In this period Brunner searched out the weaknesses of "modern theology." His doctoral dissertation, published under the title Das Symbolische in der religiösen Erkenntnis (1914) dealt with false intellectualism from Kant to Bergson. The author explained that symbolism was chosen

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<sup>5</sup>Dale Moody, "An Introduction to Emil Brunner," Review and Expositor, XL (1947), 312.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

as the topic because in its treatment the inadequacy of intellectualism could be exposed.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand symbolism seemed to be the key to the knowledge of religious concepts.<sup>9</sup>

After some post-graduate work at the University of Berlin, Brunner taught French in a boys' school in England in order to master the English language. As a result he became fluent in three modern languages, a considerable help to a serious student of theology. His stay in England was interrupted by the First World War, forcing his return to Switzerland. After serving in the Swiss army he became pastor of a small mountain parish in Obstalden, Glarus. There he served for eight and a half years (1916-1924). In the comparative quiet of the mountain community he found time for undisturbed study. It was in Obstalden that he really discovered the theological depths of St. Paul and Søren Kierkegaard. He called the latter "the greatest Christian thinker of modern times."<sup>10</sup>

At Obstalden Brunner met Karl Barth and Eduard Thurneysen and managed to have his first fight with the former. In spite of their personality differences, Brunner

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<sup>8</sup> Emil Brunner, Das Symbolische in der Religiösen Erkenntnis (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1914), p. v.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. vi.

<sup>10</sup> Moody, "An Introduction to Emil Brunner," p. 313.

counted Barth as his friend and Bundessenosse<sup>11</sup> and acknowledged him as the "renovator of our theology."<sup>12</sup> "Our differences are not in substance but in method," says Brunner, "Barth is a dogmatic churchman and I am the apologetic missionary."<sup>13</sup> The fields were ripe for the apostolic missionary. The World War had shattered the confidence of the nineteenth century for continuous progress. The time was right for the young Crisis theologians to step into action. A very capable Roman Catholic scholar, Lorenz Volken, asserts that Brunner's affiliation with the "new theology" had crucial impact on the development of Dialectical Theology. He says:

Dadurch gewann die Theologie der Krisis zunächst bedeutend an Kraft und wissenschaftlichen Ansehen. Denn Brunner war an philosophischer Bildung seinen Freunden überlegen; durchformt vom Geiste des deutschen Idealismus, war er der Mann, die neue Theologie in Zusammenhang mit dem geistigen Sturm zu bringen. Er wurde zu ihrem hervorragendsten systematischen Vertreter.<sup>14</sup>

In 1919 Brunner appeared on the same platform with Heinrich Barth, brother of Karl Barth, addressing the Aarauer Studentenkonferenz. In his essay, "Denken und Erleben," Brunner sharply criticized the impersonal elements

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<sup>11</sup>Lorenz Volken, Der Glaube bei Emil Brunner (Freiburg, Schweiz: Paulusverlag, 1947), p. 8.

<sup>12</sup>Moody, "An Introduction to Emil Brunner," p. 314.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 315.

<sup>14</sup>Volken, op. cit., p. 8.



in modern society that frustrate individuality and personality development as understood in the light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.<sup>15</sup>

In the same year opportunity beckoned to visit the United States for advanced theological training. Within a few months of the publication of Barth's Römerbrief, Brunner left for the New World. During 1919-1920 he was a Fellow at Union Theological Seminary in New York City, "improving his knowledge of the speech and mind of the United States."<sup>16</sup> At that time the Seminary was dominated by liberal theology. Eugene William Lyman and other professors impressed Brunner with solid scholarship but there was very little affinity in thought between the student and his teachers. So it is not entirely by accident that upon his return home he paid a tribute to his friends in America by publishing a charming little book entitled Die denkwürdige Geschichte der Mayflower Pilgerväter. The dedication reads: "Dieses Büchlein widme ich in herzlicher Dankbarkeit meinen Freunden am Union Theological Seminary, New York."<sup>17</sup> The copy of this book in the Union Seminary Library has the

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<sup>15</sup> Emil Brunner, "Denken und Erleben," Vorträge an der Aarauer Studentenkonferenz 1919 (Basel: Kober, 1919), passim.

<sup>16</sup> Emil Brunner, The Theology of Crisis (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929), p. ix.

<sup>17</sup> Emil Brunner, Die denkwürdige Geschichte der Mayflower Pilgerväter (Basel: Reinhardt, 1920).

following personal note added in the author's own handwriting: "Dem Union Theological Seminary in ehrerbietiger Dankbarkeit für seine Gastfreundschaft (1919/1920) überreicht vom Verfasser."

Soon afterwards he wrote his first really significant work, Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube (1921). The book was directed against abstract systems of theology that seemed to rule out the Spirit and faith. From the preface the reader sees that the author fully recognized the importance and the originality of his work.<sup>18</sup>

In 1922 Brunner became Privatdozent at the University of Zürich. His Habilitations Vorlesung was another criticism of reason, Die Grenzen der Humanität.<sup>19</sup> At the age of thirty-five Brunner became Professor of Systematic and Practical Theology succeeding such famous theologians as Huldreich Zwingli and Johannes Oecolampadius.<sup>20</sup> At this time when he was just barely established in the academic world, he made a frontal attack on Friedrich Schleiermacher's theology. Brunner's Die Mystik und das Wort (1924) took

<sup>18</sup> Emil Brunner, Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1921), p. iv.

<sup>19</sup> Emil Brunner, "Die Grenzen der Humanität," Vorträge und Schriften aus dem Gebiet der Theologie und Religion, No. 102 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1922), passim.

<sup>20</sup> Dale Moody, "The Problem of Revelation and Reason in the Writings of Emil Brunner" (Unpublished Doctor's Thesis, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky., 1941), p. 69. Hereafter referred to as "The Problem of Revelation."

issue with the idea of substituting religious experience for revelation.

Several minor works flowed from Brunner's pen as if in preparation for bigger things to come: Philosophie und Offenbarung (1925), Reformation und Romantik (1925), Die Absolutheit Jesus (1926) and Christlicher Glaube nach reformierter Lehre (1926).

Some friendly and constructive criticism from his friend Barth turned him toward a more positive point of view. In 1927 two important works appeared by him: Der Mittler and Religionsphilosophie evangelischer Theologie. The former is a monumental achievement with practically no rival in the field of twentieth century christological literature. The latter, sort of a prolegomena to Der Mittler, shall speak for itself:

Philosophie ist Besinnung auf den Sinngrund unter Voraussetzung der Letztgültigkeit des vernunftimmanenten Begründungszusammenhanges. Christlicher Glaube aber ist die Erkenntnis von der Durchbrechung dieses Zusammenhanges durch die Offenbarung.<sup>21</sup>

In the fall of 1928 Brunner paid his second visit to the United States. This time he came to lecture as the Swander lecturer at the Theological Seminary of the Reformed Church in the United States, Lancaster, Pennsylvania. The Swander Lectureship is set up for the purpose of promoting

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<sup>21</sup> Emil Brunner, Religionsphilosophie evangelischer Theologie (Zweite unveränderte Auflage; München: Leibniz Verlag, 1948), p. 4.

"sound Christological science."<sup>22</sup> The lectures were partly repeated in six other theological institutions in America: Central Theological Seminary, Dayton, Ohio; The Western Theological Seminary, Pittsburg, Pennsylvania; Princeton Theological Seminary; the Divinity School in Harvard University; Hartford Theological Seminary; and Union Theological Seminary, New York.<sup>23</sup> The lectures, a compendium of Brunner's theology, were later published as Theology of Crisis (1929). In the Foreword Brunner expresses his thanks for American hospitality: "This little book is in reality a token of gratitude for the largehearted hospitality which was everywhere shown him in America."<sup>24</sup>

#### The Period of Conflict (1929-1936)

The period covers mainly Brunner's conflict with Karl Barth and his contacts with the Oxford Movement. As a lecturer Brunner had come to be in constant demand internationally. In the autumn of 1929 he lectured mainly on ethics at various universities in Holland. These appeared in print under the title Gott und Mensch (1930). In the spring of 1931 he delivered lectures in London, Glasgow and Edinburg. The topics were essentially related to those

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<sup>22</sup>Brunner, The Theology of Crisis, p. vii.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. ix.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. x.

covered in his American lectures. The 1931 lectures appeared in print as The Word and the World.

Lorenz Volken rightly points out that Brunner's break with his friend Karl Barth is of importance:

In Emil Brunners Verhältnis zur 'dialektischen' Theologie ist zu unterscheiden die Periode vor, und die Periode nach der Trennung von Karl Barth, wo er dann als einzelner "Dialektiker" seinen Weg, den er schon vorher eingeschlossen hatte ganz folgreich weiter ging.<sup>25</sup>

The year 1929 marks the time when the friendly disagreement between Brunner and Barth began to precipitate into a theological battle. After the return from America, Brunner published an article on "Die Andere Aufgabe der Theologie."<sup>26</sup> Following the example of Pascal and Kierkegaard, he contended for a point of contact for the Gospel in human consciousness. The other task of theology was anthropology. A lecture "Von den Ordnung Gottes" (1929) emphasized this position by presenting the problem of natural theology along with the general consciousness of man.<sup>27</sup> In the major work on ethics to appear from the school of Dialectical Theology, Das Gebot und die Ordnung (1932), Brunner related the divine imperative to the natural orders of society. An article published in the same year, "Die Frage nach dem

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<sup>25</sup>Volken, op. cit., p. 8.

<sup>26</sup>Emil Brunner, "Die andere Aufgabe der Theologie," Zwischen den Zeiten, VII (1929), 255ff.

<sup>27</sup>Moody, "The Problem of Revelation," p. 77.

'Anknüpfungspunkt' als Problem der Theologie," made Brunner's position quite clear.<sup>28</sup>

Meanwhile Karl Barth was also busy writing. Three articles appeared on the subject: "Schicksal und Idee in der Theologie," "Die Theologie und der heutige Mensch," and "Die Theologie und die Mission in der Gegenwart." The first one rejected all positive relationships between philosophy and theology;<sup>29</sup> the second stressed a single unified task of theology;<sup>30</sup> and the third one made it plain that no point of contact exists between unconverted man and the message of the Gospel.<sup>31</sup>

An open conflict developed between the two theologians when Barth in his "Das erste Gebot als theologisches Axiom," claimed that Brunner had lapsed into Thomistic natural theology.<sup>32</sup> Brunner defended himself in Natur und Gnade: Zum Gespräch mit Karl Barth (1934). First Brunner explained why he had not defended himself sooner:

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<sup>28</sup> Emil Brunner, "Die Frage nach dem 'Anknüpfungspunkt' als Problem der Theologie," Zwischen den Zeiten, X (1932), 505ff.

<sup>29</sup> Karl Barth, "Schicksal und Idee in der Theologie," Zwischen den Zeiten, VII (1929), 309ff.

<sup>30</sup> Karl Barth, "Die Theologie und der heutige Mensch," Zwischen den Zeiten, VII (1929), 374ff.

<sup>31</sup> Karl Barth, "Die Theologie und die Mission in der Gegenwart," Zwischen den Zeiten, X (1932), 189ff.

<sup>32</sup> Karl Barth, "Das erste Gebot als theologisches Axiom," Zwischen den Zeiten, XI (1933), 311.

Gewiss hat mir was mein Freund Barth über mich schreibt, nicht wohl getan, aber ich konnte ihm auf keinen Fall deswegen zürnen. Nicht weil ich ein so guter Christ bin, der den, der ihn schmäht, segnet, sondern einfach, weil ich trotz allem und vor allem an dem, was Karl Barth sonst tat und schrieb, eine so grosse Freude hatte, dass ich das, was er gegen mich schrieb--knurrend freilich--mit in Kauf nahm.<sup>33</sup>

Then he explained his own position by speaking of a double revelation:

Aber grade im Glauben, auf Grund der Offenbarung in Jesus Christus, werden wir nicht umhin können von einer doppelten Offenbarung zu sprechen: von einer ersten in seiner Schöpfung, die nur der, dem durch Christus der Star gestochen ist, in ihre ganzen Grösse erkennen kann; und einer zweiten, in Jesus Christus, in deren vollem Licht er auch jene erste erst klar sieht, die aber auch weit über das hinausgeht, was ihm die erste zeigen konnte. . . .<sup>34</sup>

Although Barth claimed to have an irenic disposition,<sup>35</sup> he was quite successful in hiding it in his answer to Brunner: Nein! Antwort an Emil Brunner. In an angry outburst he denied that man has susceptibility to the Word of God (Wortempfänglichkeit) or addressability (Ansprechlichkeit)<sup>36</sup> and charged Brunner with leaving the evangelical thinking.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>Emil Brunner, Natur und Gnade: Zum Gespräch mit Karl Barth (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1934), p. 3.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>35</sup>Karl Barth, "Nein! Antwort an Emil Brunner," Theologische Existenz heute, No. 14 (1934), p. 4.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 31.

As Barth saw it, Brunner had rendered the doctrine of total depravity meaningless. The cleavage between the two theologians was completed; they have not been able to "bury the hatchet."<sup>38</sup>

The second important influence in Brunner's life at this time was his three separate encounters with the Oxford Group movement. When Brunner lectured at Princeton (1929), the student body and faculty were strongly involved in an emphasis on spiritual guidance, confession of sins and new life in honesty and purity. To Brunner this movement seemed to be akin to Methodism.<sup>39</sup>

As a lecturer at King's College, University of London (1931), he had his second encounter with the movement. He was invited to a group meeting on the luxurious premises of a countess. Brunner indignantly refused.

Somewhat later when the movement reached Switzerland and enjoyed considerable success, Brunner changed his mind.<sup>40</sup> In fact he saw in it a possible renewal of the Church.<sup>41</sup> "The Group seeks, by use of the experience which

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<sup>38</sup> Emil Brunner, Revelation and Reason, translated by Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1944), pp. 77ff.

<sup>39</sup> Moody, "The Problem of Revelation," p. 84.

<sup>40</sup> Emil Brunner, Meine Begegnung mit der Oxforder-Gruppenbewegung (Basel: Reinhardt, 1932), p. 7.

<sup>41</sup> Emil Brunner, Um die Erneuerung der Kirche (Bern: Gotthelfverlag, 1934), pp. 32ff.



it has gained of the modern fully secularized man, to know the right way of proclaiming the Gospel."<sup>42</sup> "The Group Movement is in the first instance an attempt to obey the missionary command of the Lord through mobilization of the lay world for the exercise of its Christian duty of service."<sup>43</sup> One can hardly recognize the Brunner of the earlier times when he says:

I do not say that it [traditional Church] has outlived its usefulness, or that it is in contradiction to the Bible, but I certainly do claim that contentment with it, where it has proved itself inadequate, must be reckoned to the Church as a grievous sin of indolence.<sup>44</sup>

Indeed he was so serious about the movement that he assumed the duties of its interpreter to the Church.

Not through my own choice, but by the manner in which I have been led in my life, the double task has been set me to work as interpreter on both sides, to interpret the Group Movement to the theologians and the churchmen, and to interpret theology and Church to the Group Movement, so that the one side can know the other as its necessary correlative.<sup>45</sup>

Dr. Moody is correct when he comments that "whatever the merits of the Movement may be, it is abundantly evident that it turned Brunner from his early assertions that made revelation and religious experience mutually exclusive."<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Emil Brunner, The Church and the Oxford Group, translated by David Cairns (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1938), p. 31.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>46</sup> Moody, "The Problem of Revelation," p. 85.

Brunner's works such as Vom Werk des heiligen Geistes (1935), Unsere Glaube (1935), The Church and the Oxford Group (1937), and even Der Mensch in Widerspruch (1937) reflect to some extent the influence of the Oxford Group Movement.<sup>47</sup> There is even a public apology by Brunner "for the grave injustice which undoubtedly has been done Pietism during the past twenty years" (written in 1937).<sup>48</sup>

#### The Period of Personalism (1937-1953)

In the Period of Personalism Brunner comes really into his own as a mature theologian and writer. The Olavus Petri Lectures, delivered in the fall of 1937 at the University of Uppsala, mark the most significant transition in Brunner's development. Brunner volunteers the information that "the suggestion to make the relation between the objective and the subjective in Christian faith the theme of the lectures was given by my friend, Professor A. Runestam, of Uppsala. . . ."<sup>49</sup> Brunner found that this theme proved to be "an extremely valuable starting point for reflection about the Biblical concept of truth."<sup>50</sup> Under the influence

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<sup>47</sup>Brunner, The Church and the Oxford Group, p. 55.

<sup>48</sup>Emil Brunner, The Divine-Human Encounter, translated by Amandus W. Loos (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1943), p. 39.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

of Ebner's and Buber's concept of personalism<sup>51</sup> Brunner defined the Biblical concept of truth as "truth as encounter."<sup>52</sup>

Applying this knowledge in all spheres of church doctrine and practice is of direct and unforeseen import. . . . If my thesis in these lectures really represents faithfully the Biblical understanding of truth, then indeed much of our thinking and acting in the church must be different from what we have been accustomed to for centuries.<sup>53</sup>

The lectures appeared in print under the title Wahrheit als Begegnung (1938).

In the same year Brunner was asked to come to the United States to lecture at Princeton. After only one year of teaching in America the ominous signs of an impending World War forced his return home. It has also been intimated that Brunner was not altogether happy about the fundamentalistic controversies that reigned at Princeton during that time.<sup>54</sup>

Brunner spent the war years in the practical ministry, preaching and applying the Christian faith to social orders, especially the newly created social problems of World War II,

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<sup>51</sup>Das Menschenbild im Lichte des Evangeliums: Festschrift zum 60. Geburtstag von Emil Brunner (Zwingli-Verlag, 1950), p. vi.

<sup>52</sup>Brunner, The Divine-Human Encounter, p. 7.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

<sup>54</sup>Moody, "An Introduction to Emil Brunner," passim.

As a scholar Brunner worked with zeal and insight. "A world like that of our own day, which is shaken to its foundations, needs to reflect upon the ultimate presuppositions of the meaning of existence,"<sup>55</sup> wrote Brunner in the Preface to Offenbarung und Vernunft (1941), one of his major works, which he dedicated to Max Huber and J. H. Oldham

to whom I am bound by ties of friendship and personal gratitude, whose noble passions to establish justice and love in a world of injustice and hatred of God has become an example to follow as well as admire.<sup>56</sup>

In Gerechtigkeit (1943) Brunner traced the principles of justice and applied them to special cases in politics, economics, international affairs and family relationships.<sup>57</sup>

Soon after the war was over Brunner was ready to make dogmatics "a mediator in between worldly science and supra-worldly testimony of faith."<sup>58</sup> He regarded the task of dogmatics to sustain contemporaneity by ever translating the Christian revelation into the alphabet of the times.<sup>59</sup> His contribution thus far towards a complete system of

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<sup>55</sup>Brunner, Revelation and Reason, p. ix.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. x.

<sup>57</sup>Emil Brunner, Justice and the Social Order, translated by Mary Hattingen (New York: Harper, 1945), passim.

<sup>58</sup>Emil Brunner, The Christian Doctrine of God, translated by Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1950), p. 66.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., p. v.

dogmatics in Die christliche Lehre von Gott (1946) and Die christliche Lehre von Schöpfung und Erlösung (1950). The third volume in the series is expected to appear under the title Die christliche Lehre von der Kirche, vom Glauben und von der Vollendung.<sup>60</sup>

Early in 1947<sup>61</sup> and again in March 1948<sup>62</sup> Brunner delivered a series of Gifford Lectures at the University of St. Andrews. His general theme was Christianity and Civilization. In the Preface to the first series of lectures Brunner stated,

if by the mercy of God we are to have some further breathing space, if He does grant us another chance to build up a new European civilization on the ruins of the old, facing all the time the possibility of an immanent end to all civilised life on the globe, Christianity has a tremendous responsibility.<sup>63</sup>

Hardly justice can be done here to the rich and varied life of Brunner during the Period of Personalism. Let it suffice to mention that during this time Brunner wrote two hundred articles and major works,<sup>64</sup> visited the

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<sup>60</sup>Der Auftrag der Kirche in der Modernen Welt, p. 370.

<sup>61</sup>Emil Brunner, Christianity and Civilization: First Part: Foundations (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948), p. v.

<sup>62</sup>Emil Brunner, Christianity and Civilization: Second Part: Specific Problems (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949), p. v.

<sup>63</sup>Brunner, Christianity and Civilization: First Part: Foundations, p. v.

<sup>64</sup>Der Auftrag der Kirche in der Modernen Welt, pp. 356-367.

Far East,<sup>65</sup> and kept alive an active interest in the Oeumenical Movement<sup>66</sup> between regular lecturing and preaching duties in Zürich.

#### The Missionary Period (1953-1955)

Already in the summer of 1949 Brunner expressed the desire that his theology should be known and understood as "Missionary Theology."<sup>67</sup> He claimed to have a "new understanding" of the "missionary situation of the church." "This too is probably a matter that distinguishes my thinking from Karl Barth," says Brunner.

Barth thinks as a churchman for the church; I think rather as a missionary. More and more I come to the view that the church nowadays speaks not chiefly to Christians, as it did in the Middle Ages and at the time of the Reformation and even a hundred years ago; it must speak primarily to "heathen."<sup>68</sup>

Brunner's Missionary Period is strongly influenced by his encounter with Japan. It was in the fall of 1949 that Brunner first visited Japan on a world tour. On this

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<sup>65</sup>A few words will be said about Brunner's visit to Japan and Korea under his Missionary Period where it belongs topically.

<sup>66</sup>Brunner, The Christian Doctrine of God, p. vi.

<sup>67</sup>Emil Brunner, "Towards a Missionary Theology," Christian Century, LXIV (1949), 817.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid.

tour he had the opportunity to lecture at the Universities of Tokyo and Kyoto as well as some Christian universities. Writing back home, Brunner remarked, "Der Existentialismus, so wohl Kierkegaard als auch Heidegger und Sartre aber auch die dialektische Theologie haben den Älteren Idealismus fast gänzlich verdrängt."<sup>69</sup> He took note of the indifference toward religious thinking among many university students,<sup>70</sup> of the insecurity of local democratic ideas<sup>71</sup> and of the intellectual and scientific westernizing trends.<sup>72</sup>

Brunner was also able to visit Korea for ten days in order to lecture at several universities and medical schools. He was impressed with what he saw. "Die Koreaner sind ein tüchtiges, arbeitsames, freiheitliebendes und begabtes Volk."<sup>73</sup>

The trip to the Orient had given Brunner a vision of the possibilities of Christian service particularly in Japan. Four years later the sixty-four year old Swiss theologian left behind home, friends, and security and

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<sup>69</sup>Emil Brunner, "Die japanische Universität," Neue Züricher Zeitung, Oktober, 1949, No. 2232.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid.

<sup>71</sup>Emil Brunner, "Reiseeindrücke aus Japan," Neue Züricher Zeitung, November, 1949, No. 2394.

<sup>72</sup>Emil Brunner, "Geistige Strömungen im Heutigen Japan," Neue Züricher Zeitung, Dezember, 1949, No. 2514.

<sup>73</sup>Emil Brunner, "Reiseeindrücke aus Korea," Neue Züricher Zeitung, Dezember, 1949, No. 2586.

travelled to Japan in order to accept the chair of Christian Ethics and Philosophy at the International Christian University in Mitaka, near Tokyo.

On August 30, 1955 Brunner preached his farewell sermon at Fraumünster Cathedral.<sup>74</sup> He began his address by recalling the day of his ordination in that very church forty-one years ago.

It was 41 years ago when we theological students were ordained here in this cathedral by Professor von Schuthess-Rechberg, who was acting in the name of our Church convocation, and when we received from the Church of Zürich that first stage of ordination described by the beautiful title: Verbi Divini Minister, servant of the divine Word. Of all the many titles which I have received in the course of these 41 years, this one is by far the loveliest and the most important.<sup>75</sup>

In the course of the sermon Brunner said "One must hold oneself at the disposal of God to go where He wills. And the fact now is that the call has come to me from Japan."<sup>76</sup>

in the circumstances I believe I recognize in the invitation of the International Christian University of Tokyo a real call of God, and since my wife shares my opinion, I have been so bold as to accept this call. What will come of it lies in the hands of God.<sup>77</sup>

He concluded,

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<sup>74</sup> Emil Brunner, The Great Invitation and Other Sermons, translated by Harold Knight (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1955), p. 5.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 182.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 186.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 187.



In the course of my life I have received much recognition, far too much in comparison with others. . . . And if things should not go so well with me in Japan as has hitherto been the case, I should still not have the least right to complain and am firmly resolved never to do so.<sup>78</sup>

Once in Japan Brunner launched "a Christian assault on the stronghold of Japanese intellectualism, particularly on secularism in the guise of pro-Marxism and nihilistic existentialism."<sup>79</sup> He sought to interpret the Gospel in terms of the Japanese intellectual's problems and vice versa. This he did by delivering lectures to professional groups, followed by a direct question and answer period, by offering courses in Christian Existentialism, in Truth as Encounter, in Freedom and Justice in Society, and by speaking to Missionary Conferences.<sup>80</sup>

Brunner was convinced that "the unevangelized can be reached . . . only by meeting them on their own ground and with their problems, hopes and aspirations as the point of contact."<sup>81</sup> He was even willing to do without formal preaching and a traditional church organization if that would eliminate some blocks in the way of Christ to the Japanese heart. In fact he was quite outspoken in favor

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<sup>78</sup>Ibid., p. 188.

<sup>79</sup>James Scherer, "Emil Brunner in Japan," Christian Century, LXXI (1954), 922.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., pp. 922f.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., p. 923.

of the Non-Church movement which appealed to the national-istically minded intellectuals.<sup>82</sup> Brunner conceived of his task as a "bridge-building operation between Church and Non-Church."<sup>83</sup>

For reasons of health Brunner was forced to return home after a two year period of teaching and lecturing. However, his life was far from one of rest and inactivity. In more recent times he has lectured in America,<sup>84</sup> taken up preaching duties at Fraumünster Cathedral in Zürich<sup>85</sup> and written voluminously.<sup>86</sup>

The brief sketch of Brunner's life may be brought to a close with a quote from one of his many friends.

Those who have had the experience of knowing Brunner in this intimate way cannot fail to be touched by the warmth of his personality. They will remember him as a great Christian as well as a great theologian.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Emil Brunner, "A Unique Christian Mission: The Nukyokai (Non-Church) Movement in Japan," Religion and Culture: Essays in Honor of Paul Tillich (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959), pp. 287ff.

<sup>83</sup> Scherer, op. cit., p. 923.

<sup>84</sup> Emil Brunner, Faith, Hope and Love (London: Lutterworth Press, 1957), p. 7.

<sup>85</sup> This information is taken from an unsigned article on the dust jacket of Brunner's The Great Invitation and Other Sermons (American edition, 1955).

<sup>86</sup> Der Auftrag der Kirche in der Modernen Welt, pp. 367-370.

<sup>87</sup> Scherer, op. cit., p. 923.

## CHAPTER IV

### PHILOSOPHICAL SYSTEMS AND IDEOLOGIES THAT INFLUENCED THE DEVELOPMENT OF BRUNNER'S THEOLOGY

Emil Brunner, perhaps more than any other Crisis theologian, was influenced by his philosophical heritage and environment. This was partly due to his training and partly to his personality. Even though he wanted to be, and was, a theologian of the Word, he was by no means a stranger to the history of thought. This is especially evident in the works of the young Brunner (1914-1928). In them he deals with the philosophies and ideologies of the past and present and seeks to formulate his own theological and philosophical premises. Brunner's theological development and writings are not really intelligible without some acquaintance with the major forces that molded his thinking during the crucial stage of his life. It is hardly possible to give attention to all the philosophies that contributed to the growth of Brunner's thinking in the framework of this thesis. A brief discussion of the major forces, however, is necessary. A study of Brunner's life and early writings indicates that criticism, dialecticism, Urgeschichte, existentialism, personalism, evangelical socialism and Bergsonian irrationalism exercised the greatest

influence upon him. Each of these factors deserves individual attention.

#### Criticism (Immanuel Kant)

It is difficult to find a system of thought that has dominated so completely an epoch as the philosophy of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) ruled over the thought of the nineteenth century. The philosophical systems of Schopenhauer (1788-1860) and Nietzsche (1844-1900) rose and then faded away but the "Kantian movement flowed on, always wider and deeper; until today its essential theorems are the axioms of all mature philosophy."<sup>1</sup> Kant himself was always certain of the significance of his work as can be readily seen from his own words: "This much is certain, that whoever has once tasted critique will be ever after disgusted with all dogmatical twaddle."<sup>2</sup> Even Bertrand Russell who is known to lack a special love for Kantianism is constrained to say that "it would be foolish

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<sup>1</sup>Will Durant, The Study of Philosophy: The Lives and Opinions of the Greater Philosophers (New York: Garden City Publishing Co., Inc., 1927), p. 276.

<sup>2</sup>Dr. Paul Carus quotes Kant in Kant's Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics, edited in English by Dr. Paul Carus (La Salle, Ill.: The Open Court Publishing Co., 1945), p. 172.

not to recognize his [Kant's] great importance."<sup>3</sup>

What then is Kant's philosophy? This is not easy to answer nor are his writings easy to master. Will Durant points out that the approach "towards that sub<sup>tle</sup> center where the most difficult of all philosophies has its secret and its treasure" is threefold: (1) from Voltaire (1694-1778) to Kant; (2) from Locke (1632-1704) to Kant; and (3) from Rousseau (1712-1778) to Kant.<sup>4</sup> Interesting and rewarding as these "roads" may be it is not possible to take time out here to explore them. Attention must be directed to Kant's thought<sup>t</sup> itself. Kant's critical philosophy is usually divided into three periods. In his early years, under the influence of Leibnitz and Wolff, Kant rejected all empirical tests and regarded rational thought as the only way to ultimate truth. Since 1755 he came under the influence of the British empiricists. Kant himself confesses that the Essays and Enquiries of David Hume "awoke me from my dogmatic slumber."<sup>5</sup> With the publication of the Critique of Pure Reason (1781) the important critical

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<sup>3</sup>Bertrand Russell, A History of Western Philosophy: And Its Connection with Political and Social Circumstances from the Earliest Time to the Present Day (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1945); p. 704.

<sup>4</sup>Durant, op. cit., pp. 277-285.

<sup>5</sup>Immanuel Kant, Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics (Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Co., 1933), p. 7.

period was launched. Here the "wedding" between rationalism and empiricism had been consummated, here das Ding an sich had been demonstrated to be beyond all human experience and observation.

The unknown Ding an sich is said to evoke in man a confused and diffused "heap" of sensations which must be organized by the mind. How is this accomplished? How does the raw material of sensations become the end product of thought? First, the sensations must be coordinated according to the forms of perception--space and time (transcendental esthetic). Secondly, the product of the first process must be coordinated according to the forms of conception, the famous twelve categories of thought (transcendental analytic). "The coordination of the sensibility [perception] and understanding [conception] upon sensations furnishes us with the objects of experience, which are subject to the laws of mathematics and physics."<sup>6</sup> The function of the transcendental dialectic is to examine the validity of the attempts to reason to deal with the unknowable world of das Ding an sich. Kant concludes that the transcendental ideas for which no sensuous content is available, such as the soul and God, are of regulative

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<sup>6</sup>Dale Moody, "The Problem of Revelation and Reason in the Writings of Emil Brunner," (unpublished Doctor's Thesis, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky., 1941), p. 42.

value only. Religion is beyond proof by theoretical reason. In the Critique of Practical Reason (1788), a work second only to the Critique of Pure Reason in import, he shows that the transcendental ideas of God, freedom and immortality are postulates of the moral law.<sup>7</sup> Most idealists have chosen to avoid the problem of evil, not so Immanuel Kant. He faced the issue in Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone (1793-1794) and came up with the concept of das radikale Böse. This concept actually does not seem to fit into his system.

The essence of wickedness, Kant tells us in interpreting the Biblical story of the Fall, consists firstly in doubting the strictness of the commandment itself, then in giving it the new meaning of a commandment of self-love, and finally in the subsequent over-emphasis of the sensual impulses in the maxims, i.e. the fundamental orientation to which man's conduct, governed by this undue emphasis, is for ever subject.<sup>8</sup>

Kant's major claim was to be able to show how systematic judgments a priori are possible. The pure conceptualism of Leibniz and sensationalism of Hume, taken separately, were useless in Kant's eyes, but when taken together as complementing one another, they seemed to supply the adequate method of knowledge. For Kant, percepts without

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<sup>7</sup>Immanuel Kant, "The Critique of Practical Reason," Kant, vol. XLII in Great Books of the Western World, edited by Robert M. Hutchins (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc., 1952), pp. 344-348.

<sup>8</sup>Karl Barth, Protestant Thought: From Rousseau to Ritschl (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959), p. 179.

concepts were blind and concepts without percepts were empty, but the two in correlativity seemed to form the world of man's everyday experience.<sup>9</sup> A harsh critic of Kant's philosophy, Cornelius Van Til, accuses the philosopher of virtually ascribing to man what Christianity ascribes to God, namely, the ultimate power over the possible as well as the actual.<sup>10</sup>

Brunner explicitly acknowledges his debt to Kant: "I owe too much to men like Kant and Fichte to speak contemptuously of them."<sup>11</sup>

Already as early as 1914 Brunner elaborated on his debt to Kant.

Diese neue Problemenstellung verdanken wir Kant, der zwar den Begriff 'religiöse Erkenntnis' nicht selbst gebraucht, wohl aber durch seine Gegenüberstellung von theoretischer und praktischer Vernunft vorbereitet hat.<sup>12</sup>

The age of rationalism before Kant's time and rationalism in all ages has held fast to the axiom that religious knowledge must be subject to scientific research, thus practically equating faith and knowledge. Kant disagreed.

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<sup>9</sup>Cornelius Van Til, The New Modernism (Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1947), p. 13.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>11</sup>Emil Brunner, The Theology of Crisis (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929), p. 72.

<sup>12</sup>Emil Brunner, Das Symbolische in der religiösen Erkenntnis (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1914), p. 1.



Grade dieses Axiom aber--und damit diese ganze Methode--hat Kant mächtig erschüttert, auf zweifache Weise. Erstens, negativ indem er die Unmöglichkeit einer positiven Verstandesmetaphysik nachweist, zweitens, positiv; indem er die praktische Vernunftkenntnis als eine selbständige und der theoretischen Erkenntnis übergeordnete hinstellt,--d. h. er reißt Wissen und Glauben auseinander; nach Methode und Inhalt sind ihre Aussagen verschieden, Wissenschaft und Religion gehören zwei verschiedenen Bewusstseins-sphären an.<sup>13</sup>

The differentiation between the two types of knowledge inaugurated a new era in quest of truth.

der Sinn der philosophischen und theologischen Bewegung der jüngsten Vergangenheit und der Gegenwart, von Kant bis Bergson, kann am besten verstanden werden als Herausarbeitung eines neuen, umfassenderen Wahrheitsbegriffs.<sup>14</sup>

Kant was the first major enemy of intellectualism. Philosophers have ever tried to solve the concept of religion and World-Being "auf dem Wege des mathematisch-beweisenden Denkens."<sup>15</sup> Kant rebelled against this by asserting "Erkenntnis durch sitliches Organ." His lead was followed by many philosophers and theologians, not the least among whom was Emil Brunner.<sup>16</sup>

It would be a mistake, however, to assume that Brunner is an uncritical student of Kant's philosophy. The following

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. v.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 127.

<sup>16</sup>Emil Brunner, Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1921), pp. 21-31.

words illustrate the statement.

The fact that Kant's conception of personality is not truly personal, although it comes nearer than any other philosophical conception to the truly personal--incomparably nearer than, say, that of the individualism of the Romantic School. This is made particularly clear when Kant speaks of man or personality in a purely ideal sense, without any reference to sin, even where he is concerned with ethical conduct. . . . The idea of man still remains the deepest and innermost centre of the actual man, and hence the putting forward of this idea avails to make man really good. It is on this conception of personality that Kant's phrase, "Thou canst, for thou oughtest," is founded, and this marks the point of his most extreme opposition to Christian faith.<sup>17</sup>

Both the influence of, and opposition to, Kant's critical system is evident in Brunner's words: "Faith only can prove the reality of God, because God cannot be known by theoretical reason but must be comprehended by an act of decision."<sup>18</sup> And again:

Only on the ground of faith, i.e. on the ground of a personal revelation from God, can it be affirmed that God is the creator of the world, and accordingly that "the world" is actually to be thought of as "will and idea," i.e. as the will and idea of God; and that therewith the opposition between idealism and realism falls away. God is the true reality.<sup>19</sup>

Brunner used the critical method of Kant but went beyond

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<sup>17</sup>Emil Brunner, The Philosophy of Religion From the Standpoint of Protestant Theology, translated by A. J. D. Farrer and Bertram Lee Woolf (London: James Clark & Co., LTD, 1937), p. 76. Hereafter referred to as The Philosophy of Religion.

<sup>18</sup>Brunner, The Theology of Crisis, p. 63.

<sup>19</sup>Brunner, The Philosophy of Religion, p. 82.

it, as can be clearly seen both in The Mediator<sup>20</sup> and Man in Revolt.<sup>21</sup> Brunner could afford to go ahead from the point where Kant had to stop.

Kant knew very well why he did not go further. To go further would have meant leaving the rational standpoint of the philosopher behind and becoming a believer.<sup>22</sup>

Dr. E. C. Rust is probably right when he maintains that Brunner accepts the Kantian distinction between the transcendental and the empirical egos in formulating the doctrine of the one person and two natures of Christ in a new form.<sup>23</sup> The distinction of the two egos is unfortunate for Christology because each of them becomes an abstraction when separated from the other.<sup>24</sup>

#### Dialecticism (Søren Kierkegaard)

By way of introduction attention is directed to the

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<sup>20</sup> Emil Brunner, The Mediator, translated by Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1947), pp. 114ff., 127ff., 142.

<sup>21</sup> Emil Brunner, Man in Revolt, translated by Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1947), pp. 100ff., 126ff., 222ff.

<sup>22</sup> Brunner, The Mediator, p. 142.

<sup>23</sup> E. C. Rust, "Lecture Notes on Christology," (Unpublished manuscript in the possession of Dr. Rust, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky.)

<sup>24</sup> Brunner, The Mediator, pp. 201ff., 328ff.

existentialist or rather post-existentialist<sup>25</sup> philosopher F. H. Heinemann's words:

The Kierkegaard-Renaissance is one of the strangest phenomena of our time. A lonely thinker of nineteenth-century Denmark (1813-1855), who made no mark on his own age and died in misery in a Copenhagen hospital, has become a central figure of the contemporary scene, the originator of two schools--the philosophical school of the Existentialists, and that of Karl Barth's and Emil Brunner's Dialectical Theology.<sup>26</sup>

The word "dialectical" has a Greek origin (*διαλέγεσθαι*) which can best be rendered by the German word gegeneinanderreden. The dialectical method is one in which a mutual confrontation of opposing factors occurs by which the truth can be approximated.<sup>27</sup> Before dialectics becomes desirable, it must be accepted that truth evades simple definition. The Roman Catholic scholar Lorenz Volken characterizes the concept of truth in dialecticism as follows:

Die Wahrheit ist aber nicht ein fixierte, anschaubares Etwas, sondern gleichsam eine bewegte, unanschauliche "Mitte" w zwischen zwei Aussagen. Sie ist ein "unendliches Ziel."<sup>28</sup>

The same author continues,

<sup>25</sup>F. H. Heinemann, Existentialism and the Modern Predicament (Harper Torchbooks; New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958), p. xiv.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>27</sup>David F. Swenson, Something About Kierkegaard (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1941), p. 117.

<sup>28</sup>Lorenz Volken, Der Glaube bei Emil Brunner (Freiburg, Schweiz: Paulusverlag, 1947), p. 5.

Keine einzelne Aussage verfügt über Wahrheit, kein hat allgemeine Geltung: Denn die Wahrheit liegt nur in der Beziehung auf die Gegenaussage in jener "unanschaulichen Mitte," wo These und Antithese in einer mit Spannung geladen Einheit festgehalten werden.<sup>29</sup>

Dialecticism did not appear overnight in Søren Kierkegaard; it did not even first appear in Kierkegaard. Certainly already in Fichte (1762-1814) characteristics of dialecticism are observable. However, it was Hegel (1770-1831) who brought dialecticism to its first major triumph,<sup>30</sup> and by it placed movement into logic.<sup>31</sup> By discarding Hegel's Synthesis, Kierkegaard brought the dialectical method to fruition and thus established one of the fundamental working tools of the Theology of Crisis.

A few words about the thinking of the Father of Dialectical Theology are in order. In fear and trembling the Danish thinker stood before God as he sought to interpret the secrets of life. Three stages on life's way seemed to suggest themselves: (a) the aesthetic stage of endeaemonistic enjoyment of the things of this world; (b) the ethical stage in which life is shared with others;<sup>32</sup> (c) the religious stage. Two types of religiousness are

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>30</sup> Van Til, op. cit., p. 47.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>32</sup> The first two points are outlined by Søren Kierkegaard in Either/Or, translated by David F. Swenson and Lillian Marvin Swenson (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1944).

possible: the religion of immanence (ethico-religious legalism) and the religion of transcendence (Christianity). There is no bridge from the first to the second. The law condemns man and leaves no room for hope, and yet there is hope. Since man could not go to God, God came to man. This according to Kierkegaard is the Absolute Paradox of Christianity.<sup>33</sup> For him time and eternity are utterly irreconcilable by reason.<sup>34</sup> The individual stands at the crossroads of time and eternity and participates in both. At that point where eternity touches time as a tangent touches the curve, the moment of decision occurs. The object of this decision is the Christ of history with whom man becomes contemporaneous through faith.<sup>35</sup>

As in Kierkegaard so in Brunner the reader encounters the expressions and concepts like moment (Augenblick), crisis (Krisis), decision (Entscheidung), and contemporaneity (Gleichzeitigkeit). Brunner's fundamental structure of revelation and faith is Kierkegaardian.<sup>36</sup> The Dane's famous

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<sup>33</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, translated by David F. Swenson and Walter Lowrie (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1941), p. 531.

<sup>34</sup>Perry D. LeFevre, The Prayers of Kierkegaard (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1956), p. 165.

<sup>35</sup>Paul King Jewett, Paul Brunner's Concept of Revelation (London: James Clarke & Co., 1954), p. 49.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

concept of faith as a leap, a risk, almost a gamble,<sup>37</sup> has had a tremendous impact on Brunner's thought.<sup>38</sup> Brunner writes as early as 1923: "Das Wort Sprung drängt sich jedem auf, der die Sache selbst verstanden hat, auch ohne dass er es bei Kierkegaard gelesen hätte."<sup>39</sup>

Kierkegaard's revolt against reason, to his friends the paradox of faith and to his enemies irrationalistic nonsense, has also affected Brunner's thinking in these lines, although the latter is to some extent critical of the former's purely antithetical conception of the relationship between revelation and reason. In Revelation and Reason Brunner makes his position clear: "Sinne Vernunft

Noch zweimal wurde die Lösung einer radikalen Antithese ausgeheben, von Soeren Kierkegaard und, nicht wenig von ihm her bestimmt, in der dialektischen Theologie.

Aber je grösser die Gedanklichen Mittel sind, mit denen die Theologie arbeitet, desto unmöglicher erweist sich eine rein negative, antithetische Auffassung des verhältnisses zwischen Offenbarung und Vernunft. . . . Darum kann die Frage niemals lauten: ob, sondern nur inwieweit und in welchem

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<sup>37</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, Philosophical Fragments, translated by David F. Swenson (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1936), pp. 44-93.

<sup>38</sup> Compare particularly Brunner's The Word and the World, God and Man, The Divine-Human Encounter.

<sup>39</sup> Emil Brunner, Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube (zweite und dritte, neubearbeitete Auflage; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1923), p. 99. See also p. 57.

und Offenbarung, Glaube und vernunftmässiges Denken miteinander verbunden werden können."<sup>40</sup> The Kierkegaardian distinction between objective and subjective truth is also present in Brunner's thought.

This distinction provides the frame of reference for the concepts of indirect communication (indirekte Mitteilung), venture (Wagnis) and existence (Existenz), all Kierkegaardian formulas, which Brunner frequently employs in unfolding the meaning of faith.<sup>41</sup>

Also Brunner's doctrine of God, anthropology and his special emphasis on the individual have deep roots in Kierkegaard's writings. Reading Brunner's early works makes it clear that Kierkegaard's thinking was the most important single influence on his theology. They also reveal that he was thoroughly familiar with Kierkegaard's work, not generally well known at that time.

#### Urgeschichte (Franz Camillo Overbeck)

The year continental theologians first read Karl Barth's Römerbrief, Christentum und Kultur, written by Franz Camillo Overbeck (1837-1905), a late Professor of Church History at the University of Basel, appeared posthumously. The work became well known because of its

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<sup>40</sup> Emil Brunner, Offenbarung und Vernunft (Zürich: Zwingli-Verlag, 1941), pp. 306f.

<sup>41</sup> Jewett, Emil Brunner's Concept of Revelation, p. 55.



concept of history. Overbeck was sceptical of the prevailing scientific theology and historicism. He saw man, as it were, between two poles, Urgeschichte and Endgeschichte. Man enters into the realm of the historical from primordial history, a world of origins (Entstehungsgeschichte) where no distinction between the particular and universal is observable.<sup>42</sup> In death man enters into Endgeschichte, another unknown world to a historical being. Between the supra-historical and supra-temporal realms is the temporality and relativity, commonly known as history.<sup>43</sup> Overbeck's primary interest lay in the study of history, not Christian theology. He pointed out that the only thing man learns from history, concerning revelation, is that there has been no agreement on the subject in the past. It is still an unsolved problem.<sup>44</sup> Karl Barth was the first of the dialectical theologians to make use of Overbeck's term Urgeschichte. He applied it to the point of tangency where time and eternity meet. Brunner was more cautious about the use of the term, but he, too, incorporated it into his theology.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Franz Overbeck, Christentum und Kultur, edited by Carl A. Bernaulli (Basel: Benno Schwabel & Co., 1919), p. 19.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>45</sup> Jewett, Emil Brunner's Concept of Revelation, p. 25. Consult also Brunner's Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube, pp. 104ff.

Already in his Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube Brunner said, "Der Geist hat zur Zeit nur ein negatives Verhältnis, Er weiss, dass sie nichts schafft und nichts erklärt. Er schaut über sie hinweg zum Ursprung."<sup>46</sup> And again, "Darum kann man nicht beides ernst - nehmen, Gott und die Geschichte."<sup>47</sup> Some years later Brunner wrote,

It is only from this standpoint of the "Urgeschichte" or primordial history that the general character of history can be known at all. "Urgeschichte" is the germ of all history; what the historian relates to us as "history" is its manifestation in space and time.<sup>48</sup>

Between Creation and the Fall, which are the realm of Urgeschichte,<sup>49</sup> and the end of history is a third, "middle" point of the Urgeschichte.<sup>50</sup> This is the Christ Event. To be sure Jesus of Nazareth was a historical person and his life a historical event, but that in itself was not God's revelation.<sup>51</sup> When man through the Holy Spirit recognizes in Christ his Lord, when God is revealed in Christ, then man has returned to the source of all history,

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<sup>46</sup>Brunner, Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube, p. 107.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 109.

<sup>48</sup>Brunner, The Philosophy of Religion, p. 123.

<sup>49</sup>Emil Brunner, "Der Sündenfall und die alttestamentische Wissenschaft," Die Christliche Welt, XL, No. 20 (1926), col. 997.

<sup>50</sup>Brunner, The Philosophy of Religion, p. 126.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 147.

Ur-End-Geschichte, both the prelude and the goal of history.<sup>52</sup>

It seems that Brunner's desire to emphasize the importance of the contemporaneous Christ<sup>53</sup> and a desire to avoid the seeming difficulties with the historical record of Genesis account led him to welcome Overbeck's term Urgeschichte, particularly because it lent itself to theological adaptation.

#### Existentialism (Martin Heidegger)

The philosophical movement which has enjoyed unrivaled popularity in the second quarter of the twentieth century is known as existentialism. Various attempts have been made to define this philosophical approach to life. It has been called "a clandestine wedding of nordic melancholy with Parisian pornography";<sup>54</sup> it has been termed a philosophy which in its method removes the distinction between the attitude toward reality and the content about reality.<sup>55</sup> Dr. Carl Michelson has offered a simple yet in many ways a satisfactory definition: "Existentialism is a way of life

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<sup>52</sup>Ibid., p. 148.

<sup>53</sup>Brunner, Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube, p. 104.

<sup>54</sup>Carl Michelson, editor, Christianity and the Existentialists (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956), p. 2.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 5.

which involves one's total self in an attitude of complete seriousness about himself."<sup>56</sup>

The man who coined the term Existenzphilosophie, F. H. Heinemann, gives credit to Kierkegaard as the real father of existentialism.<sup>57</sup> Commonly the names of Husserl, Jaspers, Marcel, Berdyaev, Miguel de Unamuno, Sartre, and Heidegger are associated with the movement. Any student of philosophy will readily observe that a variety of philosophies are represented by the above mentioned names. Perhaps the most famous of the men are the last two, Sartre and Heidegger.

Jean Paul Sartre (b. 1905), being much younger than Brunner, could not have influenced his early work and has not made much of an impression on his later writings. Sartre's existentialism is entirely too negative to suit Brunner's Christian philosophy.<sup>58</sup>

Martin Heidegger's (b. 1889) thinking has made more of an impression on Brunner, although even he is seldom quoted or referred to in the work of the Swiss theologian.<sup>59</sup> Heidegger's general thought pattern, however, is important

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<sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>57</sup>Heinemann, op. cit., p. 30.

<sup>58</sup>Cf. Jean Paul Sartre, L'Être et le Néant (quarante-quatrième édition; Paris: N. R. F., 1955), pp. 85ff.

<sup>59</sup>Moody, "The Problem of Revelation and Reason in the Writings of Emil Brunner," p. 51.

in understanding Dialectical Theology.

Since Heidegger has chosen to invent a vocabulary of his own to fill his need of expression, his philosophy is unusually obscure.<sup>60</sup> In his Sein und Zeit<sup>61</sup> which appeared in print in the same year as Brunner's The Mediator, Heidegger "aimed at a phenomenological analysis of human existence in respect to its temporal and historical character."<sup>62</sup> Influenced by Søren Kierkegaard and Edmund Husserl, Heidegger embarked on an existential analysis of human existence in order to formulate the concept of being in an original manner. His argumentation went as follows:

Man is a being in the world here and now (Dasein), and as such he is in Existence.<sup>63</sup>

Existence is all that is known to exist, it is more than man and less than All. Beyond it is the Seiende, which brought Existence into being. This Seiende has its Sein. Man, then, as Dasein, is so related to the Sein of the Seiende, to Seiende and to Existence that he has some

<sup>60</sup>Michalson, op. cit., p. 98.

<sup>61</sup>Martin Heidegger, Sein und Zeit (siebente unveränderte Auflage; Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1953).

<sup>62</sup>Moody, "The Problem of Revelation and Reason in the Writings of Emil Brunner," p. 52.

<sup>63</sup>Heidegger, op. cit., p. 117.

of all in his nature.<sup>64</sup> Since the fall, man, however, is not aware of his relatedness. From Dasein to which he has descended he desires to return to the Sein of the Seiende.

Man's concern (Sorge) is directed toward the ultimate, while his dread (Angst) is projected toward the objective world. In daily existence Sorge becomes obscure and a real concern for the totality of life is lost. Instead of Sorge which man should experience, he is haunted by Angst, by a feeling of being on the verge of nothingness. Angst again causes man's thoughts to turn to the Sein of the Seiende. As this takes place Angst gives way to courage. Man remembers his long journey from "home" and comes to think that he can return "home" through the "gate" of death. This in brief is the cosmic story of man according to Heidegger's early philosophy.<sup>65</sup>

Brunner comes close to using the very picture of Heidegger's leaving "home" when he says in The Theology of Crisis that sin "is an alienation, a disrupted relation,

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<sup>64</sup>Moody, "The Problem of Revelation and Reason in the Writings of Emil Brunner," p. 52.

<sup>65</sup>The general pattern of analysis of Heidegger's thinking is well expressed by Dr. Dale Moody. The writer has tried to simplify Moody's analysis where that was considered desirable without still losing Heidegger's basic philosophy. Cf. Moody, "The Problem of Revelation and Reason in the Writings of Emil Brunner," pp. 51-53.

a having left the Father."<sup>66</sup>

Personalism (Ferdinand Ebner and Martin Buber)

In March, 1919, Emil Brunner had the following to say to his audience at the Aarauer Studentenkonferenz:

Ein logisch konstruiertes Begriffssystem ist so wenig ein Ideal, wie ein mustergültiger Polizeistaat.<sup>67</sup>  
 . . . Ein Religiöse Erkenntnis bleibt tote Theologie, wenn wir sie nur mit dem Verstand, in ihrem unpersönlichen Allgemeinheit auffassen, wenn sie uns bloss an der Oberfläche unseres Ich ritzt und nicht ins Herz des persönlichen Leben trifft.<sup>68</sup>

This quotation shows Brunner's early interest in the dimension of the personal.

Influenced by Kierkegaard, personalism became important in the general cultural crisis of the First World War. The original groundwork for personalism was laid by a relatively unknown Austrian philosopher, Ferdinand Ebner, who was the first one to publish a work on the subject, Das Wort und die geistigen Realitäten, Pneumatologische Fragmente.<sup>69</sup> In it Ebner claimed that man is addressed by

<sup>66</sup> Emil Brunner, The Theology of Crisis, p. 55. Also consult the discussion of Heidegger's influence on Brunner in Van Til, The New Modernism, pp. 174ff.

<sup>67</sup> Emil Brunner, "Denken und Erleben," Vorträge an der Aarauer Studentenkonferenz 1919 (Basel: Kober, 1919), p. 25.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>69</sup> Ferdinand Ebner, Das Wort und die geistigen Realitäten, Pneumatologische Fragmente (Innsbruck: Brennen Verlag, 1921).

God for whom the former has "addressability" (Ansprechbarkeit).<sup>70</sup> The human personality always consists in the existence of the "I" in relation to the "Thou."<sup>71</sup>

Compare Brunner's words: "In dem Moment, wo ich tatsächlich vom Ruf Gottes nichts mehr hörte, wo das Wissen um Gottes Gesetz in mir ausgetilgt würde, würde ich aufhören ein Mensch zu sein."<sup>72</sup>

Martin Buber, the spiritual leader of Continental German Judaism, came independently to the same conclusions as Ebner had done.<sup>73</sup> In his work, Ich und Du, which was first sketched already in 1916 but appeared in print in 1923 Buber describes the "I-Thou" and the "I-it" relationships. In this work, which Brunner has called "the prophetic little book,"<sup>74</sup> Buber showed where Schleiermacher and Rudolf Otto failed in making the feeling of dependence on God the essence of religion and outlined himself the

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<sup>70</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>72</sup>Emil Brunner, Der Mensch im Widerspruch (Berlin: Furche Verlag, 1937), p. 291.

<sup>73</sup>Paul K. Jewett, "Ebnerian Personalism and Its Influence Upon Brunner's Theology," Westminster Theological Journal, XIV, No. 2 (1952), 117f.

<sup>74</sup>Emil Brunner, The Divine Imperative, translated by Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1947), p. 590.



"I-Thou" relationship between man and his God.<sup>75</sup>

Both Ebner and Buber have influenced Dialectical Theology. "To Brunner," however, "belongs the distinction of having pioneered in working out the implications of this approach for the whole range of theological thinking."<sup>76</sup> Already in "Denken und Erleben" (1919),<sup>77</sup> in Die Mystik und das Wort (1924),<sup>78</sup> and in "Das Grundproblem der Philosophie bei Kant und Kierkegaard" (1928)<sup>79</sup> Brunner exhibits unmistakable signs of personalism but the concept comes to fruition in his Olavus Petri Lectures (1937), The Divine-Human Encounter.<sup>80</sup>

Evangelical Socialism (The Blushardts,  
Hegaz, Kutter)

The early writings of Brunner cannot be understood without some acquaintance with the evangelical socialist movement in Switzerland. The men who sponsored the movement

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<sup>75</sup> Martin Buber, I and Thou, translated by Ronald Gregor Smith (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), p. 3.

<sup>76</sup> Jewett, "Ebnerian Personalism and Its Influence Upon Brunner's Theology," p. 118.

<sup>77</sup> Brunner, "Denken und Erleben," p. 27.

<sup>78</sup> Emil Brunner, Die Mystik und das Wort (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1924), p. 5.

<sup>79</sup> Emil Brunner, "Das Grundproblem der Philosophie bei Kant und Kierkegaard," Zwischen den Zeiten, II, No. 4 (1924), passim.

<sup>80</sup> Brunner, The Divine-Human Encounter, passim.

or were its leaders were also the ones who awakened Brunner's existential concern for Christianity.

The Evangelical Socialist party was organized against the Social Democrats; it "even claimed such opposition as its chief reason for being."<sup>81</sup> It was organized in 1906 but its roots went back to Swabian Pietism, a movement spearheaded by the Blumhardts. Johann Christoph Blumhardt (1805-1880), a Lutheran pastor, came to teach at the Basel Mission School in 1830. Several years later he became pastor at Nöttlingen, South Germany, where he was reputed to have healed a demon possessed girl and other more common ailments by laying on of hands in token of absolution. His preaching attracted attention and large audiences.

At Johann Christoph Blumhardt's death his son, Christoph took over the work at Bad Boll. To this man and to Kierkegaard Brunner attributes "human speaking" the best what the dialectical theologians had in the beginning of the movement.<sup>82</sup>

In 1899 Christoph Blumhardt left the official church and started the bold task of social reconstruction. He believed that both the material and human world was in need of redemption. According to him, God confirmed His

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<sup>81</sup>Hermann Kutter, They Must (Chicago: Co-operative Printing Company, 1908), p. 16.

<sup>82</sup>Brunner, The Divine-Human Encounter, pp. 39f.

revelation by continually revealing Himself in an ever new outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Preaching apart from the continuous outpouring of the Holy Spirit seemed meaningless and lifeless to him.<sup>83</sup>

Evangelical socialism touched Brunner personally through Leonard Ragaz and Hermann Kutter.

Ragaz was the Professor of Systematic Theology at the University of Zürich (1908-1921) and a leader of Swiss Evangelical Socialism. His debt to the Blumhardts is clearly expressed in Der Kampf um Reich Gottes im Blumhardt, Vater und Sohn.<sup>84</sup> Ragaz was generally loved by the working class but bitterly opposed and even feared by the conservatives of the established Church. Brunner thought so highly of Ragaz that the dedication of his first book, Das Symbolische in der religiösen Erkenntnis reads: "Herrn Professor L. Ragaz in Zürich, dem Lehrer und Führer in dankbaren Verehrung zugeeignet."<sup>85</sup>

Hermann Kutter, Brunner's pastor in Zürich, left an indelible mark on the latter's personality and thinking. Since 1898 Kutter was pastor of New Münster in Zürich.

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<sup>83</sup>Moody, "The Problem of Revelation and Reason in the Writings of Emil Brunner," p. 55.

<sup>84</sup>Leonard Ragaz, Der Kampf um Reich Gottes im Blumhardt, Vater und Sohn (Erlenbach-Zürich: Rotapfel Verlag, 1922).

<sup>85</sup>Brunner, Das Symbolische in der religiösen Erkenntnis, p. iii.

There he enjoyed the support of the proletariat. In his manifesto Sie Müssen (1904) he proclaimed the official Christendom to be in direct opposition to Biblical Christianity. His opinion was that the Church practices atheism because it has exchanged for God an idea of Him. He spoke of "the suffering masses,"<sup>86</sup> of a communistic life "in endless reality, where all problems and temptations are easily met and solved; where all false pride and all anxiety for the needs of this life fall away,"<sup>87</sup> and of "the conviction that sin is a factor with which progress need not reckon at all."<sup>88</sup> Kutter was so violently opposed to systems that he was even against the Protestant system. He believed that all systems shut God out.<sup>89</sup>

In the Preface to the first edition of Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube Brunner writes: "Ich hätte dies Buch nie schreiben können ohne den langjährigen persönlichen Einfluss des prophetischen Mannes, dem es gewidmet ist."<sup>90</sup> The book is dedicated to Hermann Kutter.

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<sup>86</sup>Kutter, op. cit., p. 17.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., p. 137.

<sup>89</sup>Moody, "The Problem of Relation and Reason in the Writings of Emil Brunner," p. 57.

<sup>90</sup>Brunner, Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube, p. iv.

## Bergsonian Irrationalism

A student of Brunner's early theology is impressed by the influence that Henri Bergson has exercised on the Swiss theologian. Bergson was the leading French philosopher of the twentieth century to whom, among others, William James and Whitehead owed a debt.<sup>91</sup>

Here no attention can be given to Bergson's dualism of life and matter, his artistic conception of creative evolution,<sup>92</sup> the theory of memory,<sup>93</sup> the doctrine of space and time,<sup>94</sup> or even his concept of instinct as intuition.<sup>95</sup>

Bergson made his primary impact on the young Brunner by his attack on intellectualism. Brunner remarked in Das Symbolische in der religiösen Erkenntnis,

Den hauptvorstoß aber gegen den Intellektualismus machte, mit einer Wucht, deren Tagweite wir gegenwärtig wohl noch kaum genügend zu würdigen vermögen, die Philosophie Henri Bergsons.<sup>96</sup>

Comparing concept and symbol Brunner said: "Begriff sowohl wie Symbol sind uneigentliche Ausdrücke; und 'eigentlich'

<sup>91</sup>Russell, op. cit., p. 791.

<sup>92</sup>Henri Bergson, Creative Evolution, translated by Arthur Mitchell (London: Macmillan and Co., 1911).

<sup>93</sup>Russell, op. cit., pp. 796f.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid., pp. 800ff.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid., pp. 793f.

<sup>96</sup>Brunner, Das Symbolische in der religiösen Erkenntnis, p. 129.

ist allein das unausdrückbare und ursprüngliche Erlebnis, die Intuition."<sup>97</sup> Both, naturalistic empiricism and idealistic nationalism are, according to Brunner, conquered by intuition.<sup>98</sup>

Brunner, however, is not an uncritical student of Bergson. Far from willing to sacrifice reason to the extent Bergson does, Brunner remarks that possibly Bergson's judgment of reason would not have been so one-sided had he thought in the German language.<sup>99</sup> Yet Brunner's word: "Die intuitive Philosophie Bergsons weist uns ans Leben,"<sup>100</sup> must also stand.

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p. 131.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., p. 129.

<sup>99</sup> Brunner, Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube, p. 69.

<sup>100</sup> Brunner, Das Symbolische in der religiösen Erkenntnis, p. 130.

## CHAPTER V

### THEOLOGICAL INFLUENCES ON BRUNNER

Of necessity the consideration of the theological influences on Brunner have to be limited to a few outstanding theologians and theological schools of thought. A brief consideration of the special influences of Pauline and Johannine theology; the Christian Church Fathers, the theology of Luther and Calvin, Schleiermacher's romantic mysticism, Ritschl's scientific methodology and the Dialectical Theology of the twentieth century as seen in the work of Karl Barth, Friedrich Gogarten, Eduard Thurneysen, Rudolf Bultmann, and Karl Heim will be presented below. Comparatively speaking, more space will be allowed for the discussion of Schleiermacher and the dialectical theologians than other theological factors of influence, because the writer believes that their influence on Brunner's theology demands it.

#### Pauline and Johannine Influence

The dialectical theologians in general and Brunner in particular are happy to be known as the theologians of the Word of God. Brunner does not consider all statements found in the Scriptures to be of equal importance and value to the man of the twentieth century. He regards the message of the Cross as the central point of the kerygma.

Particularly the theology of Paul and the Gospel message of John have influenced Brunner's thinking. In Offenbarung und Vernunft Brunner comments,

Es ist vor allem das Johannesevangelium da, auf Grund der Verkündigung des Apostels Paulus, diesen impliziten Sinn des Christusbekenntnisses explicit macht, das vollen Ernst macht mit dem Satz: Er selbst ist die Offenbarung. In seiner Liebe begegnen wir nicht bloss der Liebe eines Menschen, sondern der Liebe Gottes.<sup>1</sup>

Brunner sees in Paul's theology the classic statement of general revelation, whereas the Gospel of John supplies the most explicit statement of special revelation. This distinction is not to be considered as a contradiction but rather "a balance between two poles of thought."<sup>2</sup> Both Paul's and John's writings are very frequently called upon to support Brunner's argumentation in his outstanding work, The Mediator.<sup>3</sup> In another early work, Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube, Brunner takes great pains to insist upon "die reine Sachlichkeit des Glaubens" which he sees mirrored in both Paul's and Luther's teaching of justification

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<sup>1</sup> Emil Brunner, Offenbarung und Vernunft (Zürich: Zwingli-Verlag, 1941), p. 111.

<sup>2</sup> Dale Moody, "The Problem of Revelation and Reason in the Writings of Emil Brunner," (Unpublished Doctor's thesis, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky., 1941), pp. 22f.

<sup>3</sup> Emil Brunner, The Mediator, translated by Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1947), pp. 174, 323, 437 et. al.



by faith alone.<sup>4</sup> In a later work Brunner expresses his appreciation for the theology of Paul in no uncertain terms:

we must agree with Luther in this: that the Letter to the Romans is fateful in the story of the Christian Church. Throughout the centuries of Christian history, the fate of the Church of Christ has time and again depended on the understanding and evaluation of the Letter to the Romans. Why is this? Because in this single literary document what is particular and decisive in the Christian Faith is worked out in the scutest form and presented in a concentrated, instructive manner.<sup>5</sup>

Brunner's high estimate of Johannine theology is clearly expressed in The Mediator. Concerning the words "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God . . . and the Word was made flesh . . . and we beheld His glory," Brunner comments, "It would be true to say that this description covers the whole content of faith, the Divine Revelation as a whole."<sup>6</sup>

#### The Church Fathers in Brunner's Writings

Brunner does have his enemies against whom he is vehemently opposed. They are the Roman Catholic Church,

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<sup>4</sup> Emil Brunner, Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1921), p. 94.

<sup>5</sup> Emil Brunner, The Letter to the Romans: A Commentary, translated by H. A. Kennedy (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1959), p. 9.

<sup>6</sup> Brunner, The Mediator, p. 205.

Protestant Orthodoxy, Subjectivism and Modernism.<sup>7</sup> For the theology of the historic Church he has great admiration. Particularly the theology of Irenaeus of Lyon and Athanasius of Alexandria stand high in his regard. A triad might be completed by adding the name of Augustine.

It is indeed high praise when Brunner says,

Irenaeus may be described as the first great theologian of the Early Church; indeed, he has a greater right than any other to the title of the founder of the theology of the Church. All the others build on the foundation which he has laid. Further, in spite of the fact that his extant writings are few in number, he may be described as the most fertile and creative of the early theologians, for in his writings he gathers up the whole wealth of the New Testament witness to Christ, Johannine as well as Pauline, the specifically New Testament elements as well as those which are drawn from the Bible as a whole, combining them into a unity, in a way which was possibly never equalled until the time of Luther.<sup>8</sup>

Keeping the high praise in mind that is accorded to Irenaeus, note is taken of Brunner's remarks concerning Athanasius.

The fundamental structure of thought, the meaning of the Logos, of the Incarnation, and its necessary union with the doctrine of the Cross, the meaning of the knowledge of the faith and of the Church is exactly the same in all essential points in an Athanasius as it is in an Irenaeus.<sup>9</sup>

Athanasius is also given special credit of his own:

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<sup>7</sup>Moody, op. cit., p. 20.

<sup>8</sup>Brunner, The Mediator, p. 249.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 263.

The Logos doctrine of Athanasius is the finest of all in its systematic, and at the same time non-speculative existential character. Athanasius above all has clearly worked out the idea that man, created in the Word of God, has in it his life-principle--granted by grace--and since he has fallen away from the Word can only be restored by the Word coming to him again.<sup>10</sup>

Brunner's early works do not reflect his real appreciation for the theology of Augustine, although definite hints are there.<sup>11</sup> Quoting Augustine's well known phrase Cor nostrum inquietum donec requiescat in Te, Domine, Brunner declares it "the only key to the right understanding of man."<sup>12</sup> It may be of interest to note that he considers Augustine's Confessions, where his mystical character is evident, superior to The City of God.<sup>13</sup>

Brunner brings together four of the theologians for whom he has deep admiration when he remarks: "Irenaeus and Athanasius speak of the Logos as Augustine and Luther were to do later: the Logos is the Eternal personal Revealer."<sup>14</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 229.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., pp. 213, 222, 252.

<sup>12</sup> Emil Brunner, Revelation and Reason, translated by Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1944), p. 74.

<sup>13</sup> Brunner, Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube, p. 13.

<sup>14</sup> Brunner, The Mediator, p. 213.

The Influence of the Reformers, Luther and Calvin

The Roman Catholic scholar Lorenz Volken is critical of Brunner but correct when he says,

Die echte Tradition ist für Brunner die Reformation. Und seine Auffassung vom Glauben soll nicht nur das biblische, sondern auch das "reformatorische Glaubensverständnis" sein. . . . "Reformatorisch" wird hier von Brunner fast ausschliesslich auf Luther bezogen.<sup>15</sup>

Indeed Brunner is deeply impressed by the Reformation movement. He calls it a "vulkanischer Ausbruch aus vergorgener Tiefe, Erschütterung, die alles geschichtliche Leben zum Erzittern bringt."<sup>16</sup> Of the reformers Brunner seems to be most impressed by Luther. He admires Luther's courage to stand alone against the great powers of his time. This courage Brunner attributes to "eine grosse, heilige Wahrheit" which had taken hold of the Reformer and made the conflict imperative.<sup>17</sup> Brunner gives credit to Luther for rediscovering the Gospel.

So fand er, wie Livingstone in der Mitte des dunklen Kontinents die Nilquellen, die verschütteten und durch eine tausendjährige kirchliche Tradition verdeckten Quellen der christlichen Botschaft, das ursprüngliche Evangelium von Gottes rettender

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<sup>15</sup> Lorenz Volken, Der Glaube bei Emil Brunner (Freiburg, Schweiz: Paulusverlag, 1947), p. 163.

<sup>16</sup> Emil Brunner, Reformation und Romantik (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1925), p. 6.

<sup>17</sup> Emil Brunner, "Wie wir Schweizer heute Martin Luther sehen," Reformierte Schweiz, III, No. 4 (1946), 130.

Offenbarung in Jesus Christus.<sup>18</sup>

Led by the Spirit of God Luther went back to God's own Word. His motto was, "Das Wort allein tut's."<sup>19</sup>

According to Brunner, the key to Luther's theology is Luther's dialectical approach to God, the distinction between the angry God and the gracious God.<sup>20</sup> Luther's emphasis on Law and Gospel is termed by Brunner a dialectical approach, a paradox.<sup>21</sup> Also in the doctrine of faith and its relationship to the Word of God, Brunner frequently relies on Luther's expressions.<sup>22</sup> He is particularly happy with the latter's statements that Scripture is the cradle in which Christ lies and "si adversarii scripturam urgerint contra Christum, urgemus Christum contra scripturam."<sup>23</sup> Brunner believes that Luther supports him in distinguishing between general and special revelation, in the relationship between revelation and the distorted

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 131.

<sup>20</sup> Emil Brunner, "Der Zorn Gottes und die Versöhnung durch Christus," Zwischen den Zeiten, V, No. 2 (1927), 97.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 102.

<sup>22</sup> Emil Brunner, Die Mystik und das Wort (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1924), pp. 95f.

<sup>23</sup> Emil Brunner, The Philosophy of Religion from the Standpoint of Protestant Theology, translated by A. J. D. Farrer and Bertram Lee Woolf (London: James Clarke & Co., LTD., 1937), p. 34. Hereafter referred to as The Philosophy of Religion.

reason of sinful man, and in the relationship of the incarnate Logos and the Bible.<sup>24</sup>

There is also criticism of Luther in Brunner's writings, but never really destructive criticism. He calls the Reformer "ein Mensch mit grossen Fehlern und Schwachheiten,"<sup>25</sup> he says that "Luthers Reformation hat ungeheuer viel wertvolles zerstört, das fangen wir erst heute an so recht zu verstehen"; but he adds at once, "Aber wer von uns möchte ihn aus der Geschichte fortwünschen?"<sup>26</sup> It is to praise Luther that he says,

Luther war viel radikaler als die Stürmer in Wittenberg, darum, weil er so viel innerlicher war als sie und nicht Halbes mochte.<sup>27</sup>

His fight was a struggle for eternal life.<sup>28</sup> Brunner is proud to borrow Luther's words, "Verbum est principium primum," as his motto for Die Mystik und das Wort.<sup>29</sup>

It may be surprising but true that Calvin (1509-1564) comes out second best in Brunner's writings. The Swiss theologian is impressed by Calvin's systematic treatment

<sup>24</sup>Moody, op. cit., pp. 33-37.

<sup>25</sup>Brunner, "Wie wir Schweizer heute Martin Luther sehen," p. 131.

<sup>26</sup>Emil Brunner, "Das Unbedingte und die Wirklichkeit, unser Problem," Neue Wege, XI, No. 7 (1917), 340.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 341.

<sup>28</sup>Brunner, Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube, p. 58.

<sup>29</sup>Brunner, Die Mystik und das Wort, p. 1.

of Reformation theology. He follows Calvin's distinction between the natural and the Christian knowledge of God.<sup>30</sup> He accepts the traditional Reformed separation of the two natures in Christ,<sup>31</sup> and commends Calvin for the formulation of the relative necessity of Atonement in Christ.<sup>32</sup> On the other hand, often when both Luther and Calvin agree on a concept, Calvin's statement has to take second place to that of the German Reformer.<sup>33</sup> It is true that Calvin's theology has made a stronger impact on Die Mystik und das Wort and Revelation and Reason than it has made on the Christological formulations in The Mediator.

#### Schleiermacher the Mystic

Karl Barth speaks of Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) in terms of a theological "hero."

Anyone who has never noticed anything of the splendor this figure radiated and still does--I am almost tempted to say, who has never succumbed to it--may honourably pass on to other and possibly better ways, but let him never raise so much as a finger against Schleiermacher.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Brunner, The Mediator, p. 33.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 343.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 472.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., pp. 256, 403, 473.

<sup>34</sup> Karl Barth, Protestant Thought: From Rousseau to Ritschl (New York: Harper Brothers, 1959), p. 308.

Brunner has noticed the importance of Schleiermacher's work.

Er [Schleiermacher] ist nicht etwa der grösste Vertreter der modernen Religion, noch weniger ihr Schöpfer. Aber er ist der bedeutendste von denen, die es fertig brachten, den Inhalt des christlichen Glaubens in Mystik umzuprägen und aufzuarbeiten, und er ist sicher einer der grössten Faktoren dieses geistigen Processes. . . . Er, der einzige wirklich grosse Theologe des Jahrhunderts, ist gleichsam der Wurzelstock, von dem, wie Absenker, unterirdisch mit ihm verbunden, die "christliche Mystik" der modernen Theologie herkommt. . . .<sup>35</sup>

And Brunner has also "raised a finger" or rather "a fist," not against the brilliant mind and personality of Schleiermacher, but against his theology.<sup>36</sup>

Was Brunner influenced by Schleiermacher? The negative influence is unmistakably clear in almost all Brunner's early work. There might also be some implicit positive influence which eludes easy formulation. At least Karl Barth seems to imply that Brunner is not entirely free from such influence when he says,

it is truly a sign of the extraordinary extent of his [Schleiermacher's] influence that E. Brunner, in 1924, was the first man writing against Schleiermacher whose premises were really different, really free of him (even if they were perhaps only relatively free of him!) Until then every attack had shown such a close similarity of content with his own writings that an effective antithesis had been impossible.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Brunner, Die Mystik und das Wort, p. 6.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>37</sup> Barth, Protestant Thought: From Rousseau to Ritschl, p. 307.



Barth adds, "Nobody can say today whether we have really overcome his influence, or, whether we are still at heart children of his age, for all the protests against him.

. . . "38

Brunner in his principal work against Schleiermacher's theology of mystical self-consciousness, Die Mystik und das Wort, attacks the fundamental principle of the latter's theology.

Schleiermachers ganzes Denken (und das all seiner theologischen Nachfahrern) ist bestimmt durch das Wort: Und. Das Geistige, das zugleich das Natürliche; das Gottesreich, das zugleich die Geschichte ist, -- Gott und die Humanität, so lautet sein Program.<sup>39</sup>

What Brunner wants to know is, "Hat denn neben Gott ein Und Platz?"<sup>40</sup> His answer is an emphatic no. It is either Christian faith or modern theology of the Schleiermacher variety.<sup>41</sup> The two are mutually exclusive. Brunner sees no room for compromise with Schleiermacher. The axiom is: "Entweder die Mystik oder das Wort."<sup>42</sup>

Brunner's work of the Critical Period may give an impression that he has not interpreted Schleiermacher in the historical context and therefore has failed to appreciate

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Brunner, Die Mystik und das Wort, p. 390.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 391.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

the latter's work. This observation is both correct and false. It is correct in so far as Brunner was not primarily concerned with the forces of romantic idealism that prepared the way for Schleiermacher's Die Reden or the profound Moravian piety that led Schleiermacher to express his faith in terms of pious self-consciousness. As an historian, Brunner, no doubt, would praise Schleiermacher's efforts to communicate the depth of life to a generation that had ceased to "worship the Deity in sacred retirement" but worshipped "the sage maxims of our wise men, and the splendid compositions of our poets."<sup>43</sup> But as a Christian theologian, he recognized the inadequacy of Schleiermacher's expressions on religion and stood up to rescue Christianity from mysticism. Whether Brunner has always been fair to Schleiermacher or has in every instance interpreted him correctly need not be considered here. Let it suffice to say that a great part of Brunner's early writings reflect a reaction against Schleiermacher's Gefühlstheologie. Schleiermacher is held responsible for converting Theo-Logie into Religions-Psychologie.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>Friedrich Schleiermacher, On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers, translated by John Oman (Harper Torchbooks; New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958), p. 1.

<sup>44</sup>Emil Brunner, Die Grenzen der Humanität (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1922), pp. 17f.

The Rationalistic Theology of Ritschl and Harnack

Ritschl's and Harnack's interpretation of Protestant Christianity influenced Brunner to a greater extent negatively than positively.

In The Mediator Brunner offers his evaluation of Ritschlian theology.

The Ritschlian theology is a Rationalistic system clad in scriptural garments; indeed, it is a system which does all honour to the systematic abilities of its builder, for it is an almost perfectly unified Rationalistic building of simple designs.<sup>45</sup>

Brunner recognizes the fact that Ritschl's intentions were good. He wanted to break away from "the idealistic speculative idea of universal religion" and find his way back to "the scriptural doctrine of a revealed religion."<sup>46</sup> To judge Ritschl's theology from the historical point of view alone would call for words of sincere appreciation. However, if "his actual completed theological system" be measured in terms of Biblical revelation, the words of criticism must stand.<sup>47</sup> Brunner registers surprise that Ritschl, whose Rechtfertigung und Versöhnung he considers "the second milestone in the theological history of the last century," did not perceive that his own theology was built on a general conception of religion very similar to

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<sup>45</sup>Brunner, The Mediator, p. 57.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 57.

that of Schleiermacher, even though his work "condemned Schleiermacher's dependence on the idea of a universal religion."<sup>48</sup>

In another place Brunner characterizes Ritschl's theology as "an ethical rationalism, a one-sided rational idea of God" where "a conception of revelation and salvation has replaced the Christian faith in revelation as an improved form of Christian thought."<sup>49</sup>

Harnack as a disciple of Ritschl is guilty of much of the same faults. Brunner often refers to their theological opinions as those of the Ritschl-Harnack school<sup>50</sup> or the "Ritschl-Harnack point of view."<sup>51</sup>

Brunner is ready to admit that one can and in fact does learn from Ritschl, because in his theology the Reformation principles occupy the central position. "Es wäre ungerecht, Ritschls und seiner Schule Verdienste um das Verständnis der Reformation zu leugnen," says Brunner.<sup>52</sup> Since Ritschl and his followers had too much respect for the objectivity of faith and the sovereignty of God, they

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 253.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., p. 175.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 173.

<sup>52</sup>Brunner, "Der Zorn Gottes und die Versöhnung durch Christus," p. 96.

did not usually fall into crass Psychologismus. The value judgments of faith, however, placed the Ritschlian school somewhere between anthropology and theology.<sup>53</sup>

This writer believes that some of the rationalistic tendencies in Brunner's theology, especially in the realm of higher criticism, may well find their roots in the Ritschlian school of thought.

#### The Dialectical Theologians

Dialectical Theology, the school to which Brunner belongs, asserts that "only by means of the contradiction between two ideas, God and Man, grace and responsibility, holiness and love," can man apprehend "the contradictory truth that the eternal God enters time or that sinful man is declared just."<sup>54</sup>

Brunner himself describes the beginnings of the Dialectical Theology of the twentieth century as follows:

As regards the great change in Continental theology, it is not entirely correct to associate it only with the line of thought to which Karl Barth's name is attached. This revolution had been quietly preparing for a long time. In the first years of the century, Karl Holl in his Luther researches and the Luther-inspired Swedish theological school (Billing, Aulén) had already broken with the rationalistic, idealistic and historical thinking of the nineteenth century. It was some time later that the group of

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<sup>53</sup> Brunner, Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube, pp. 38f.

<sup>54</sup> Emil Brunner, The Word and the World (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1931), p. 6.

theologians stepped forward whose point of meeting was the journal Zwischen den Zeiten (Between the Times) and whose uncontested leader was Karl Barth.<sup>55</sup>

The general change in Continental theology took place shortly after the First World War. It is generally agreed that the new movement was launched by Karl Barth's frontal attack on contemporary Protestant theology.<sup>56</sup> Barth's Römerbrief (August, 1918) "fell like a bomb on the playground of the theologians," to quote Dr. Karl Adam.<sup>57</sup>

This attack "was supported by a series of writings by those who shared Barth's views, among whom were Eduard Thurneysen, Friedrich Gogarten and I," says Brunner.<sup>58</sup>

Why did Barth's theology have such a profound effect? The liberal theology had apparently failed the people. Barth proclaimed that man's relationship to God must be dialectical rather than systematic. He said,

If I have a system it is this that I keep in mind as strongly as possible what Kierkegaard called the infinitive qualitative difference between time and eternity.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Emil Brunner, "Toward a Missionary Theology," Christian Century, LXIV (1949), 816.

<sup>56</sup> Volken, op. cit., p. 3.

<sup>57</sup> Quoted by John McConnadie, The Significance of Karl Barth (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1931), p. 43.

<sup>58</sup> Brunner, "Toward a Missionary Theology," p. 816.

<sup>59</sup> Karl Barth, The Epistle to the Romans, translated by Edwin C. Hoskyns (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 10.

Barth saw the content of the Scriptures revealing the right divine thoughts to men, not the right human thoughts about God.

The Bible tells us not how we should talk with God but what he says to us; not how we find the way to him, but how he has sought and found the way to us; not the right relation in which we must place ourselves to him, but the covenant which he has made with all who are Abraham's spiritual children and which he has sealed once and for all in Jesus Christ. It is this which is within the Bible. The word of God is within the Bible.<sup>60</sup>

Brunner has always been generous in giving credit to Barth's influence on his thinking. In 1921 he wrote:

Ich möchte . . . nicht versäumen, meine grosse Dankesschuld für die beeuchtende Gedankenarbeit Karl Barths anzuerkennen. Er ist der erste, der die prophetischen Geschichte Kutters in strengen Zusammenhang brachte und selbständig des Meisters Gedanken--in gemeinsamer Arbeit mit Eduard Thurneysen--weiterführte, während wir anderen noch mit ihrem Verständnis ringen mussten. Er hat aber auch über Kutter hinausgehend, besonders die Objektivität des Glaubens in einer Weise herausgearbeitet, die für die weitere Entwicklung der Theologie entscheidend sein dürfte.<sup>61</sup>

Similar thoughts appeared already in 1919 from Brunner's pen when he had the occasion to review Der Römerbrief which he called "ein erstaunlich objectives . . . Buch."<sup>62</sup>

<sup>60</sup> Karl Barth, The Word of God and the Word of Man, translated by Douglas Horton (Harper Torchbooks; New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957), p. 43.

<sup>61</sup> Brunner, Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube, p. 56.

<sup>62</sup> Emil Brunner, "Der Römerbrief von Karl Barth," Kirchenblatt für die reformierte Schweiz, XXXIV, No. 8 (1919).

It has been said that "Brunner has framed the greatest portion of his theology from the influence of Barth. . . ." <sup>63</sup> This statement may stand if it is interpreted in the light of Brunner's own words:

I never was a pupil of Barth's, though from the very beginning I gratefully learned from him. But like Eduard Thurneysen and Barth himself I responded to the influence of Christoph Blumhardt, Hermann Kutter and Leonard Ragaz, as well as to that of Kierkegaard, so that I took a theological line which more or less paralleled Barth's. <sup>64</sup>

By this statement Brunner in no way meant to minimize Barth's "outstanding merit as pioneer of the new movement." <sup>65</sup>

Already some other names have been mentioned as pioneers in developing the Dialectical Theology or as sympathizers with that theology. A close associate of Karl Barth was Eduard Thurneysen, a pastor at Bruggen, Switzerland. His study of Dostoevski's work in the light of Christian Revelation deserves mention, <sup>66</sup> as does his close collaboration with Barth in the capacity of coeditor, and later, editor, of Theologische Existenz Heute, a

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<sup>63</sup> Ralph Oscar Hjelm, "The Doctrine of the Word of God in the Thought of Emil Brunner and Gustaf Aulén," (Unpublished Master's Thesis, Union Theological Seminary, New York City, 1943), p. 2.

<sup>64</sup> Brunner, "Toward a Missionary Theology," p. 816.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Eduard Thurneysen, Dostojewski (München: Chr. Kaiser, 1930).



mouthpiece of the new theology. Brunner expresses his appreciation and shows his acquaintance with Thurneysen's work in Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube.<sup>67</sup>

From the beginning, Friedrich Gogarten in Germany shared the theological views of the Crisis theologians. It was through Gogarten that Brunner came to know and understand Ebner's and Buber's personalism.<sup>68</sup> Gogarten was a North German pastor at Dorndorf an der Saale before he became Privatdozent at Jena (1927). Later he taught at Breslau and Göttingen as Professor of Systematic Theology. His writings, and he has a number of them, had a lasting influence on the young Brunner. In the Preface to the first edition of Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube Brunner singled out two works of significance--Barth's Römerbrief and Gogarten's Religiöse Entscheidung.<sup>69</sup> In Von Glauben und Offenbarung Gogarten shows besides his dialectical view of God a real concern for relating faith to history.<sup>70</sup> Brunner was influenced also by Gogarten's concern for man in his social environment.

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<sup>67</sup> Brunner, Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube, p. 56.

<sup>68</sup> Emil Brunner, The Divine Imperative, translated by Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1947), p. 636.

<sup>69</sup> Brunner, Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube, p. iv.

<sup>70</sup> Friedrich Gogarten, Von Glauben und Offenbarung (Jena: Eugen Dietrichs, 1923), p. 83.

Lorenz Volken puts it thus:

Aber als nun Gogarten begann, den Menschen in seiner sozialen und konkreten Wirklichkeit auch vom Glauben aus besser zu bewerten und Lebensproblemen näher ins Auge zu fassen, da schlug Brunner auch eine ähnliche Richtung ein, etwas vergorren schon von 1925 an, ziemlich offen seit. . . .<sup>71</sup>

Rudolf Bultmann, the famous New Testament scholar from Marburg, also became friendly towards the Crisis theologians. He influenced Brunner mostly through his writings, particularly Die Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition (1921). The influence is obvious in The Mediator<sup>72</sup> as well as The Theology of Crisis. In the last mentioned work Brunner has this to say:

I myself am an adherent of a rather radical school of Biblical criticism, which, for example does not accept the Gospel of John as an historical source and which finds legends in many parts of the synoptic Gospels.<sup>73</sup>

Finally the name of Karl Heim of Tübingen fame, a popular preacher and teacher who sought to relate revelation to the intellectuals, deserves to be mentioned. Heim and Brunner shared many theological concerns but it is not easy to establish just what one theologian owed to the other. It is, however, very likely that Heim's influential

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<sup>71</sup>Volken, op. cit., p. 10.

<sup>72</sup>Brunner, The Mediator, pp. 157, 177, 187, 190, 196, 372, 386, 423.

<sup>73</sup>Brunner, The Theology of Crisis (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929), p. 41.

books stimulated Brunner's thought.

As has been pointed out above, Brunner's theological development owes something to Pauline and Johannine writings; to the Church Fathers, Irenaeus, Athanasius and Augustine; to the Reformation theology; to the mysticism of Schleiermacher; to the historicocritical school of Ritschl-Harnack as well as to Brunner's own friends of the Dialectical School. Without minimizing the importance of these influences, it must be made clear that much of Brunner's thinking was carried on independently.

The previous chapters of this study, offering an analysis of Brunner's physical environment, biographical data, the philosophical and theological influences, have prepared the way for a review of his writings of the Critical Period.

## CHAPTER VI

### BRUNNER'S WRITINGS OF THE CRITICAL PERIOD

During the span of fifteen years (1914-1928) which has been labeled as Brunner's Critical Period, he published twelve works of various length. These works are, in order of publication, Das Symbolische in der religiösen Erkenntnis (1914), Denken und Erleben (1919), Die denkwürdige Geschichte der Mayflower-Pilgerväter (1920), Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube (1921), Die Grenzen der Humanität (1922), Die Mystik und das Wort (1924), Reformation und Romantik (1925), Philosophie und Offenbarung (1925), Die Absolutheit Jesu (1926), Christlicher Glaube nach reformierter Lehre (1926), Religionsphilosophie evangelischer Theologie (1927), and Der Mittler (1927). Since Brunner's Swander Lectures were delivered in 1928 and since they fittingly summarize his theological development during the Critical Period, they will also be discussed below, even though they appeared in print a year later as The Theology of Crisis (1929). Of the above mentioned works Das Symbolische in der religiösen Erkenntnis; Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube; Die Mystik und das Wort; Religionsphilosophie evangelischer Theologie; Der Mittler and The Theology of Crisis are outstanding and deserve particular attention. A brief characterization of each book will be offered below.

An attempt is made to show the progressive development of Brunner's theology, starting with his somewhat uncertain doctoral dissertation and leading up to more mature works such as The Philosophy of Religion from the Standpoint of Theology,<sup>1</sup> The Mediator and The Theology of Crisis.

Before embarking on the examination of individual works, cognizance is taken of the fact that there is an amazing continuity of thought running through all of Brunner's writings. There is no dismetrical difference between his early work and that of the later period.<sup>2</sup> It is true that,

Brunner began fast so einseitig wie Barth, aber durchweg "deutlicher" als er, die absolute Distanz zwischen Gott und dem Menschen zu vertreten; nur steht bei ihm die Auseinandersetzung mit dem Vernunftdenken und den theologischen Strömungen der Zeit im Vordergrund.<sup>3</sup>

The hallmark of his early work is criticism directed toward rationalism on the one hand and the theology of feeling on the other. On the basis of this critical trend the label "Critical Period" was formulated. This, however, does not imply that no constructive theology came forth

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<sup>1</sup> Hereafter this work will be referred to as The Philosophy of Religion.

<sup>2</sup> Cornelius Van Til, The New Modernism (Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1947), p. 209.

<sup>3</sup> Lorenz Volken, Der Glaube bei Emil Brunner (Freiburg, Schweiz: Paulusverlag, 1947), p. 9.

from Brunner's pen. One landmark in the progress of his work was Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube, definitely establishing him as a dialectical theologian. Possibly the other highlight of his early career was the publication of The Mediator.

Das Symbolische in der religiösen Erkenntnis (1914)

Brunner's first work, his doctoral dissertation, showed the direction his future thought would take. The title reflected two major concerns of the author. Firstly, Brunner was interested in religious knowledge. This theme became the core around which most of his later works were oriented. The subject received possibly the most comprehensive treatment in Offenbarung und Vernunft (1941) but it was certainly already developed to some extent in Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube (1921) and Die Mystik und das Wort (1924). For Brunner the key question was from the very beginning: How does man know about God? Once the mode of knowledge was established then it was valid to inquire into the content of the knowledge. Secondly, symbolism was chosen because its treatment would expose the inadequacy of intellectualism.<sup>4</sup> Practically all the subsequent works of the Critical Period had something to say

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<sup>4</sup> Emil Brunner, Das Symbolische in der religiösen Erkenntnis (Tubingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1914), p. v.

about it. This topic was more fully developed in Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube (1921) and The Philosophy of Religion (1927).

The distinct contribution of Das Symbolische in der religiösen Erkenntnis is its preoccupation with symbolism as a source of religious knowledge. Brunner describes the symbol as "ein Schlüssel für die Erkenntnis der religiösen Vorstellungsbildung."<sup>5</sup> He believes that this area needs concentrated study because of its promise for the future. "Grade auf diesem Gebiet das Fragen, das Auffinden und kräftige Anpecken neuer Probleme die Wertvollste Arbeit ist."<sup>6</sup>

The method of Brunner's work is scholarly. He is not interested in knocking down the opposing views with stereotyped expressions.<sup>7</sup> Both Kant's and Schleiermacher's approaches to religious knowledge are considered and their weaknesses exposed.<sup>8</sup> A simple synthesis of the two is rejected.

Eine Synthese von Kant un Schleiermacher die schon lange als Ideal roschwebt, kann also nicht in der Weise vorgenommen werden, dass man von Schleiermacher das "Wesen" der Religion und von Kant ihre normative

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. vi.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 126.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., pp. 2ff.

Begründung sich zeigen lässt, so verlockend auch diese Vereinigung wäre.<sup>9</sup>

Brunner believes that an independent theory of religious knowledge must be formulated.<sup>10</sup>

Das "Positive" unserer Methode besteht darin, dass wir uns die Aufgabe stellen, den Prozess der religiösen Vorstellungsbildung und Erkenntnis selbst zu verfolgen, seine Eigenart und seine Wahrheitskriterien kennen zu lernen.<sup>11</sup>

Already in this early work Brunner connects religious knowledge with faith.

Es kann . . . nicht aus der Form des Selbstbewusstseins, der Ichheit, der ganze Inhalt unserer Erkenntnis herausgesponnen werden. Aller Inhalt kommt aus der Erfahrung. Von hier aus ergab sich uns ein neues Verständnis der religiösen Erkenntnis, des Glaubens.<sup>12</sup>

In a clearly formulated paragraph Brunner himself offers the reader some real insight into his concept of the expression of religious knowledge. This writer considers the quote below to be the key to Das Symbolische in der religiösen Erkenntnis.

Das im Glauben, in der religiösen Erkenntnis Erfasste ist etwas mit meinen übrigen Bewusstseinsinhalten schlechterdings Unvergleichbares. Ich aber bin ein Wesen und trachte nach Einheit; auch möchte ich meinen inneren Besitz anderen mitteilen. So muss ich das Un-endliche durch das Endliche ausdrücken. Ich kann dies auf zweierlei Art tun: Entweder durch den Begriff oder durch das Symbol. Der erstere gibt zwar nicht die Sache selbst, sondern bloss deren Relationen an; dafür diese adäquat. Das letztere ist inadäquat,

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 130.



aber es geht als ein Konkretes auf das konkrete Einzelne, so wie es ist. Darum bediene ich mich als Wissenschaftler des Begriffs, weil es mir in der Wissenschaft um das Allgemeine, das System zu tun ist; als religiöser Mensch aber, dem alles auf das Leben, auf das konkrete Einzelne ankommt, des Symbols. In beiden Fällen aber meine ich mit dem Endlichen das Un-Endliche. . . . Begriff sowohl wie Symbol sind uneigentliche Ausdrücke; und "eigentlich" ist allein das unausdrückbare und ursprüngliche Erlebnis, die Intuition.<sup>13</sup>

The two principal symbols in the realm of faith are "die (göttliche) Persönlichkeit und die (geistige) Ueberwelt."<sup>14</sup>

Im einen kommt die Tatsache zum Ausdruck, dass ich das Göttliche als ein mir Wesensverwandtes, ein geistiges Sein, erkenne, an dem ich Anteil habe; das andere sagt aus, dass dieses Göttliche etwas allem Endlichen auch dem endlichen Geist, schlechthin Entgegengesetztes, Transzendentes sei; etwas das auch durch die Gesamtheit alles Endlichen nicht erschöpft wird, ein Umfassendes, Un-endliches. Das eine führt unter dem Druck des Bedürfnisses sinnlicher Anschauung zum Menschenbild, das andere zum Himmelsymbol. Gott ist nicht unerkennbares X, er ist Geist, sittlicher Geist. Das Göttliche ist nicht endlich, auch nicht endlicher Geist, es ist, ein Ueberwelt, himmlisches Sein. Die Versöhnung der beiden gleichberechtigten Tendenzen der religiösen Vorstellungsbildung erfolgt in der Synthese: Gott ist der "himmlische Vater."<sup>15</sup>

In this lengthy but important quotation the genesis of Dialectical Theology is taking root. But Brunner speaks of synthesis, not of paradox. Apparently Kierkegaard has not yet made an impression on the writer. Henri Bergson's

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 131.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 132.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

influence, however, is prominently in evidence.<sup>16</sup> Also Kant, Schleiermacher, Husserl and William James have contributed in no small measure to Brunner's thinking in this work.

Brunner's style is difficult to follow. He avoids the conventional terminology because of its close association with intellectualism. Consequently clarity is sacrificed for meaning, for which the author begs forgiveness.<sup>17</sup>

It is significant that Brunner concludes the work by defining the task of the philosopher in the realm of religion. He asserts that the philosopher cannot know nor can he show "den Weg zum Heiligen."

Eines kann er freilich: die Wege der wahren Religion unterscheiden von einer halbahren oder ganz unahren, aber nicht aus eigenem Wissen vermag er das, sondern weil er bei seinem Lehrmeister gelernt hat, was wahre Religion sei.<sup>18</sup>

Das Symbolische in der religiösen Erkenntnis introduces Brunner as a competent philosopher and promising theologian. It, however, lacks the clarity, power, and conviction of his later works.

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., pp. 20, 87.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 133.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

Denken und Erleben (1919)

In March, 1919 Brunner was one of the principal speakers at the twenty-third Aarauer Studentenkonferenz. His topic was "Denken und Erleben." The essay which soon appeared in print attacked man's reliance on thinking and reason. Also the impersonal elements in modern civilization which grow out of cold scientific analysis of all phenomena were under criticism.

Brunner sees that man must have certainty and knowledge. "Solange der Mensch nicht erkennt, ist er ein Heimatloser, die Welt seine Fremde, er sich selber ein Fremder."<sup>19</sup> But there is such a thing as too much faith in science and intellect.<sup>20</sup> To this writer it seems that Brunner takes an altogether too negative attitude over against the intellectuals.

Es sind die Intellektuellen, welche sich fast überall als die Mrgsten Kriegschetzer und skrupellosesten Verherrlicher der Machtpolitik erwiesen; es sind ihre Kreise, in denen das menschenmörderliche kapitalistische System, die eifrigsten Befürworter fand.<sup>21</sup>

The writer continues in another section,

Es sind die Intellektuellen, die Akademiker, von denen aus die grösste Volksseuchen Alkoholismus und

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<sup>19</sup> Emil Brunner, "Denken und Erleben," Vorträge an der Aarauer Studentenkonferenz 1919 (Basel: Kober, 1919), p. 6.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

Prostitution in die breiten Massen drängen.<sup>22</sup>

Reason is called the eternal Jew, because it wanders on and on without ever reaching a destination. Because it is the eternal septic it promotes the idea of relativity, recognizing no absolutes.<sup>23</sup> Thus faith is lost and together with it the Eternal and the Absolute.<sup>24</sup> "Ein logisch konstruierte Begriffssystem ist so wenig ein Ideal, wie ein mustergültiger Polizeistaat. Der Begriff tötet, das geistige schauen macht lebendig."<sup>25</sup>

Instead of cold reason, Brunner advocates a trust in intuition.<sup>26</sup> He believes that the latter has something personal to say to every man; it touches man's soul. Not all that is commonly classified as thinking strives for materialism and mechanization. "Es gibt ja Geisteswissenschaften, idealische Philosophie, spekulative Theologie: sie alle aber leben nicht von begrifflichen Denken, sondern von der Intuition."<sup>27</sup>

This writer believes that Brunner himself has summarized the work when he says: "Das Leben steht über

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., pp. 25f.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 25.

Denken und darf sich von ihm nicht tyrannisieren lassen."<sup>28</sup> He concludes "Denken und Erleben" with the assertion that knowledge (Erkenntnis) and life (Leben) find a synthesis in the person of Christ.

This somewhat uneven short work betrays a strong Bergsonian influence.<sup>29</sup> As an attack on arrogant scientific reasoning it prepares the way for Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube and The Philosophy of Religion. The fully developed and clear formulations on revelation, faith and the Mediator are not as yet present.

Die denkwürdige Geschichte der  
Mayflower-Pilgerväter (1920)

When Brunner returned to Switzerland after eight months of study at Union Theological Seminary in New York City, he published Die denkwürdige Geschichte der Mayflower-Pilgerväter, a tribute to religious liberty. It has been said that he "found more in the American past to interest him than he found in the present."<sup>30</sup> It is true that Brunner was not overly impressed by American theology but he admired the American way of life and the consciousness

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 9

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., pp. 23, 25, 26.

<sup>30</sup> Dale Moody, "The Problem of Revelation and Reason in the Writings of Emil Brunner," (Unpublished Doctor's Thesis, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky., 1941), p. 67.

of individuality and liberty that prevailed in the New World. He traced the roots of the love for liberty back to the pilgrim days. Besides, he saw there a bridge between Europe and America.

In der kleinen Schweiz, nicht nur im Genf Calvins, sondern ebensosehr im Zürich Zwinglis, Bullinger's und der Täufer, steht die Wiege Amerikas, des geistigen Amerika, dessen an ihm, was wir am höchsten schätzen und das wir lieben.<sup>31</sup>

Brunner's love for freedom and individuality of expression is seen from the following approving comment concerning the American religious situation.

Amerika . . . hält unbeirrt daran fest, dass Mannigfaltigkeit, ja sogar Zersplitterung und Willkür besser sei als Uniformität, die durch Vergewaltigung des Gewissens erzwungen werden muss, dass alle Hilfe, die der Staat der Religion leisten könnte, den Preis Abhängigkeit von ihm nicht wert sei.<sup>32</sup>

The sacrifice of the early colonists for the sake of religious liberty<sup>33</sup> and the farsighted leadership of men like Roger Williams<sup>34</sup> and William Penn<sup>35</sup> made a deep impression on the freedom loving young Brunner.

Die denkwürdige Geschichte der Mayflower-Pilgerväter did not contribute much to the theological growth of Brunner

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<sup>31</sup> Emil Brunner, Die denkwürdige Geschichte der Mayflower-Pilgerväter (Basel: Friedrich Reinhardt, 1920), p. 6.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 76.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 72.

but the book is important in understanding him as a man. The new appreciations and insights that he gained in the New World remained with the Swiss theologian all his life and helped to make him a theological bridge between the two continents.

Brunner did not pretend to be a historian of merit. He has said: "Ich bin kein Historiker und keines Historikers Sohn."<sup>36</sup> This, however, was not meant to imply that he did not make use of the best available source material for the beautiful little volume<sup>37</sup>---a tribute to American friendship and religious liberty of the individual.

Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube (1921)

With the publication of Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube a new era begins in Brunner's theology. The relatively short and very successful work<sup>38</sup> is a skillfully formulated attempt to pull together the critique of experience-theology and intellectualism. It also offers an exposition of the concept of faith in Christian theology. An able critic of Brunner's theology, Lorenz Volken, considers this work to occupy a crucial place in the literary career of the Swiss

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 80.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>The work appeared in five editions within twelve years.

theologian. "Mit dem Buch: Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube (1921) steht er [Brunner] schon grundsätzlich auf dem Boden der 'Dialektiker.' . . ." <sup>39</sup>

Brunner claims that Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube is both a Vorwort and a Nachruf. <sup>40</sup> It is a Vorwort in so far as it is an introduction to a new era of theology; it is a Nachruf in so far as it is a farewell address to the past hundred years of theological thinking. For the first time Brunner is absolutely sure that he stands on the threshold of a new theological era. He believes that he is capable of giving directions for its future development. <sup>41</sup>

The work begins with Brunner's inquiry into the validity of experience and knowledge as answers to man's problem of existence. <sup>42</sup> The past hundred years have stood under the sign of historicism and subjectivism. For that age man was the measure of all things. <sup>43</sup> The romanticists of the nineteenth century believed that "Gott soll nicht

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<sup>39</sup>Volken, op. cit., p. 9.

<sup>40</sup>Emil Brunner, Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1921), p. v.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 1.



mehr gedacht sondern erlebt oder erfahren werden."<sup>44</sup> Also intellectualism in religion, whether it manifests itself in simple trust in logical thinking or scientific data, is not an adequate answer to man's spiritual predicament. Even psychology of religion, popular at the time, fails to teach what religion really is.<sup>45</sup> With conviction Brunner proclaims,

Religion erklären wollen, ohne für die transzendenten Faktoren, die allein Religion erklärlich machen, innerhalb der Kausalreihe Raum zu schaffen, heisst Religion leugnen.<sup>45</sup>

Man must go beyond experience and knowledge. Faith, the true knowledge of God,<sup>47</sup> is the only link between time and eternity. Only by faith can man step outside of time in order to perceive the meaning of history.<sup>48</sup>

Faith is not an experience in the sense of the romantics nor knowledge in the sense of the rationalists.

Glaube ist Bruch, Durchbruch, Rückkehr aus der Fremde des zeitlich-kausalen, psychologisch historischen Geschehens in die Heimat des uranfänglichen, vor und jenseits aller Geschichte und aller Prozesse liegenden Ewigen. Glaube ist Sichfinden im Sichverlieren ein stets zu erneuern des Lebengewinns im "Sterben."<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 88.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 127.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 122.

Faith knows no way but only a bold leap.<sup>50</sup> It does not inquire after the "how" or "how long" but only after "yes" or "no."<sup>51</sup> Brunner does not forget the object of faith.

Glauben ist . . . nicht etwas, aus dem man nachträglich Gott erschliessen kann, sondern umgekehrt, etwas, das ohne die Voraussetzung Gottes gar keinen Sinn hat. Glauben heisst, es mit Gott zu tun haben. Das ist seine Sachlichkeit.<sup>52</sup>

It is true that Brunner terms the Logos the beginning and the end of Biblical revelation,<sup>53</sup> but it is also obvious that he has not yet fully developed and sufficiently emphasized the doctrine of Christology.

The work, however, contains many advances in Brunner's thinking. Personalism has its unmistakable beginnings in it.<sup>54</sup> Dialectical approach to religious thinking,<sup>55</sup> the Kierkegaardian paradox of faith and Urgeschichte are clearly evident in his thought.<sup>56</sup> These concepts are brought to more mature expression in The Divine-Human Encounter, Revelation and Reason and The Philosophy of Religion, to mention just a few of the pertinent titles.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 102.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., p. 91.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 124.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 116.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 124.

In Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube the beginning of a systematic attack on Schleiermacher's experience-theology and on the historicism of Ritschl are discernable. Brunner places himself, or at least the dialectical theologians, into the tradition of the great voices of reformation. Recalling Elijah's battle with Baal worship, Paul's war against Judaism and Luther's firm stand against the Kultusmystik of the Roman Catholic Church, Brunner indicates that his opposition to romantic-pragmatism and the consequent falsification of faith takes its place alongside the theological quests for the true God in the past.<sup>57</sup>

Two years after the appearance of the first edition of Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube a revision of the same work appeared. In the preface to the new edition Brunner correctly pointed out that new emphasis had been placed on the concept of the Word and the distinction of the limits between Immanence and Revelation. The author, however, did not make any significant changes in the work for he relied on his future publications to supplement the emphasis of the earlier work.<sup>58</sup> Therefore, no further treatment of the slightly altered second edition is necessary.

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<sup>57</sup>Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>58</sup>Emil Brunner, Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube (zweite und dritte neubearbeitet Auflage; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1923), p. v.

Die Grenzen der Humanität (1922)

Brunner's Habilitationvorlesung at the University of Zürich, Die Grenzen der Humanität, once again deals with the inadequacy of reason and feeling in the realm of religion. Ever since the three Critiques of Kant, it has been questioned what the proper place of religion is within the limits of humanity. Brunner believes that Kant's answer made religion an appendix of morality, whereas Schleiermacher made it dependent on "das fromme Gefühl."<sup>59</sup> Especially critical of the latter view, Brunner comments, "Eine Religion, die bloss Gefühl, bloss lieblich oder wehmütig das Leben begleitende Musik ist, ist jedenfalls nicht die Frömmigkeit des Jesajas, Paulus und Luther."<sup>60</sup>

Schleiermacher's religious experience-theology was carried to its logical conclusion by Feuerbach when the latter proclaimed: "Der Mensch schuf Götter nach seinem Bilde." As far as Brunner is concerned, immanence theology is a self-contradiction.<sup>61</sup> According to him, "Evangelischer und reformatorischer Glaube aber ist nicht am Erlebnis, nicht am Menschen, sondern an Gott orientiert."<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup>Emil Brunner, Die Grenzen der Humanität (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1922), p. 5.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., p. 7.

The thorough crumbling of the cultural foundations during the First World War and the years immediately following the catastrophe<sup>63</sup> projected on humanity the clear image of man's sinfulness and guilt.<sup>64</sup> Brunner believes that the crisis can turn man's view toward the Wholly Other.

Nur in dieser Tiefe wird jene Höhe sichtbar. Nur in dieser Not eröffnet sich die Aussicht auf das ganz Andre, in dem unsere Erlösung gewährleistet ist. Wir gewinnen den Standort jenseits der Grenzen der Humanität, gerade indem wir sie in unbedingter Ehrfurcht, mit dem absoluten Pathos der Distanz anerkennen.<sup>65</sup>

History bears witness to the fact that man knows of religion all too often within the limits of human possibility.<sup>66</sup> It is the task of philosophy to stand guard on the boundaries of human limits. "Denn sie [Religion, Philosophie] bezeichnen beide den Ort, wo das Menschliche aufhört und das sichtbar wird, was grösser ist als der Mensch."<sup>67</sup>

In conclusion Brunner draws a warning picture of the contemporary religious scene for the benefit of the professional theologians.

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<sup>63</sup>Ibid., p. 1.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., p. 16.

Die heutige Theologie versucht vergeblich, diesen Kulturoptimismus, den Quietismus, die Zerspaltung des Lebens, die Kirchlichkeit der Religion, den Relativismus loszuwerden, die ihr seit Schleiermacher in Fleisch und Blut übergegangen sind. Sie kann es nicht, so lange sie nicht die Wurzel des Übels ausreißt: die Verwechslung von göttlicher Gnade und religiösem Erleben, die Begründung der Glaubenswahrheit in psychologischen Vorgängen.<sup>68</sup>

The contribution of Die Grenzen der Humanität is the clearly drawn distinction between the theology within the limits of humanity and the faith in the realm of the Wholly Other.

Die Mystik und das Wort (1924 and 1928)

Soon after Brunner was appointed to a regular professorship at the University of Zürich, his most controversial work, Die Mystik und das Wort, appeared in print. It was his first really comprehensive work.<sup>69</sup> With it Brunner launched an unequivocal attack on the theology of Friedrich Schleiermacher, a theologian who had ruled the religious thinking of nineteenth century Europe. As stated above, Brunner had already criticized the theology of feeling and Schleiermacher as its foremost representative. This time, however, the attack was more pointed and better oriented theologically.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>69</sup>The work is three hundred ninety-six pages long.

<sup>70</sup>Volken, op. cit., p. 9.

In Die Mystik und das Wort Brunner points out that in the final analysis there are only two types of God-man relationships, mysticism and faith.<sup>71</sup> As far as he is concerned there is no room for a synthesis of the two; it has to be either mysticism or the Word.<sup>72</sup> He believes that Schleiermacher summarized his own life work when he said: "Ich muss die tiefsten spekulativen Gedanken denken und die sind mir völlig eins mit den innigsten religiösen Empfindungen."<sup>73</sup>

Much of the criticism of Schleiermacher's theology is summarized in the following quote from Die Mystik und das Wort.

Die Identitätsphilosophie ist die Philosophie des Mystikers und die Mystik die Religion des Identitätsphilosophen. . . . Nur die Religion, die Mystik ist, verträgt, ja verlangt es, als reine Subjektivität aufgefasst zu werden. Nur sie erlaubt aber auch, dass die Wahrheitsfrage in einem System des höchsten spekulativen Wissens erledigt werde, und erkennt darin sich selber. So ist der Religionsbegriff Schleiermachers der Schlüssel zum Verständnis seines Vermächtnisses, und das Vermächtnis erklärt uns die Tatsache, warum die Religion so unbekümmert der Erörterung der Wahrheitsfrage zusieht. Denn schliesslich: Gefühl ist alles, Name ist Schall und Rauch.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Emil Brunner, Die Mystik und das Wort (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1924), p. 2.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., pp. 5, 89, 399.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., pp. 77f.

Brunner notes that Schleiermacher's theology agrees in all important points with the theology of mysticism: (1) the concept of God is vague; (2) God's relation to the world is not clearly defined; (3) God and man become one through the penetration of the divine; (4) descriptions often appear in picture form; (5) individual self consciousness is surrendered to the Divine; (6) feeling of the nearness of the unknown; (7) definitions are avoided as much as possible.<sup>75</sup>

The positive element in Schleiermacher's work, according to Brunner, is usually expressed in the antitheses.<sup>76</sup> Schleiermacher is correct when he denies that religion is knowledge or desire, but he is wrong in his principle to insist that religion is feeling.<sup>77</sup> Brunner cannot approve of Schleiermacher's statement that a religion without God can be better than another with God.<sup>78</sup> It is indeed severe criticism when Brunner, speaking of Schleiermacher, comments: "Er glaubte mit Psychologie das Rätsel der Religion zu lösen und seine psychologische Fragestellung hat das ganze Jahrhundert irreführt."<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>75</sup>Ibid., pp. 55f.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., p. 105.



In the criticisms Brunner emerges as the theologian of the Word. "Dass der Mensch das Wort hat, ist der Ursprung seiner Vernünftigkeit, seine unzerstörte Gottebenbildlichkeit, und die Summe des Evangeliums von der Erlösung."<sup>80</sup>

Brunner published the second edition of Die Mystik und das Wort, with some modifications, four years later. Although it is said that the later edition is substantially revised, it is basically very much like the first one. The criticisms of the first edition are acknowledged, considered and on the most part rejected.<sup>81</sup> Some statements that were subject to misunderstanding are clarified and an effort is made to make it plain that the author does not advocate Kant's philosophy as a replacement of Schleiermacher's theology.<sup>82</sup> Brunner has tried to be as fair as he could allow himself to be toward Schleiermacher. He even acknowledges some Christian faith in Schleiermacher's later work.

Wir haben gesehen, dass in Schleiermachers massgebendem theologischem Spät- und Hauptwerk zwei heterogene Elemente um den Vorrang kämpfen: sein identitäts-philosophisch-mystisches System und der christliche Glaube. Wir wissen --aus seiner Biographie--dass das zweite Element in der frühen Jugend das massgebende,

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<sup>80</sup>Ibid., p. 90. Also cf. pp. 95ff.

<sup>81</sup> Emil Brunner, Die Mystik und das Wort (zweite, stark veränderte Auflage; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1928), p. v.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., p. iv.

erst in seinen späten Jahren wieder stärker hervortrat.<sup>83</sup>

Most critics of Die Mystik und das Wort attack Brunner because of the latter's "unhistorical" approach. One able critic considers Brunner's conclusion that Schleiermacher was a mystic unfair and not in harmony with the life and preaching of the German theologian.<sup>84</sup> The critic feels that it is unfair to judge Schleiermacher outside the purpose of his message and his historical situation.<sup>85</sup>

Brunner, however, is not attempting to write a historical biography of Schleiermacher.

Es ist uns nicht ganz unwahrscheinlich, dass Schleiermacher, wenn er predigte, tatsächlich christlicher glaubte, als wenn er theologisch lehrte, so dass also seine Predigten ebenso wie als Zeugnisse für seine--nichtchristliche--Theologie, auch als Zeugnisse seines neben und im Gegensatz zu seiner Theologie vorhandenen christlichen Glaubens verwertet werden könne. Darum sind sie biographisch ebenso hochbedeutend, als sie theologisch unbrauchbar sind. . . . Das Bild des Mannes Schleiermacher wird allerdings durch diese Weglassung einseitig und insofern unrichtig. Das müssen wir in Kauf nehmen. Denn ein Bild zu geben haben wir nicht beansprucht.<sup>86</sup>

Brunner's answer to his critics is:

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<sup>83</sup>Ibid., p. 365.

<sup>84</sup>Hubert Riedel, "Emil Brunner's Criticism of the Epistemology of Friedrich Schleiermacher" (Unpublished Bachelor's Thesis, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 1950), p. 58.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>86</sup>Brunner, Die Mystik und das Wort, 1928, pp. 365f.

Man kann die Lehre Schleiermachers auf schärfste bekämpfen und sein Erbe als ein unheilvolles erkennen, und doch vor der geschlossenen Kraft seiner Persönlichkeit, dem Reichtum seines Geistes und der untadeligen Lauterkeit seines Gesinnung ehrfürchtiglich sich beugen. Nicht dieser Schleiermacher, sondern der in seinem Werk gegenwärtige ist unser Gegenstand, nur ihm gilt unser Kampf.<sup>87</sup>

In short, it must be objectively recognized that Brunner has written an able critique of the experience-theology of the nineteenth century, establishing himself as a talented theologian with a promising future.<sup>88</sup>

### Reformation und Romantik (1925)

During the two years following the publication of Die Mystik und das Wort, four shorter works of Brunner's appeared. The first three from a critical triad: Reformation und Romantik, Philosophie und Offenbarung and Die Absolutheit Jesu.

Reformation und Romantik was originally an address delivered on July 18, 1925 to a meeting of the Luther-Gesellschaft in Munich. In the essay Brunner makes it quite clear that romanticism, even though it has religious implications,<sup>89</sup> is basically a Weltanschauung. Reformation faith,

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<sup>87</sup>Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>88</sup>James M. Bulman, "A Comparison of John Calvin's and Emil Brunner's Doctrine of God," (Unpublished Doctor's Thesis, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky., 1949), p. 87.

<sup>89</sup>Emil Brunner, Reformation und Romantik (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1925), p. 7.

however, is a Revelation, a hope for a new world.<sup>90</sup>

Romantik ist Protest gegen alle Erstarrung. Es wird daher zu jeder Zeit eine gewisse Romantik geben, die aber nur unter besonderen, geschichtlichen Bedingungen selbst zu geschichtlicher Grösse emporwachsen kann.<sup>91</sup>

Reformation is also a reaction, but a distinctly theological one, which shakes the world.<sup>92</sup> Reformation inquires about salvation, about man's sin and forgiveness of God.

Brunner tells the reader that man can only be a romanticist or a mystik as long as the concept of sin has no existential meaning for him--as long as he does not take God's will seriously.<sup>93</sup> The Reformation takes the Word of God seriously. Its message is: God has spoken.

Gott hat geredet, das aus der Schrift die von diesem Jesus Christus Kunde gibt, ihnen entgegen kam und doch, indem es ihnen wirklich entgegenkam, kein Vergangenes, sondern ein Gegenwärtiges wurde: das Wunder der Offenbarung in Christus und im Glauben an ihn, das Wunder des Heiligen Geistes.<sup>94</sup>

It is noticeable that besides critical analysis of mysticism and romanticism, Brunner devotes considerable attention to the Word of God<sup>95</sup> and the cross of Christ.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>90</sup>Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid., pp. 21, 23.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid., p. 22.

This new emphasis comes to fruition in The Mediator.

Philosophie und Offenbarung (1925)

Philosophie und Offenbarung, dedicated to the theological faculty of Wilhelmsuniversität at Münster, is composed of two parts: "Die Offenbarung als Grund und Gegenstand der Theologie" and "Gnosis und Glaube." Both of the essays deal with the relationship of reason and revelation. The following words reveal the general trend of the essays:

Die Frage, ob es einen Vernunftweg zu Gott gebe-- wobei unter Vernunft alle dem Menschen gegebenen Möglichkeiten: Verstand, Wille und Gefühl, oder was sonst noch genannt werden mag, begriffen werden--, ist nicht eine, sondern die Lebensfrage des Glaubens. Wer glaube sagt in dem Sinn wie im klassischen Christentum von Glaube die Rede ist, d. h. wer vom Glauben nur im Zusammenhang mit der besonderen Offenbarung in Jesus Christus spricht, hat damit schon in der Frage, wie es sich mit jener menschlichen Möglichkeit verhalten, Stellung genommen.<sup>97</sup>

The dialectical approach to theology is already clearly formulated.

Der Glaube ist nicht nur ein Ja, sondern ebenso sehr ein Nein. Glauben heisst also auch: wir leben-- nur--im Glauben und nicht im Schauen. Wir bringen uns dadurch gedanklich zum Bewusstsein, dass wir sagen, der Glaube sei paradox-dialektisch. Paradox seinem Inhalt nach, dialektisch seiner Form nach.<sup>98</sup>

Even though Brunner's critique of Gnosis and reason

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<sup>97</sup> Emil Brunner, Philosophie und Offenbarung (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1925), p. 31.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

is prevalent in the essay,<sup>99</sup> the reader notices a new positive emphasis on revelation, faith, justification,<sup>100</sup> and a personal God who encounters man.<sup>101</sup> In many ways Philosophie und Offenbarung is a miniature Revelation and Reason.

Die Absolutheit Jesu (1926)

In Die Absolutheit Jesu Brunner comes closer to Christology than in any of his previous writings. He places Jesus Christ in opposition to both rationalism and romanticism. The whole problem is seen, as can be expected, in the context of reason and revelation. Brunner puts it thus:

Behind our theme there stands in the last analysis nothing other than the problem which has disturbed the thinking of Christendom since its foundation--few other problems have disturbed it more--the problem of Reason and Revelation.<sup>102</sup>

He sees a great danger in contemporary thinking which regards everything as relative<sup>103</sup> and transient.<sup>104</sup> Wisely, he observes that if everything is relative, so is the theory

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<sup>99</sup>Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid., pp. 20, 32, 48.

<sup>102</sup>Emil Brunner, "The Absolutness of Jesus," Union Seminary Review, XLVI (1935), 269f.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid., p. 270.

<sup>104</sup>Ibid., p. 271.

of relativity.<sup>105</sup> The problem is: Is Christianity and the Christ-event relative? Brunner believes that "the question concerning the person of Christ is not a historical question but one of faith."<sup>106</sup> Thus the task of theology is not to argue, reason or enter into historical research but to explain faith.<sup>107</sup>

It is significant to note that for Brunner,

Jesus, the Human, is fundamentally in contrast to all which is otherwise called human, to all things historical, to all which has taken place before him or after him on the side of the human, to all morality and religion.<sup>108</sup>

He is our Lord and Redeemer.

The author himself summarizes Die Absolutheit Jesu as follows:

Revelation of Christ and faith in Christ are the miracle of God in history and in the soul which can be understood neither historically nor psychologically, nor in connection with historical events nor in connection with the inner life of man. As soon as we would understand it, it ceases to be Revelation and Faith in the Christian sense. It is the absolutely inconceivable idea of God's presence in history and in the soul, an idea without analogy in other historical and in other soul phenomena.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>105</sup>Ibid., p. 272.

<sup>106</sup>Ibid., p. 279.

<sup>107</sup>Ibid.

<sup>108</sup>Ibid., p. 280.

<sup>109</sup>Ibid., p. 282.

The primary importance of Die Absolutheit Jesu in the development of Brunner's theology is its preoccupation with the person of Christ. A year later Brunner expanded the theme into a comprehensive work, The Mediator.

Christlicher Glaube nach reformierter Lehre (1926)

Christlicher Glaube nach reformierter Lehre is a dogmatics in outline. The frame of reference is the question concerning the meaning of human existence.<sup>101</sup>

Brunner's answer is: "Nicht in uns selber haben wir unseren Sinn. Unser Sinn ist jenseits, gegenüber, ausser uns, nicht inwendig."<sup>111</sup> Man is the creature of God, created by His Will.<sup>112</sup> God reveals Himself, His will and His meaning through the Word.<sup>113</sup>

Das Wort im Fleisch. Das ist Offenbarung des lebendigen persönlichen Gottes. Nur da kommt es zu einer wirklichen, lebendigen und persönlichen Beziehung.<sup>114</sup>

Brunner goes on to speak of Christian faith,<sup>115</sup> of sin,<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Emil Brunner, "Christlicher Glaube nach reformierter Lehre," Der Protestantismus der Gegenwart (Stuttgart: Bohnenberger, 1926), p. 398.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., p. 400.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., p. 401.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., p. 404.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., p. 406.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., p. 407.



of incarnation,<sup>117</sup> of justification,<sup>118</sup> and salvation.<sup>119</sup>

The essay reveals that Brunner has arrived at a point where he has applied the principles of Dialectical Theology to all the major aspects of Christian teachings. He no longer is primarily a critic of the past mistakes. The time has arrived to start formulating and expounding the truth about Christianity.

The Philosophy of Religion (1927)

In 1927 Brunner systematized and classified his previous critical attacks on theological and philosophical thinking. The new work, The Philosophy of Religion, is so comprehensive that anyone who is unfamiliar with his critical writings can quickly get a general overview of the same by consulting it. One is impressed by the wealth of subject matter that is squeezed between the covers of a rather small volume. In the first part of the work the author gives a competent description of orthodoxy, rationalism, romantic subjectivism and historicism. In the second part the author looks at each of the above mentioned "schools of thought" and tries to discover to what extent they must be rejected and to what extent they

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<sup>117</sup>Ibid., p. 409.

<sup>118</sup>Ibid., p. 411.

<sup>119</sup>Ibid., p. 414.

make a positive contribution towards establishing the truth. Much of the critical thinking has already been touched upon in the earlier writings and thus need not be reconsidered here. However, the theological position of orthodoxy has not received previous critical treatment, being an addition to Brunner's earlier criticisms.

The author agrees with the thesis of orthodox Christianity: "We do not measure God's word in Scripture by the standard of reason: we measure reason and indeed all knowledge by God's word in Scripture."<sup>120</sup> However, he rejects the Bible as a book of divinely revealed truth.<sup>121</sup> According to him,

It is full of errors, contradictions, and misleading views of various circumstances relating to man, nature, and history. It contains many contradictions in its reports of the life of Jesus; it is over-grown with legend, even in the New Testament. Some parts of it are written in very helpless, colloquial, and even faulty language, while others again rise to the level of the greatest works of literature.<sup>122</sup>

Again, "It [the Bible] is neither a book of oracles, nor a divine encyclopaedia of infallible instruction on all possible and impossible subjects."<sup>123</sup> The author offers

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<sup>120</sup> Emil Brunner, The Philosophy of Religion From the Standpoint of Protestant Theology, translated by A. J. D. Farrer and Bertram Lee Woolf (London: James Clarke & Co., LTD., 1958), pp. 150f.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., p. 151.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., p. 155.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., p. 156.

a clue as to why he has taken the above quoted position. "As with the whole Biblical revelation of God incarnate, the saying, finitum non est capax infiniti (the finite cannot grasp the infinite) is in place here."<sup>124</sup>

Another new contribution to the body of Brunner's thinking is an extensive discussion of Urgeschichte or primordial history. The following words summarize Brunner's position:

The notion of a history of the world as a unity is a bastard begotten of Christian faith and rationalism. Christian faith knows nothing of any history of the world in the sense of unity. Its unity is not historical but that which belongs at once to "Urgeschichte" or primordial history, and "Engeschichte" or the consummation of history, i.e., history not as moved by forces within itself, but within its relation to a creative and redeeming God.<sup>125</sup>

The controversy of faith with the "isms," according to Brunner, is the task of theology. No neutral or objective theology is possible.<sup>126</sup> He concludes the work with the following words:

To have faith--really have it, means to be a man on the watch. For what faith possesses--really possesses--is the promise of that which as yet it does not possess. Verbum solum habemus.<sup>127</sup>

Brunner's The Philosophy of Religion is not only a

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<sup>124</sup>Ibid.

<sup>125</sup>Ibid., p. 126.

<sup>126</sup>Ibid., p. 183.

<sup>127</sup>Ibid., p. 191.

good summary of his past theological ideas. It also prepares the way for his future work. It might be regarded as the prolegomena to his next work, The Mediator.

### The Mediator (1927)

With the publication of The Mediator (Der Mittler) Brunner took his place among the ranking Protestant theologians of the world. Indeed he had come a long way since his first literary effort, Das Symbolische in der religiösen Erkenntnis. During the thirteen years that had elapsed between the two works, he had reckoned with rationalism and mysticism. Each had been weighed and found totally unacceptable for establishing the Christian Truth. As noted above, since the publication of Die Mystik und das Wort, Brunner's smaller writings became gradually more and more constructive, preparing the way for major works dealing with practically every important aspect of Christianity.

His first comprehensive constructive work deals with Christology. Brunner called it The Mediator. It is often said that Brunner's most important concern is the relationship between revelation and reason. It would be incorrect indeed to deny that revelation and reason play an important role in his theology. The fact, however, remains that The Mediator appeared in 1927, whereas Revelation and Reason had to wait until 1941. There can be no doubt that The

Mediator is the most important and the most mature work of Brunner's Critical Period. This writer considers it the outstanding work of all his literary output.

Obviously no detailed analysis of the book can be offered here. As interesting as that might be, it lies outside the scope and task of this dissertation. A few general introductory remarks must suffice.

In the preface of The Mediator, a work that is more than six hundred pages in length in the English translation, Brunner modestly states:

Nor does this book claim to be a "doctrine of Christ." In my opinion, the time is not yet ripe for this; in any case, I am not equal to such a task. I do not venture to offer more than an introduction to the subject.<sup>128</sup>

Actually, as it turns out, The Mediator, is more than an introduction. It deals with General and Special Revelation;<sup>129</sup> it offers an overview of the modern interpretations of the Mediator;<sup>130</sup> it comes to grips with the problem of evil;<sup>131</sup> and it looks at historical research in the light of Christian faith.<sup>132</sup> All this prepares the way for a thorough treatment of the person and the work of Christ.

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<sup>128</sup> Emil Brunner, The Mediator, translated by Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1947), p. 15.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., pp. 21ff.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., pp. 72ff.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., pp. 122ff.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., pp. 153ff.

If there is any paragraph in The Mediator which summarizes its main themes, the writer believes that the one reproduced below comes closest to it.

Christianity, and Christianity alone, is the absolute opposite of this form of religion [universal religion]. For the very existence of the Christian religion depends on vital connections with an "accidental" fact of history, with a real event in time and space, which, so it affirms, is the unique, final revelation, for time and for eternity, and for the whole world. In principle, therefore, its relation with God is not immediate but is mediated. Between the soul and God, there stands a third element, or rather a third Person, who, although He unites man with God, yet equally maintains the absolute distinction between them; through Him alone that reconciliation takes place through which God reveals Himself: the Mediator. In the one form of religion it is claimed as fundamental that God reveals Himself directly to the human soul, in the other as fundamental that God reveals Himself through the Mediator. This is the fundamental distinction.<sup>133</sup>

Emil Brunner holds to both the true divinity and the true humanity of the person of Christ.<sup>134</sup> Although he does not say so, it seems that he rejects the idea of Parthenogenesis in order to emphasize the truly human existence of Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>135</sup> Once the true humanity of Christ is established, the author loses interest in the manhood of Christ and concentrates on the Son of God of faith.

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<sup>133</sup>Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>134</sup>Ibid., pp. 265, 405.

<sup>135</sup>Ibid., pp. 322ff.

The author does not claim to expound anything new concerning Christ, but rather endeavors to present Him as the faith of the Christian Church has recognized Him from the very earliest days.<sup>136</sup>

It is incorrect to assume that The Mediator contains no criticisms, so prominent in Brunner's earlier writings. He remains a keen critic at heart. His most frequent criticisms are levelled against the liberal theology of Ritschl and Harnack<sup>137</sup> but he has not forgotten his old enemies, Schleiermacher's mysticism<sup>138</sup> and rationalism of the days of Enlightenment.<sup>139</sup>

The criticisms, however, are relatively unimportant in the light of the challenge of God with which He confronts man: Jesus Christ.<sup>140</sup> Brunner borrows Irenaeus' motto: "Jesus Christ, in His infinite love, has become what we are, in order that He may make us entirely what He is."<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>136</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>137</sup>Ibid., pp. 213, 250, 253, 256, 268, et al.

<sup>138</sup>Ibid., pp. 90f.

<sup>139</sup>Ibid., pp. 142, 190.

<sup>140</sup>Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>141</sup>Ibid., p. 3.

The Theology of Crisis (Lectures in 1928)

The Theology of Crisis originated as a series of Swander Lectures, delivered at the Theological Seminary of the Reformed Church in the United States, Lancaster, Pennsylvania, in the autumn of the year 1928.<sup>142</sup> Therefore they must be treated here even though they appeared in print a year later. The remarks in this dissertation are based on the printed lectures.

Wilhelm Pauck in his review of The Theology of Crisis declared: "Anyone who desires to know what it would mean to have a Christian faith in our day as Paul or Luther had it in theirs (the same in intention, if not in kind) ought to read this book."<sup>143</sup>

The original intention of the work was to introduce the Theology of Crisis to the English speaking public.<sup>144</sup> As such The Theology of Crisis is a popular summary of the most important emphases in Brunner's understanding of Christian faith.

The author defines Christianity in bold and uncompromising terms:

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<sup>142</sup> Emil Brunner, The Theology of Crisis (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929), p. ix.

<sup>143</sup> Wilhelm Pauck, "The Gospel According to Karl Barth," Christian Century, XLVII (1930), 305.

<sup>144</sup> Brunner, The Theology of Crisis, p. x.



Christianity is either faith in the revelation of God in Jesus Christ or it is nothing. From this faith it derives its name, and has its peculiar content, its claim, its history. With it Christianity stands or falls.<sup>145</sup>

His basic thesis is formulated as follows:

Fundamentalism conflicts with science exactly because, and in so far as, it is not truly Christian; and liberal criticism is not truly Christian because, and in so far as, it is not truly critical. A third thesis may be added with propriety, namely, that only a Christian can be truly critical, and only he who is truly critical can be a Christian. The principles of true Christianity and of true criticism are identical. Fundamentalism and orthodoxy in general are a petrification of Christianity; and modernism and all doctrines of immanence are its dissolution.<sup>146</sup>

The above quotation offers in general terms the sum and substance of the Theology of Crisis.

Particularly in one area of theology, Christian ethics, Brunner adds a new aspect to his earlier writings. In the fourth lecture, "The Problem of Ethics," he attempts to formulate the foundation for Christian ethics.

the sola gratia, sola fide, soli deo gloria of the Christian faith, that is, the Pauline view of faith, is the only solid foundation for ethics; and faith in redemption through Christ is the only real source of that ethical renewal and energy to which Paul refers when he speaks about the new creation in Christ.<sup>147</sup>

The review of Brunner's writings of the Critical Period

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<sup>145</sup>Ibid., pp. 2f.

<sup>146</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>147</sup>Ibid., pp. 68f.

reveals a definite trend in his theological development. From the somewhat uncertain and strongly philosophically oriented beginnings (Das Symbolische in der religiösen Erkenntnis) he developed into a dialectical theologian who rejected experience and knowledge as ultimate ways of establishing fellowship with God. Faith was the only medium by which God and man could exist in communion (Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube). With Die Mystik und das Wort Brunner reached the height in critical analysis of immanence theology. During the transition period (1925-1926) several shorter critical writings gave evidence that a more positive and constructive strain of theological thought was taking hold of him. The concepts of the Word of God, revelation, Mediator, and salvation became more prominent than in his earlier works. The Philosophy of Religion was both a summary of the past criticisms and a prolegomena to The Mediator, his work par excellence. With the publication of The Mediator Brunner demonstrated to the world that he had ripened into a mature and able theologian who regarded Christology as the central doctrine of the Christian faith. The Theology of Crisis offered a popular overview of Dialectical Theology as interpreted and represented by Emil Brunner.

A chronological treatment of the articles would not serve the purpose of this study. An attempt is made to group the articles under the following five categories:

## CHAPTER VII

### BRUNNER'S PERIODICAL LITERATURE AND SHORT ESSAYS OF THE CRITICAL PERIOD

Emil Brunner's literary output in book and booklet form is amply supplemented by a variety of articles in magazines, religious periodicals and newspapers as well as by occasional writings of various description. This study will touch briefly upon the majority of the articles which appeared during the Critical Period.

Basically the periodical literature bears out the general trends in Brunner's theological development as discussed in the previous chapter. The articles up to 1924 are primarily concerned with the crisis in Protestantism and with the beginnings of Dialectical Theology. The critical elements predominate over constructive Theology. But beginning with 1925 the articles become increasingly theological in content. Throughout the Critical Period the occasional literature provides glimpses into Brunner's pastoral concerns. The articles on preaching, education and congregational life exhibit a vital concern for a living, practical Christianity.

A chronological treatment of the articles would not serve the purpose of this study. An attempt is made to group the articles under the following five categories:

Crisis in Protestantism, Theological Articles, Pastoral and Educational Concerns, Christianity and the World, and Brunner on His Contemporaries. Since some overlapping of material is inevitable, the subdivisions must not be regarded as clearcut. No attempt will be made to give equal attention to all articles. Usually a few of them serve as a nucleus around which similar writings can be gathered.

### Crisis in Protestantism

As "Disillusionment and Hope in Switzerland" indicates, the First World War brought with it general hopelessness and cynicism.<sup>1</sup> All cultural and theological tenets were questioned. The historical-critical method of scientific analysis of theology endeavoured to mold religion into a neatly packaged system. The young theologians, among whom Brunner counted himself, were dissatisfied with such a scientific approach to living theology. In an early article, "Grundsätzliches zum Kapitel 'Die jungen Theologen,'" Brunner describes the complaints of the older generation of theologians. The latter asserted that the young theologians had only questions but no answers; they lacked a system and zeal for scientific research.<sup>2</sup> Instead

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<sup>1</sup> Emil Brunner, "Disillusionment and Hope in Switzerland," The World Tomorrow, III, No. 9 (1920), 276.

<sup>2</sup> Emil Brunner, "Grundsätzliches zum Kapitel 'Die jungen Theologen,'" Kirchenblatt für die reformierte Schweiz, XXI, No. 15 (1916), 57.

of reading Augustine and Luther, the young men preferred Kierkegaard, Ibsen and Tolstoy.<sup>3</sup> An old theologian is to have remarked: "Sie wollen prophetisch dem Gottesreich den Weg bereiten."<sup>4</sup> Brummer summarizes the situation thus:

So bleibt uns die Wahl, entweder dieser Wissenschaft ihre alte zentrale Stellung auch weiterhin einzuräumen --und dem Leben fernzubleiben; oder aber uns von ihren Schätzen ein gute Hand voll in die Tasche zu stecken und dann weiterzuziehen, ins Leben hinaus, in der Hoffnung, dass bald, eine Zeit komme, wo die Wissenschaft wieder eine lebenschaffende Macht sein wird. Wir haben uns für das zweite entschieden.<sup>5</sup>

He declares that intellectualism as well as rationalism and Psychologismus must be defeated.<sup>6</sup> History is to be lived and not only to be studied. "Wir wollen in erster Linie Geschichte erleben, mitmachen."<sup>7</sup>

The historical-critical school of theology claimed to be objective. In "Das Elend der Theologie" it is phrased thus:

Sie will empirisch sein, d. h. das Tatsächlich-Gegebene auffinden. Sie will ferner genetisch sein, d. h. kausal in historischer und psychologischer Analyse das Werden und damit den Bestand dieses Tatsächlichen erklären. Das man dies könne, ist

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 59.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 59.

das Arbeitsprincip oder auch das Axiom der kritisch-historischen Theologie.<sup>8</sup>

With that point of view Brunner does not agree.

Der Wahn einer "objektiven" Geisteswissenschaft wird von dem Moment an verschwinden, wo erkannt ist, dass auf dem Gebiet des wahrhaft Geistigen Erkennen und Anerkennen eins sind, und dass das Postulate neutraler "rein feststellender" Erkenntnis in Wahrheit auf einem Verzicht auf Erkenntnis beruht.<sup>9</sup>

The untenable position of historicism called forth a reaction. Psychology, especially the psychology of religion, became prominent. Brunner, together with other young dialectical theologians, rejects also that approach.

Auf den kürzesten Ausdruck gebracht, ist Psychologismus die Verkenennung der fundamentalen Unterscheidung zwischen Geistigem und bloss Seelischen, zwischen dem Subjektiven und dem Objektiven in der Innerlichkeit, die durchgängige Subjektivierung des Geisteslebens.<sup>10</sup>

There was no doubt that theology was undergoing a crisis. Brunner in "Die Krisis der Religion" expresses the hope that the crisis will lead to new life. "Die Krankheit zum Tode ist, wo es wirklich zum Sterben kommt, die Krisis zum Leben."<sup>11</sup> In "Krisis in Protestantismus" he makes it clear that the crisis is not undesirable in itself.

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<sup>8</sup> Emil Brunner, "Das Elend der Theologie," Kirchenblatt für die reformierte Schweiz, XXXV, No. 50 (1920), 198.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 199.

<sup>10</sup> Emil Brunner, "Das Elend der Theologie," Kirchenblatt für die reformierte Schweiz, XXXV, No. 51 (1920), 203.

<sup>11</sup> Emil Brunner, "Die Krisis der Religion," Kirchenblatt für die reformierte Schweiz, XXXVII, No. 17 (1922), 66.

Um die heutige Krise im Protestantismus zu verstehen ist die Einsicht notwendig, dass die Krise der Religion im Protestantismus permanent, ja dass sie gerade das Wesen des Protestantismus ist. Denn der protestantische Glaube ist die Krise des frommen Menschen als solchen. In der Widerentdeckung dieses radikal kritischen Sinnes des christlichen Glaubens hatte die Reformation ihren Ursprung und ihre Kraft.<sup>12</sup>

Not all theology of the past has been critical in the true sense of the word, even if it has claimed to be so. "Ist die sogenannte Kritische Theologie wirklich kritisch?" leaves no doubt that this was the case with historicism.<sup>13</sup>

In a lecture to Kantgesellschaft in December 1923, Brunner clearly indicates his admiration for Kant's critical principles. Brunner goes so far as to say that Kant's Critique of Pure Reason is only a prolegomena to his Critique of Practical Reason. He believes that in the latter work Kant comes truly into his own.<sup>14</sup> The nineteenth century Neokantians, however, completely misunderstood their teacher, if Brunner's judgment is to be trusted. The Neokantians operated within the limits of humanity; Kant, however, refused to mix the phenomenal realm with

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<sup>12</sup> Emil Brunner, "Krisis im Protestantismus," Süddeutsche Monatshefte, LXX, No. 9 (1928), 638.

<sup>13</sup> Emil Brunner, "Ist die sogenannte Kritische Theologie wirklich kritisch?" Kirchenblatt für die reformierte Schweiz, XXXVI, No. 27 (1921), 105f.

<sup>14</sup> Emil Brunner, "Das Grundproblem der Philosophie bei Kant und Kierkegaard," Zwischen den Zeiten, II, No. 4 (1924), 37.

the spiritual world.<sup>15</sup> Kant's real problem was: "der Mensch in seinem Verhältnis zum Absoluten. . . ." <sup>16</sup>

Brunner sees a close relationship between Kant's and Kierkegaard's thought.

Es wird niemand, der von Kant herkommend in Kierkegaard sich vertieft, finden, dass er nicht hier höchst wichtige Ausschlüsse über den Sinn dessen was er von Kant her eigentlich hätte wissen sollen, erhalte.<sup>17</sup>

Two other articles deserve mention. In "Konservativ oder Radikal?" Brunner observes that both conservatism and radicalism by themselves are inadequate. "Vergisst der Konservative den lebendigen Gott, so übersieht der Radikale den lebendigen Gott."<sup>18</sup> He summarizes the article as follows:

Gott ist die einzige wirkliche revolutionäre Macht, der einzige Radikale, weil er allein auch die Tiefen aufwühlt. Er ist auch die einzige konservative Macht, weil er allein Leben baut und erhält. Der einzig mögliche "Standpunkt" der jene Gegensätze wirklich überbietet, ist der: dass man Gott sich zur Verfügung stelle; dass man ihn--nicht Gedanken über ihn--suche; sich von seinem Leben--nicht von Ideen und Programmen--erfassen lasse. Von ihm allein werden "Ströme lebendigen Wassers ausgehen," an denen die Welt genießen kann.<sup>19</sup>

In "Das Unbedingte und die Wirklichkeit: Unser Problem"

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>18</sup>Emil Brunner, "Konservativ oder Radikal?" Neue Wege, XII, No. 2 (1918), 67.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 70.



Brunner discusses the relation between historical relativism and the Absolute.<sup>20</sup> Is the absolute possible in this world?

Noch nie ist eine Zeit oder Bewegung oder Persönlichkeit ausgekommen ohne Kompromisse; aber vorwärts gegangen ist es in der Richtung des Absoluten immer nur da, wo einer die Kühnheit hatte . . . es mit dem zu wagen, was er im Inneren als das Höchste, Unbedingtgut, Unbedingtwertvolle erschaut hatte.<sup>21</sup>

The solution is to be sought in faith. "Eine wirkliche Lösung gibt wie in allem ganz wichtigen Dingen nicht das Denken sondern die persönliche Entscheidung, der Glaube."<sup>22</sup>

The Absolute is related to the world of relativity by faith.<sup>23</sup>

According to Brunner the answer to the crisis in Protestantism is the Theology of Crisis, a truly critical theology which accepts by faith the existence of the Absolute.

#### Theological Articles

One of the best theological essays of the Critical Period is "Was heisst Erbaut auf dem Grunde der Apostel und Propheten?" It was originally delivered as a lecture

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<sup>20</sup>Emil Brunner, "Das Unbedingte und die Wirklichkeit: Unser Problem," Neue Wege, XI, No. 7 (1917), 336.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 342.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 327.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

to a group of Reformed pastors. Its point of departure is that all preaching must be built upon the apostles and prophets.

Brunner rejects any notion that reason has to justify religion.

Welche immer unsere Vernunfttheorie sei, die Kantsche, Hegelsche oder Schopenhauersche: eins ist doch gewiss, dass der christliche Glaube sich einer solchen nicht unterwerfen kann, ohne aufzuhören, christlicher Glaube zu sein. Offenbarung, die an der Vernunft ihren Meister hat, ist nicht Offenbarung.<sup>24</sup>

A general revelation occurs in nature, history and man's heart.<sup>25</sup> The revelation in Christ, however, is not just the high point of the same type of revelation, as the idealists thought.<sup>26</sup> Intervention must come from outside. "Eben dieses ganz andere meint der christliche Glaube mit Gottes Heilsoffenbarung in Jesus Christus."<sup>27</sup>

Revelation is not only a word, but also an act.

Darum ist die Offenbarung nicht nur ein Spruch, ein Wort der Rechtfertigung, sondern eine Tat oder Tatsache, das heisst also etwas, was wir nicht denken können, sondern was als Aufhebung des Gesetzes ja gerade allem Denkenkönnen und Denkendürfen widerspricht.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Emil Brunner, "Was heisst: Erbeut auf dem Grunde der Apostel und Propheten?" Verhandlungen der Schweizer reformierten Predigergesellschaft, 1925, p. 37.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., pp. 39f.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 42.

The One who breaks through into this world is the Mediator. Since He belongs to both eternity and time, He can be and is the Revelation.<sup>29</sup> The personal God becomes existentially real to man on the cross. There God reveals the secret of His will and His gracious Name.<sup>30</sup> How does man know about this? Brunner's answer reads as follows:

Ich weiss, dass Gott redet eben weil er redet. Das ist es was im Neuen Testament Glauben heisst. Glauben an das Wort und die Tat Gottes in Christus ist der Bruch mit aller immanenten Erkenntnis, also auch gegensatz zu aller Religion.<sup>31</sup>

Close attention must be paid to the formulation of the relationship of the Word of God and Revelation. "Offenbarung heisst! Gottes Wort nicht als Idee, sondern als Faktum in der Geschichte. Faktum in der Geschichte, nicht geschichtliches Faktum."<sup>32</sup> A Geschichtliches Faktum is a phenomenon in time and space, and thus subject to perception by all. Christ, on the other hand, can be known only by those to whom it is given to understand Him.<sup>33</sup> The Faktum in der Geschichte becomes known to man in history.

Da aber dieses Reden Gottes an dieses Faktum der Geschichte gebunden ist, kann es auch nur auf geschichtliche Weise an uns kommen, das heisst durch Schrift und mündliche Tradition. Beides ist notwendig, aber im Konfliktfall entscheidet die Schrift, weil

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., pp. 43f.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

sie allein das Faktum als ein einmalig geschehenes, abgeschlossenes, als ein Perfektum festhält.<sup>34</sup>

Scripture itself is not Revelation. Referring to the words of the Apostles, Brunner comments, "Sie, sofern sie nämlich Christum bezeugen und nur insofern--gehören mit zur Offenbarung."<sup>35</sup>

Brunner concludes "Was heisst Erbauen auf dem Grunde der Apostel und Propheten" by offering his interpretation of the concept of the Church. Since in the Critical Period he has little to say on this subject elsewhere, a quotation is in order here.

die Kirche wird nicht von Menschen und nicht durch menschliche Mittel gebaut, obschon nie ohne sie, sondern durch das Wort der Offenbarung. Sie ist etwas Sichtbares, Allzumenschliches, aber sie ist zugleich eine reine Glaubengrösse, über deren Bestand einzig Gott allein Bescheid weiss. Sie ist, als diese, nicht etwas, was man geschichtlich greifen, sondern nur, durch den Glauben an Christus, glauben kann.<sup>36</sup>

Much of the same material appears in "Inspiration und Offenbarung." It is stressed that revelation is the foundation of Christian faith.<sup>37</sup> God is said to be accepted only where He personally makes Himself known to man.<sup>38</sup> "Gott

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>37</sup>Emil Brunner, "Inspiration und Offenbarung," Der Kirchenfreund, LXI, No. 2 (1927), 19.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 20.

selbst muss das Wort, das im Buch vor uns ist, in uns als sein Wort reden, damit wir wahrhaftig sagen können: Es ist so, ich glaube es."<sup>39</sup> In Brunner's concept of revelation there is no room for the doctrine of verbal inspiration.<sup>40</sup> He likes to compare the Scriptures to the Son of Man in the state of humiliation.

Es ist sein Wille gewesen, die Fülle seiner Gottheit in einem armen unbekanntem und vor der Welt unbedeutenden Menschen Gestalt annehmen zu lassen, Knechtsgestalt, wie der Apostel sagt. So ist es auch sein Wille gewesen, sein Wort--sein autoritatives Offenbarungswort--hineinzulegen in die unscheinbare Hülle dieser israelisch-jüdisch-hellenistische Literaturdokumente, die wir Christen heilige Schrift nennen.<sup>41</sup>

In a lecture at Thun on "Die Kerngedanken der Reformation," Brunner shows both his familiarity with and appreciation for the Reformation heritage. He admits the genius of Luther, the keen mind of Zwingli and the organizational talents of Calvin, but concludes that it was not man but the Word of God in Christ that effected the Reformation.<sup>42</sup>

es war das Wort Gottes von Jesus Christus, dem Gekreuzigten und Auferstandenen, das jene Männer

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<sup>39</sup> Emil Brunner, "Inspiration und Offenbarung," Der Kirchenfreund, LXI, No. 3 (1927), 35.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>41</sup> Emil Brunner, "Inspiration und Offenbarung," Der Kirchenfreund, LXI, No. 4 (1927), 53.

<sup>42</sup> Emil Brunner, "Die Kerngedanken der Reformation," Pflugschar, IX, No. 11/12 (1926), 229.

bloss als seine Instrumente gebrauchte um durch sie hindurch ihrer Zeit das zu sagen, was jederzeit und auch heute das ist, was uns helfen kann.<sup>43</sup>

Brunner holds to both the reality of God's wrath and grace. The former concept is dealt with in "Der Zorn Gottes und die Versöhnung durch Christus."

Der Gedanke des göttlichen Zorns bildet aber mit dem Grundgedanken der ganzen christlichen Verkündigung eine so unbedingte, unauflöslche Einheit, dass man ihn nur um den Preis der Verstümmelung des ganzen Gedankengefüges--und das heisst des Sinnes--aus dieser Verbindung herauslösen kann.<sup>44</sup>

The concept of God's grace is treated extensively and scholarly in an article in Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart: Handwörterbuch für Theologie und Religionswissenschaft. Grace is regarded as the central concept of Christian faith. "Gnade (gratia, Χάρις) ist der Zentralbegriff der christlich-biblischen Gotteserkenntnis."<sup>45</sup>

The meaning of Law,<sup>46</sup> its relationship to philosophy,<sup>47</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Emil Brunner, "Der Zorn Gottes und die Versöhnung durch Christus," Zwischen den Zeiten, V, No. 2 (1927), 94.

<sup>45</sup> Emil Brunner, "Gnade Gottes," Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart: Handwörterbuch für Theologie und Religionswissenschaft, II (zweite, völlig neubearbeitete Auflage; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1928), col. 1261.

<sup>46</sup> Emil Brunner, "Gesetz und Offenbarung," Theologische Blätter, IV, No. 3 (1925), col. 57.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., col. 53.

to humanity,<sup>48</sup> and to God's revelation<sup>49</sup> is set forth in "Gesetz und Offenbarung." According to Brunner, Law is not only that which establishes humanity, but also that which limits it.<sup>50</sup>

Two small articles deserve mention here. In "Vom Rätsel Mensch" Brunner contends that man must recognize his predicament before he can appreciate the statement that only God can and is willing to help him.<sup>51</sup> A popularly written article, "Religion oder Glaube," shows the futility of man's way to God (religion)<sup>52</sup> and the effectiveness of God's way to man (revelation).<sup>53</sup>

#### Pastoral and Educational Concerns

The material treated under this topic belongs in the fields of pastoral theology, education and homiletics.

Ein offenes Wort an die Männer und Frauen von Obatalden und Filzbach offers the reader a glimpse of Brunner as a pastor of a country congregation. Like most

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., col. 54.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., col. 56.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., col. 54.

<sup>51</sup>Emil Brunner, "Vom Rätsel Mensch," Gemeindeblatt für die reformierte Kirchengemeinden des Kantons Glarus, XIII, No. 6 (1926), 32.

<sup>52</sup>Emil Brunner, "Religion oder Glaube," Zwinglikalendar 1926, edited by Adolf Maurer (Basel: Reinhardt, 1926), p. 36.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 37.

pastors, Brunner had his share of problems. He states his problem very simply: "Es ist etwas zwischen uns nicht in der Ordnung. . . ." <sup>54</sup> The spirit of unity and singlemindedness of purpose left something to be desired. He continues: "Wenn es . . . wahr ist, dass Gott ist, und wenn ihr selbst daran glaubt, dann--das will ich euch offen sagen--dann verstehe ich euch nicht." <sup>55</sup> The basic malady seems to have been indifference towards God. "Uns kommt nicht Gottes Wille in erster Linie, wir denken kaum je an ihn, er ist uns gleichgültig." <sup>56</sup> Other interests, such as concern for money, employment, business, station in life, and health seemed to take preference over God. The deeper malady manifested itself in poor church attendance. According to Brunner, some do not go to church because it is not fashionable, others claim to have no time, some do not like what they hear, others just lack interest. Basic to all the reasons is indifference towards God. "Uns kommt nicht Gottes Wille in erster Linie, wir denken kaum je an ihn, er ist uns gleichgültig." <sup>57</sup>

Brunner has always taken Christian education seriously.

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<sup>54</sup> Emil Brunner, Ein Offenes Wort an die Männer und Frauen von Obstalden und Filzbach (Obstalden: Selbstverlag, 1917), p. 2.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 5.



He believes that faith and education cannot be divorced without serious consequences. In "Glaube und Erziehung" he warns his contemporaries: "Eine Zeit ohne rechten lebendigen Glauben wird in der Erziehung bei allem vielen Reden und Schreiben darüber doch zu nichts Rechten bringen."<sup>58</sup> The adults perform an important role in Christian education, not only by what they say but also by what they do. Note Brunner's words,

Das Wichtigste in der christlichen Erziehung ist eben dies, das Kind merken zu lassen, wie wir Erwachsene selbst in der Schule Gottes leben und darin seine Kinder sind.<sup>59</sup>

In "Etwas vom Konfirmandenunterricht" Brunner emphasizes the importance of parental attitudes and value judgments. No one can teach another to love God.<sup>60</sup> "Es ist einzig dieses wirkliche Leben mit Gott, was sozusagen ansteckend wirken kann; blosses Lehren bleibt tot."<sup>61</sup> The purpose of confirmation, according to Brunner, is: "Zeigen, dass Gott und Leben zusammenhören."<sup>62</sup>

In an article concerning women's education and her

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<sup>58</sup> Emil Brunner, "Glaube und Erziehung," Zwinglikalendar 1928, edited by Adolf Maurer (Basel: Reinhardt, 1928), p. 40.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>60</sup> Emil Brunner, "Etwas vom Konfirmandenunterricht," Gemeindeblatt für die reformierte Kirchengemeinde des Kantons Glarus, V, No. 3 (1918), 12.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

place in the society, "Mädchenbund: Stimmen zur Frauenbewegung," Brunner emphasizes the importance of women's place in the home<sup>63</sup> and in certain suitable professions such as nursing and teaching.<sup>64</sup> His advice to the young ladies is not to compete with men but to work together with them in harmony.<sup>65</sup>

"Von guten und schlechten Predigten" gives the reader an idea what Brunner considers an ideal sermon. A good sermon gives God the opportunity to show man his predicament and lets God proclaim: "Du gehörst mir; in Jesus Christus. Christus, der Gekreuzigte und Auferstandene, das heisst: Gott ist dir treu geblieben, auch wo du untreu wurdest."<sup>66</sup>

A devotional article, "Der wiedergefundene Bauplan," pictures Christ as God's eternal plan for the world.<sup>67</sup> Another, much earlier article of the same type, "Geist," speaks of unity and Christian love engendered by the Holy

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<sup>63</sup> Emil Brunner, "Mädchenbund: Stimmen zur Frauenbewegung," Korrespondenzblatt Studierender Abstinenter, XXII, No. 5 (1918), 138.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 139.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 140.

<sup>66</sup> Emil Brunner, "Von guten und schlechten Predigten," Zwinglikalender 1925, edited by Adolf Meurer (Basel: Reinhardt, 1925), p. 44.

<sup>67</sup> Emil Brunner, "Der wiedergefundene Bauplan," Zwinglikalender 1927, edited by Adolf Meurer (Basel: Reinhardt, 1925), p. 32.

Spirit.<sup>68</sup> The only one of Brunner's sermons from the Critical Period that this writer has seen in print, "Zacchaeus, the Publican," is based on Luke 19:2. It deals with the dangers that the worldly treasures impose upon human lives and the great love that God shows towards sinners.<sup>69</sup>

### Christianity and the World

Brunner's friends were not wrong when they named the Festgabe for his seventieth birthday Der Auftrag der Kirche in der modernen Welt. From the very beginning of his theological career, Brunner made it clear that he did not intend to divorce Christianity from the world. This is clearly seen from the periodical literature of his Critical Period.

In an essay delivered in 1926, "Die Aufgabe der Christen an der Welt," Brunner rejoices that,

Die Frommen beginnen zu verstehen dass ihre Christus-erkenntnis das Heil, das sie in Christus gefunden haben, der ganzen Welt gehört, nicht bloss in dem Sinn, dass alle sich bekehren sollen zum Herren Jesus, was freilich wahr bleibt, sondern auch in dem bloss eine Herzensangelegenheit, nicht bloss ein frommes

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<sup>68</sup> Emil Brunner, "Geist," Gemeindeblatt für die reformierte Kirchengemeinde des Kantons Glarus, III, No. 6 (1916), 32.

<sup>69</sup> Emil Brunner, "Zacchaeus, the Publican," Christian Century, XLVII (1930), 395f.

inneres Erleben ist, sondern eine Kraft, die Welt in allen ihren Verhältnissen nezugestalten.<sup>70</sup>

He is convinced that Christians have failed to take social evils and needs seriously enough in the past.

Als die Armut, die grosse soziale Not und Unrechtigkeit von uns Hilfe begehrte, haben wir nicht geholfen, haben euer Schreien nach Gerechtigkeit und Menschlichkeit nicht zu dem unseren gemacht, sondern haben euch mit Kimmelstrost abgefertigt.<sup>71</sup>

The church also failed when it did not speak up against war. Its own existence will not improve before it begins to take social needs more seriously.

Es wird mit der christlichen Kirche nicht besser als bis endlich in ihr der Gedanke durchdringt: Wir sind schuld an der sozialen Not, wir sind schuld, dass es noch Kriege gibt, wir sind schuld am Alkoholismus, wir sind schuld am Verbrechertum, wir sind schuld am Laster.<sup>72</sup>

Brunner explicitly denies that he is advocating salvation by social gospel. The only way of salvation is by faith in Christ.<sup>73</sup>

One of the issues with which Brunner concerns himself is the relationship of morality and religion. In "Gibt es eine allgemeine neutrale Staatsmoral?" Brunner asserts that for a Christian there can be only one morality--a

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<sup>70</sup> Emil Brunner, "Die Aufgabe der Christen an der Welt," Monatsblatt der Evangelischen Gesellschaft des Kantons Zürich, IX, No. 2 (1926), 17.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

morality based on the Christian faith.<sup>74</sup> The following year another article appeared on a similar topic, "Gibt es eine religionslose Moral?" Brunner answers his own question thus: "Ja, wenn wir darunter einfach ein bestimmtes Verhalten verstehen und nicht nach seinem tiefsten Motiv fragen. Nein, wenn wir nach der innersten Gesinnung fragen."<sup>75</sup> Faith and the truly good are one.

To the question, "Gibt es geistliches Recht?" which appeared in the form of an article in Kirchenblatt für die reformierte Schweiz, Brunner gives a negative answer. "Die Gotteserkenntnis ist zwar Quelle alles Rechtsbewusstseins, aber als Quelle nicht zu 'fassen' in die Begriffe des von ihm abgeleiteten Gebietes."<sup>76</sup>

Brunner's visit to America in 1919/1920 left vivid impressions upon the Swiss theologian, many of them in the area where religion and social concerns meet. These impressions appeared in print in three installments under the title "Aus dem weniger bekannten Amerika." Brunner was impressed, on the one hand, by the teamwork and unity of spirit in such religious organizations as the Federal

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<sup>74</sup> Emil Brunner, "Gibt es eine allgemeine neutrale Staatsmoral?" Neue Züricher Zeitung, January, 1927, No. 77.

<sup>75</sup> Emil Brunner, "Gibt es eine religionslose Moral?" Schweizer evangelisches Schulblatt, LXIII, No. 6 (1928), 197.

<sup>76</sup> Emil Brunner, "Gibt es geistliches Recht?" Kirchenblatt für die reformierte Schweiz, XLI, No. 9 (1926), 35.

Council and the Interchurch World Movement; on the other hand, he was extremely unhappy with the strong denominationalism among the Protestant churches.<sup>77</sup> He says that he had no particular love for the Free Church movement before he came to America, nor did it grow there on the basis of what he was able to observe.<sup>78</sup> Liturgical tendencies in some Reformed churches shocked him. He says, "Ich habe sogar reformierte Kirchen gesehen die von einer englischen Hochkirche sich nicht mehr wesentlich unterschieden."<sup>79</sup> But the interest in foreign missions and faith-translated-into-action impressed him deeply. "Glaube, der in der Liebe tätig ist, das ist unbedingt das Ideal und die Richtschnur amerikanischer Frömmigkeit."<sup>80</sup>

#### Brunner on His Contemporaries

In Brunner's periodical literature appear several names of his contemporaries. Sometimes the author writes in order to register agreement with another theologian; often, however, he takes the pen in order to take issue

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<sup>77</sup> Emil Brunner, "Aus dem wenig bekannten Amerika," Kirchenblatt für die reformierte Schweiz, XXXV, No. 37 (1920), 147.

<sup>78</sup> Emil Brunner, "Aus dem wenig bekannten Amerika," Kirchenblatt für die reformierte Schweiz, XXXV, No. 38 (1920), 150.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Emil Brunner, "Aus dem wenig bekannten Amerika," Kirchenblatt für die reformierte Schweiz, XXXV, No. 39 (1920), 153.

with a point of view not his own. Below reference is made to Brunner's articles that show his views concerning some of his contemporaries.

Brunner's book review of Karl Barth's Der Römerbrief gives a good indication of the likemindedness of the two Swiss theologians in the nineteen-twenties. Brunner speaks highly of Barth's ability as a scholar<sup>81</sup> but reserves the real praise for Barth's interpretation of Pauline metaphysics.<sup>82</sup> He implies that Barth's book may not be the last word in the newly rediscovered approach to God-man relationship. This, however, does not detract from the sincere praise that he accords to his friend's work.

Das Entscheidende aber ist, dass endlich wieder einmal einer gemerkt hat, dass es eine dritte Dimension gibt, und zwar einer, der auch das Zeug hat, uns mitzuteilen, was man da sieht; dass er sich's angelegen sein liess, endlich einmal das Vielerlei der modernen Fragestellungen beiseite zu lassen und dem Zentralgedanken der Bibel auch wirklich zum alles beherrschenden Mittelpunkt zu machen: Erkenntnis der überweltlichen Reichsgottesbewegung, die in Jesus aus dem Verborgenen ins Sichtbare tritt und in ihm ihr Ziel enthält: Immanuel.<sup>83</sup>

In a review of Spengler's The Decline of the West Brunner speaks highly of the German philosopher's achievement.

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<sup>81</sup> Emil Brunner, "Der Römerbrief von Karl Barth," Kirchenblatt für die reformierte Schweiz, XXXIV, No. 8 (1919), 29.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 32.

What Einstein is in the field of science, Spengler seems to be for philosophy and history, as far as present-day importance is concerned: the storm center of discussion and the focus of interest.<sup>84</sup>

In his opinion The Decline of the West "Is the confession of a brilliant, rich, original thinker who has lost hope forever."<sup>85</sup> Brunner concludes with a few words of advice:

If we want to get out of this atmosphere of despair we shall move to get our help from some deeper source than the reservoir of the conception of a shallow modernity, of a superficial, decadent era. We shall have to look out for a sphere beyond the stream of change, for eternal truth.<sup>86</sup>

A controversy with Dr. Ludwig Köhler, an Old Testament scholar at the University of Zürich, was the occasion for three articles. Brunner was offended by Dr. Köhler's article on the historicity of the Fall. In "Die Erde dreht sich" Brunner attacks "die Ehrfurchtlosigkeit und schulmeisterliche Herablassung, mit der er [Köhler] von dieser Geschichte fast wie von einem Ammenmärchen spricht."<sup>87</sup> Brunner then proceeds to put forth his own position concerning the historicity of the account. Careful attention must be paid to the quote below, because it sheds light on his concept of Urgeschichte.

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<sup>84</sup> Emil Brunner, "The Decline of the Occident: A Book Review," The World Tomorrow, IV, No. 11 (1921), 350.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p. 351.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Emil Brunner, "Die Erde dreht sich," Kirchenblatt für die reformierte Schweiz, XLI No. 29 (1926), 113.



Die Geschichtliche Welt aber--das was wir so kennen und nennen--beginnt diesseits des Urstandes als Folge des Falls und wird beendet durch die Erlösung, die ebensowenig wie jener ein Zustand des geschichtlichen Menschen ist, da ihr ja gerade die Merkmale des Geschichtlichen: Tod, Sünde, Gesetz, Elend, fehlen.<sup>88</sup>

For Köhler there were only two possible interpretations: to consider the Fall historical or to give it a psychological interpretation. He chose the latter.<sup>89</sup> Because of this position Brunner accuses him of Pelagianism in "Duplik," another article on the same subject.<sup>90</sup> Brunner himself takes the act of the Fall seriously. In what he considers a theological interpretation, he proposes the Urgeschichte concept. Urgeschichte is not part of human, time-space history but lies in another dimension.<sup>91</sup>

Brunner contends in "Der Sündenfall und die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft" that the real difference between him and his opponents, like Köhler, in interpreting the Old Testament is this, that they regard the Biblical record as an important religious document, whereas he holds it to be the Word of God.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>88</sup>Ibid., p. 114.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid., p. 115.

<sup>90</sup>Emil Brunner, "Duplik," Kirchenblatt für die reformierte Schweiz, KLI, No. 36 (1926), 142.

<sup>91</sup>Emil Brunner, "Der Sündenfall und die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft," Die Christliche Welt, XL, No. 20 (1926), col. 997.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid., col. 996.

Commenting on Geistproblem der Theologie, by Dr. Schäder, a theologian from Breslau, Brunner maintains in "Theozentrische Theologie?" that the former has failed to understand Dialectical Theology. Brunner complains that Schäder's books contain nothing about justification.<sup>93</sup> "Schäder just does not seem to realize that Dialectical Theology does not have its roots in the philosophical paradox of finite and infinite but in the teaching of justification."<sup>94</sup> He does not have a theocentric theology.

After having heard Max Scheler's lecture on anthropology, Brunner registers disapproval in "Der Geist und die Triebe in der Geschichte." He criticizes sharply Scheler's philosophical presentation:

Welche Dekadenz der Philosophie, die Philosophie der Dekadenz ernst zu nehmen und sie mit ihrem eigenen Mitteln gesund machen zu wollen.<sup>95</sup>

Whenever Brunner has occasion to speak of Hermann Kutter, it is always in terms of praise. His short article, "H. Kutter," in 1927 proves to be no exception. He sums up Kutter's message succinctly: "das Wort von der einen grossen Hilfe."<sup>96</sup> The following words which Brunner directs

<sup>93</sup> Emil Brunner, "Theozentrische Theologie?" Zwischen den Zeiten, IV, No. 2 (1926), 183.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Emil Brunner, "Der Geist und die Triebe in der Geschichte," Neue Züricher Zeitung, Juni, 1926, No. 999.

<sup>96</sup> Emil Brunner, "H. Kutter," Neue Züricher Zeitung, April, 1927, No. 641.

to Kutter's work apply equally well to Brunner himself.

Ist doch sein ganzes Denken und Schaffen die Entladung einer einzigen leidenschaftlichen Spannung, die durch die zwei Pole erzeugt ist: die Not der Zeit und die Gewissheit der ewigen Welt, die aus der Bibel leuchtet.<sup>97</sup>

In 1928 Brunner published an article entitled "Grisebachs Angriff auf die Theologie," in which he commended Grisebach for the development of the concept of reality<sup>98</sup> and for his criticism of idealism.<sup>99</sup> He criticized Grisebach, however, for the latter's attack on systematic theology.<sup>100</sup> The article is interesting because it contains one of the few references to Paul Tillich to be found in Brunner's writings. It reads thus, "Tillich ist ebenso bestimmt Religionsphilosoph und nicht Theolog, als Barth und wir nicht Religionsphilosophen, sondern Theologen sind."<sup>101</sup>

The brief survey of the periodical literature of the Critical Period indicates that Brunner's interests are wider than his major works would lead one to believe. Particularly in the areas of practical theology and social

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<sup>97</sup>Ibid.

<sup>98</sup>Emil Brunner, "Grisebachs Angriff auf die Theologie," Zwischen den Zeiten, VI, No. 3 (1928), 222.

<sup>99</sup>Ibid., p. 232.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid., p. 229.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid., p. 231, n. 5.

concerns the articles offer information not available elsewhere. Brunner's concern for man in crisis is total in scope. Man's spiritual need finds its solution in a personal God-and-man relationship in Christ. His social needs, if taken seriously, find their solution in Christian behavior of all true believers. Brunner urges all Christians to become what they are in Christ.

#### Clearing the Ground

The basic principle of subjectivism, the disclosure of the absolute in the realm of feeling, is foreign to Christianity. Brunner points out that in the mystical

## CHAPTER VIII

### MAJOR THEMES IN BRUNNER'S THEOLOGY OF THE CRITICAL PERIOD

The purpose of this chapter is to pull together the main themes that Brunner developed in his theology during the Critical Period. No attempt is made to be exhaustive. Rather, the aim is to present an overview of the basic Christian teachings, as Brunner understood and interpreted them. As seen above, much of Brunner's energy in the Critical Period was spent on clearing the field of theology of the misconceptions of subjectivism, rationalism, historicism, and orthodoxy. Once the ground was cleared, the tremendous task of reestablishing and formulating a truly Christian theology made its claim upon his keen mind, indefatigable energy, and selfless dedication to the cause of Christ. During the Critical Period he established the foundations for all major Christian teachings upon which he continued to build through the years elaborate edifices of polished scholarly works.

#### Clearing the Ground

The basic principle of subjectivism, the disclosure of the Absolute in the realms of feeling, is foreign to Christianity. Brunner points out that in the mystical

subjectivism of Schleiermacher as well as in the subjectivism of the contemporary neo-romanticists Christianity loses its unique position among the religions of the world. According to subjectivism,

The essence of religion is the same in every religion; it is experience through feeling of unity with the universe, although always and everywhere it assumes a different individual expression and is capable of different degrees of clearness.<sup>1</sup>

This universal religion is in sharp contrast to Christian revelation.<sup>2</sup> Mysticism and the Word of God are mutually exclusive.<sup>3</sup>

Rationalism on the other hand holds that "the ground of all intellectual life is God Himself and revelation is the gradually increasing consciousness of this ground that is accomplished in history."<sup>4</sup> The ground of reason is regarded as divine. Consequently man becomes the measure of all things.

The rational man assumes a closed universe, as it were, an unbroken continuum of truth, a circle of varieties which are the objects of both of mathematical science and of theological enquiry. So man makes himself the

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<sup>1</sup> Emil Brunner, The Philosophy of Religion From the Standpoint of Protestant Theology, translated by A. J. D. Farrer and Bertram Lee Woolf (London: James Clarke & Co., LTD., 1937), p. 44. Hereafter referred to as The Philosophy of Religion.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Emil Brunner, Die Mystik und das Wort (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1924), p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> Brunner, The Philosophy of Religion, p. 37.

judge of all truth; and, in so doing, he shows himself to be uncritical.<sup>5</sup>

Monism of reason opposes faith in Christian revelation.<sup>6</sup>

Historicism surrenders Christianity into the hands of relativism. The Biblical history is regarded merely as a phase of universal history, and the history of Israelite and Christian religion becomes "only one wave of the great stream of the history of religion in general."<sup>7</sup> Again the distinctly Christian character of revelation is lost.

Orthodoxy or fundamentalism "errs in its insistence on the rigidity and finality of its form, which, because of its lack of critical insight, it assumes to be essential to its existence."<sup>8</sup> Brunner further claims that orthodoxy has always tried to prove by historical arguments that Jesus was the God-man. This attempt at historical proof has brought orthodoxy in conflict with science.<sup>9</sup> Brunner has no sympathy with the orthodox position concerning the Scriptures. He says,

Once the fatal step is taken of regarding Scripture as true in itself, as revelation in itself, it is obvious that this quality applies equally to every

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<sup>5</sup>Emil Brunner, The Theology of Crisis (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1930), p. 15.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>7</sup>Brunner, The Philosophy of Religion, p. 48.

<sup>8</sup>Brunner, The Theology of Crisis, p. 18.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

single part of Scripture down to the smallest detail.<sup>10</sup>

He labels such an interpretation atomism and holds it directly responsible for the development of the "unspiritual" dogma of verbal inspiration.<sup>11</sup>

It was not enough, however, just to expose the dangers and misconceptions of past theological thinking. A new constructive formulation of the Christian faith was needed. A brief sketch of Brunner's answer to this need follows below.

#### The Supreme Question

Brunner does not take the question "Is there a God?" seriously. He says, "The only answer to such a question is that of the Greek philosopher, who, when asked about God by an idler, kept a persistence silence."<sup>12</sup> Brunner continues,

It is really a sign of mental disorder when a man asks, "Is there a God?" One might almost say that this is the question of an insane man--a man who can no longer see things simply, clearly and calmly as they are.<sup>13</sup>

In Brunner's theological writings God's existence is

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<sup>10</sup> Brunner, The Philosophy of Religion, p. 34.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Emil Brunner, Our Faith, translated by John W. Rilling (London: SCM Press LTD., 1956), p. 13.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 15.



taken for granted a priori. This fact leads to what he calls the supreme question.

Can we or can we not know God? This question is not one among many others; because it is not concerned with a truth among other truths. It is the question out of which all other questions originate, from which all values derive their worth, all meanings their content. It is the supreme question, because it aims at the heart of all existence, at the meaning and destiny of all life. It is the primary question even for those who are not aware of it, because it also includes their destiny, and the destiny of all science and culture, which perhaps seems more important to them. For all culture, including science, has grown and still grows out of the faith that human existence has a meaning. And this belief is an outgrowth of religion.<sup>14</sup>

In his writings Brunner constantly deals with the knowledge of God. He is not interested in metaphysical speculations about God's being. One finds little concern for the symbol of Trinity in his writings, although he does hold to the Christian conception of the Triune God.<sup>15</sup> He has the following to say on the subject,

The doctrine of the Trinity is a theological doctrine, not a scriptural proclamation (*κηρυγμα*). It is not a message to be preached. It is a defensive doctrine, which would not have been necessary at all if the two fundamental statements of the Christian creed had been allowed to stand: God alone can save, and Christ alone is this divine salvation.<sup>16</sup>

The answer to the knowledge of God is revelation.

<sup>14</sup>Brunner, The Theology of Crisis, p. 27.

<sup>15</sup>Emil Brunner, "Der Zorn Gottes und die Versöhnung durch Christus," Zwischen den Zeiten, V, No. 2 (1927), 109.

<sup>16</sup>Emil Brunner, The Mediator, translated by Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1947), p. 276.

## Revelation

According to Brunner, natural man has always had some knowledge of God.<sup>17</sup> The able scholar, Lorenz Volken, has summarized Brunner's concept of the natural knowledge of God thus: "Es gibt nicht nur eine Schriftoffenbarung, sondern auch eine Schöpfungsoffenbarung, d. h. eine allgemeine Offenbarung Gottes in der Natur, im Gewissen und in der Geschichte."<sup>18</sup> The revelation in creation must not be taken lightly, for through it man becomes really man. Because of natural revelation he is a responsible being, related to God and accountable for his sin.<sup>19</sup> The natural knowledge of God by itself, however, is insufficient and misleading. Without Divine intervention it leads to idolatry. The distinct Christian revelation is the once-for-all event in which the Word of God became flesh.<sup>20</sup> This revelation is the foundation of the Christian faith.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Emil Brunner, "The Absoluteness of Jesus," Union Seminary Review, XLVI (1935), 280.

<sup>18</sup> Lorenz Volken, Der Glaube bei Emil Brunner (Freiburg, Schweiz: Paulusverlag, 1947), p. 11.

<sup>19</sup> George L. Luecke, "A Study of the Relation Between Brunner's General Concept of Revelation and His Christology," (Unpublished Bachelor's Thesis, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 1952), p. 7.

<sup>20</sup> Emil Brunner, "Inspiration und Offenbarung," Der Kirchenfreund, LXI, No. 2 (1927), 17.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

the christian religion . . . is not based upon a series of events, but upon one single event; moreover, it is fully conscious that this one fact of revelation, this event which took place once for all is unique.  $\epsilon\phi \ \& \ \pi\alpha \ \xi$ , once for all, this is the category to which the Christian revelation belongs. The Scriptures bear witness to this unique character of the Christian revelation--a revelation which can never be repeated.<sup>22</sup>

### Christ the Word

The Word, God in the flesh, is God's way of revealing Himself to man.

only because this divine Logos Himself, in an incomprehensible way, in a way which is a stumbling-block to the intellect, comes to us: no, came to us in a contingent historical event, is it possible to know Him and to share in His life.<sup>23</sup>

This is not meant to imply that Christ is exhaustively revealed in history. The real Christ is not visible to the eyes of a historian at all. "To see the revelation of God in Christ is a gracious privilege of faith, of the believer and not of the historian, . . ."<sup>24</sup> It is of interest how Brunner relates the Eternal Son of God, Jesus Christ and the word of Scripture.

The real gift of God is always His Word; but the message of prophecy does not fully express this intention. For it is still only a word about the Word. The real Word is the personal Word, which is identical with His personal presence. This Word, as a personal

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<sup>22</sup>Brunner, The Mediator, p. 25.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 214.

<sup>24</sup>Brunner, The Theology of Crisis, p. 42.

Presence, is Christ, the Eternal Son, the Word which was from the beginning. Therefore He is the fulfilment of all the action and all the speech of God.<sup>25</sup>

He makes no attempt to explain the mystery of incarnation, but simply admits that man does not know how it could be possible that "an historical man is the Eternal Son."<sup>26</sup> It is best, according to Brunner, not to attempt to probe into the mystery. By faith the believers hold that in the Jesus of history they can behold the Eternal Son. They believe that in Him God Himself meets man. To put it in his own words, "the knowledge that in Jesus Christ the barrier which separates us from the Creator has been transcended, so that now God really meets us personally, constitutes the real knowledge of Christ."<sup>27</sup>

#### Personal Encounter

Brunner is convinced that the Christian truth comes into being only when and where God encounters man personally. God's Thou must meet man's I. In revealing Himself, Christ is not the object of thought but a person who meets man.<sup>28</sup> Christ is not to be found through reflection. He Himself must take the first step and address

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<sup>25</sup>Brunner, The Mediator, p. 410.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 411.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Brunner, "Inspiration und Offenbarung," p. 38.

man. The following quotation from The Theology of Crisis vividly depicts the responsibility of man in the encounter between God and His foremost creature.

There is nothing so solitary and personal as the call of God and the personal "Yes" in response to it. No other being can share with a man this responsibility; the last decisive step must be taken absolutely by one's self alone.<sup>29</sup>

The encounter must not be measured in terms of time. It has no duration, but is only a moment (Augenblick).

Brunner puts it thus,

es ist der Augenblick, darin die Zeit sich erfüllt, weil in ihm der Sinn aller Zeit geoffenbart wird, der Augenblick, wo die verborgene Einheit, der verborgene Grund aller Dinge selbst hervortritt.  
 . . .<sup>30</sup>

In order to come in contact with Christ, something particular is needed which every man does not have simply because he is man. The "something" comes to man from the outside. Man meets Christ through the Scriptures and through the proclamation of the kerygma.<sup>31</sup>

#### The Scriptures

In no sense is the Bible to be understood as a revealed object. It is not a book of divinely revealed truths on

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<sup>29</sup>Brunner, The Theology of Crisis, p. 82.

<sup>30</sup>Emil Brunner, "Christliche Glaube nach reformierter Lehre," Der Protestantismus der Gegenwart (Stuttgart: Bohnenberger, 1926), p. 405.

<sup>31</sup>Brunner, "The Absoluteness of Jesus," p. 275.

the order of an encyclopedia.

For unperverted Christian faith . . . Scripture is only revelation when conjoined with God's spirit in the present. The testimonium spiritus sancti and the clarity of God's word are one and the same thing.<sup>32</sup>

For Brunner the Bible is a very human book and at the same time it is the echo of the voice of God. The Swiss theologian claims that the Bible abounds in errors and contradictions. Even the account of the life of Jesus is presumed to be surrounded by unhistorical legends.<sup>33</sup>

Brunner believes it to be characteristic of God to make use of humble vessels in order to convey divine thoughts. He says,

The characteristic "style" of God's revelation is to avail itself of the form of a servant, to humiliate itself deeply and suffer descent into earthly frailties, not to thrust itself on man's view with the pomp of heathen theophanies, but even in the act of revelation to let itself be sought for as something hidden. It is in keeping with God's choice of a small, insignificant, and uncouth people, and with His revelation of His profoundest mystery on the cross of Golgatha, that He gave us His word in a literary document which will give the critics, in the legitimate exercise of their task, enough to do for generations to come.<sup>34</sup>

Yet in that human book Christ is to be found. In it one is confronted with the two great themes of the Christian

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<sup>32</sup>Brunner, The Philosophy of Religion, p. 151.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 155.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 156.

faith: incarnation and reconciliation. The proclamation, based on the evidence of the Biblical accounts, is that "in Christ the Eternal Word became flesh and that the word of reconciliation was spoken by God."<sup>35</sup>

### Man's Predicament

Man is separated from God by sin.

The central point in every human being is his attitude toward God. So far as his attitude toward God is concerned his nature, is perverted, spoiled, and lost. It is God's holiness and righteousness which makes us aware of this subjective fact as an objective fact; since our attitude toward God has been perverted, God's attitude toward us has also been changed.<sup>36</sup>

Brunner takes both the Fall and Original Sin seriously.

The former is an idea in which "the inexplicable character of evil finds its clearest expression";<sup>37</sup> the latter conveys the concept of separation of man from his origin, not only as a mere act but also as destiny.<sup>38</sup>

Sin affects the nature of man as a whole. The totality of sin is taken seriously when the depth of its roots is recognized. Brunner explains,

I need to see that evil has roots in the very depths of my nature in order to realize that "I" am really bad. Until I see this I regard evil as something

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., pp. 179f.

<sup>36</sup> Brunner, The Mediator, p. 443.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 144.

<sup>38</sup> Brunner, The Philosophy of Religion, p. 92.

accidental, like a splash of mud, not like something which belongs to "the essence of my nature."<sup>39</sup>

Sin is not only total but it is also universal. In one of the sermons Brunner comments,

Before God we are all one---the one sinner, Adam . . . all poor men, lost men, sick men, in need of a physician. The only real difference between us is that some of us see this and others do not.<sup>40</sup>

### The Atonement

Because fellowship between God and man is broken by sin a special act on the part of God is required to re-establish communion. This special act is divine atonement. Actually both revelation and atonement witness to the same truth: the Mediator.

But because the disturbance of life is still deeper than the disturbance of the system of knowledge, therefore the Atonement is the final and the most profound expression of the whole fact of Christ.<sup>41</sup>

By the atonement the discontinuity between God and man is overcome; the breach between God and the world is healed.<sup>42</sup> Man again responds to God's call and surrenders his life to God's glory in the service of his fellow men.

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<sup>39</sup> Brunner, The Mediator, p. 141.

<sup>40</sup> Emil Brunner, "Zacchaeus, the Publican," Christian Century, XLVII (1930), 396.

<sup>41</sup> Brunner, The Mediator, p. 485.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 486.



## Faith

All that has been said above cannot be known by reason or experience but must be accepted by faith.<sup>43</sup> This faith, a personal decision,<sup>44</sup> a leap,<sup>45</sup> a breakthrough to Jenseits,<sup>46</sup> a return "home,"<sup>47</sup> is the key to Christianity. Without faith there is no Mediator, but only Jesus of Nazareth; no Word of God, but only a book of pious writings, known as the Scriptures; no meaning of history, but a chaos of human experiences; no salvation, but meaningless existence.

To have faith--really have it, means to be a man on the watch. For what faith possesses--really possesses--is the promise of that which as yet it does not possess. Verbum solum habemus.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>Cf. Emil Brunner, Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1921), passim.

<sup>44</sup>Brunner, The Philosophy of Religion, p. 79.

<sup>45</sup>Brunner, Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube, p. 123.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 122.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid.

<sup>48</sup>Brunner, The Philosophy of Religion, p. 191.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE IMPORTANCE AND INFLUENCE OF BRUNNER'S THEOLOGY

In 1954 Paul King Jewett, a conscientious scholar and a thorough student of Brunner's works had the following to say in Emil Brunner's Concept of Revelation, probably the best work on Brunner's theology in English.

Brunner's position among the outstanding theologians of our day has long since [the beginnings of Dialectical Theology] been secure. A guest lecturer in many of the leading centers of sacred learning in Europe and America, his work has been in the highest tradition of theological scholarship both for quality and quantity. He has published over three hundred items, including many learned treatises of the size and proportions customary for German books.<sup>1</sup>

Brunner has come a long way since the days when Dialectical Theology was a new, if not startling, phenomenon on the horizon of Continental Protestantism.

#### The Theology of Crisis

For the part that Brunner played in helping to establish, mold and proclaim the Theology of Crisis he will always be remembered. After the First World War Europeans were suffering a crisis in every walk of life, not the least of which was the loss of spiritual foundations. The

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<sup>1</sup>Paul King Jewett, Emil Brunner's Concept of Revelation (London: James Clarke & Co., LTD., 1954), p. 139.

Protestant theology of the day was not equipped to meet the crisis successfully. Brunner describes the turbulent years as follows,

Protestant theology of our day is in a state of rapid dissolution. This is true of the United States even more than of the Continent or of England. The clearest evidence of it is the decay of theological consciousness. Theologians of to-day are busy confirming the prejudice that theology is something unimportant and secondary, or even harmful to living religion. The modern slogan, "Not doctrine but life, not dogma but practice," is itself a doctrine, even a dogma, but it is not a Christian doctrine nor a Christian dogma. It is the dictum either of an ethical pragmatism or of mysticism. This attitude is characteristic of contemporary theology and religion.<sup>2</sup>

In this environment a young theological movement, the Theology of Crisis, grew into a mighty force. It contradicted every optimism because it took sin seriously; it contradicted every pessimism because it knew the wholly other but gracious God. Its foundation was beyond optimism and pessimism in the deeper, spiritual dimension of faith.<sup>3</sup> God had prepared a favorable time for His message. Many were disappointed in the words of men and eagerly turned to hear the Word of God. Brunner, along with his friend Karl Barth and others, proclaimed the wholly other God, the utter creatureliness of man, the Mediator from sin,

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<sup>2</sup>Emil Brunner, The Theology of Crisis (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1930), p. 2.

<sup>3</sup>H. Jochims, "Dialectical Theology in the English-Speaking World," Union Seminary Review, XLVI, No. 4 (1935), 317.

and the revelation of the divine Word. Such books as Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube and The Mediator, along with Barth's Der Römerbrief, went a long way to convert the crisis in theology into the Theology of Crisis.

#### Brunner and Barth

The two main representatives of Dialectical Theology, Emil Brunner and Karl Barth, are often considered to be of the same school of thought. It is true that the two men were friends during Brunner's Critical Period, both of them proclaiming basically the same message of God's Revelation. It is also a fact that Brunner acknowledges a debt to Barth's theology but that does not mean that he may be considered a mere student of Barth.<sup>4</sup> The thinking of the two men was very much akin because they drew their ammunition from the same source, they were inspired by the same theologians (Kutter, Kierkegaard, et al.) and they fought for the common cause, against common enemies. The two theologians, speaking in harmony, complemented each other's peculiar emphases. Where Barth was weak Brunner usually excelled; where the latter lacked in force the former was most valiant.<sup>5</sup> Brunner's assets were his

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<sup>4</sup>Emil Brunner, "Toward a Missionary Theology," Christian Century, LXIV (1949), 816.

<sup>5</sup>Dale Moddy, "The Problem of Revelation and Reason in the Writings of Emil Brunner," (Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky., 1941), p. 5.

thorough familiarity with past and contemporary philosophical systems and his keen, systematically inclined mind.<sup>6</sup>

A time came, however, soon after Brunner's Critical Period, when the differences which had slowly developed in their theology no longer allowed Barth and Brunner to speak as one voice. Brunner spoke of a general revelation in nature and man, of sustaining grace, of natural ordinances, and of the point of contact between faith and reason. Barth disagreed in no uncertain terms. The two theologians parted company with sharp criticisms for each other's theologies. The break has not as yet begun to heal, as can be seen from Brunner's Offenbarung und Vernunft<sup>7</sup> and Barth's Die Kirchliche Dogmatik.<sup>8</sup> Even the most recent publications of the two men reflect a mutual distrust and a critical attitude.

When the importance of Brunner's theology is discussed, usually the question is raised as to who of the two Swiss theologians is greater. The question is unfortunate, because both of the men have made major contributions to

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<sup>6</sup>Lorenz Volken, Der Glaube bei Emil Brunner (Freiburg, Schweiz: Paulusverlag, 1947), p. 8.

<sup>7</sup>Emil Brunner, Offenbarung und Vernunft (Zürich: Zwingli Verlag, 1941), pp. 78-81.

<sup>8</sup>Karl Barth, Die Kirchliche Dogmatik, II, 1 (Zürich: Verlag der Evangelischen Buchhandlung, A. G. Zollikon, 1940), pp. 107-141.

the theological thinking of the twentieth century. Brunner, most likely, has done more than any other man in interpreting Dialectical Theology to the world at large and in relating it to contemporary civilization. It seems, however, that Barth's voluminous Die Kirchliche Dogmatik and the Barthian school of thought on the Continent overshadow Brunner's accomplishments at the present time (1960). Only the future generations will be able to judge with any degree of certainty as to which of the two men has made a more lasting contribution to Christian thinking.

#### Brunner's Influence on American Theology

Since Brunner's message was not calculated to please his audiences, he made both friends and enemies. Because he spoke also in English, his theological emphases could not be ignored for very long by the American theologians. The old liberal school of thought did not understand Brunner's message. In 1929 the following words appeared in The Journal of Religion:

That the ideas as to what is probably held by these men [Brunner, et al.] differ so greatly from those of most present-day students of religion is nothing short of a calamity. They are men of real power. For their energy, ability, and genuine piety one can have only the greatest respect, and their aim, to make religion more vigorous in a materialistic age, awakens only approval. The pity of it is that the ideas which seem most important to them are those in which the modern man is least able to find meaning. Perhaps the fault is with the modern age and

not with these theologians. That is their claim, but they have not as yet made it convincing.<sup>9</sup>

When this article appeared, interest in Brunner's theology had already begun to grow. His visit to seven leading American seminaries in 1928, and the subsequent publication of the lectures, The Theology of Crisis (1929), helped to introduce him to theologically literate America.

In 1930 Wilhelm Pauck offered high praises of Brunner's personal ability, but was noncommittal in accepting his theology. He said,

As a matter of fact, he [Brunner] is almost uncanny in his ability to analyze and to criticize problems. He leaves in his readers a profound feeling of discomfort, even if they will not accept his conclusions. But if they will make his arguments their own, they cannot but enthusiastically follow him.<sup>10</sup>

Three years later a former teacher of Brunner, Eugene William Lyman of Union Theological Seminary, labeled Brunner's thinking a philosophical scepticism based on an arbitrary sanction of dogma. He feared that such a theology would sacrifice the ethical importance of Christ's high ideals and values.<sup>11</sup> The same year Holmes Rolson, one of the first among the young American theologians to speak in

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<sup>9</sup>Julius Bixley, "Emil Brunner as a Representative of the Theology of Crisis," The Journal of Religion, IX (1929), 459.

<sup>10</sup>William Pauck, "The Gospel According to Karl Barth," Christian Century, XLVII (1930), 304.

<sup>11</sup>Moody, op. cit., p. 8. The remarks are based on Layman's work, The Meaning and Truth of Religion (1933).

favor of Brunner, expressed his conviction that God was using the young Swiss theologians to call men back to His Word.<sup>12</sup> Since that time Brunner's influence has grown in America. Most Protestant theologians have some acquaintance with his theological thought patterns. However, his influence must not be overestimated. A comprehensive work on his theology still waits to be written in the English language. Theologians with liberal views complain that his message bears marks of neo-orthodoxy.<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, the fundamentalistic Reformed theologians, with Cornelius Van Til as their spokesman, consider his Dialectical Theology a new modernism. To them Brunner is an enemy in a friendly disguise.<sup>14</sup> Also Lutherans have criticized Brunner. Dr. John T. Mueller, an able theologian of The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, has this to say,

In his theological method Brunner, though in an independent way, has gone back to Schleiermacher and Ritschl, and he continues the trend of liberal theological speculation, which has ever dethroned

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<sup>12</sup>Holmes Rolston, A Conservative Looks to Barth and Brunner (Nashville, Tenn.: Cokebury Press, 1933), p. 8.

<sup>13</sup>Brunner considers it unfair to label his theology by that name. Cf. Brunner, "Towards a Missionary Theology," p. 816.

<sup>14</sup>Cornelius Van Til, The New Modernism (Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1947), p. 3.



Holy Scripture and enthroned in its place perverse and and conceited human reason.<sup>15</sup>

In a recent article another Lutheran writer declared that Brunner is "no longer taken seriously by many today."<sup>16</sup>

From personal observation it seems to the writer that many Protestant groups in America, although not necessarily accepting Brunner's world in detail, are still willing to listen to what the Swiss theologian has to say.<sup>17</sup>

#### Brunner's Influence on the Continent and in Scandinavia

The little country of Switzerland is almost too small for two outstanding theologians of the stature of Emil Brunner and Karl Barth. From the very beginning of his academic career Brunner influenced more people in Zürich than in other parts of Switzerland. Professors Max Huber, Werner Kägi, Arthur Rich, and others of the University of Zürich have high regard for his accomplishments and

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<sup>15</sup> John T. Mueller, "Miscellanea: Notes on Emil Brunner's The Christian Doctrine of God," Concordia Theological Monthly, XVIII, No. 6 (1947), 453.

<sup>16</sup> Robert Preus, "The Word of God in the Theology of Karl Barth," Concordia Theological Monthly, XXXI, No. 2 (1960), 105.

<sup>17</sup> This comment is based on personal contact with the theological thinking at Union Theological Seminary in New York City and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.

acknowledge their debt to him thankfully.<sup>18</sup>

In Germany success came early to Dialectical Theology,<sup>19</sup> but on account of a strong Barthian school of thought, Brunner's influence was less noticeable. There are, however, individual theologians such as Paul Althaus and Helmuth Thielicke who are deeply impressed by Brunner's work.<sup>20</sup>

Brunner's theology has also attracted interest in Roman Catholic circles. Lorenz Volken, possibly the best interpreter of Brunner's theology, has this to say,

Das protestantische Leben und Lehre wird heute [1947] von keinem Theologen so nachhaltig beeinflusst wie von Karl Barth und Emil Brunner. Auch auf katholischer Seite finden sie viel Beachtung.<sup>21</sup>

Volken, critical of some of Brunner's theology,<sup>22</sup> is impressed by the latter's formulation of faith as encounter. He agrees with Brunner,

Wenn Brunner den Glauben als Personbegegnung bestimmt und damit betonen will, dass Glaube nicht ein Sach-Verhältnis sondern ein Person-Verhältnis sei, so

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<sup>18</sup>Cf. Das Menschenbild im Lichte des Evangeliums: Festschrift zum 60. Geburtstag von Emil Brunner (Zürich: Zwingli-Verlag, 1950), pp. v-viii. Also see Der Auftrag der Kirche in der Modernen Welt: Festgabe zum siebenzigsten Geburtstag von Emil Brunner (Zürich: Zwingli Verlag, 1959), pp. 7f.

<sup>19</sup>Pauck, op. cit., p. 304.

<sup>20</sup>Cf. Das Menschenbild im Lichte des Evangeliums: Festschrift zum 60. Geburtstage von Emil Brunner, passim.

<sup>21</sup>Volken, op. cit., p. v.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 163.

ist er durchaus im Recht.<sup>23</sup>

Volken's considered opinion is that Brunner's influence has been wider in scope, if not more profound, than that of his compatriot Karl Barth.<sup>24</sup>

The influence of Brunner's thought on Swedish theology has been real but oblique.<sup>25</sup> The strength of the native confessional Church has kept Dialectical Theology at a distance. The Swedish Lutheran Church has been blessed with enough vitality in its own ranks so as to be able to dispense with foreign leadership. It might be recalled that Swedish theologians Billing and Aulen broke with rationalism and idealism of the nineteenth century before the Theology of Crisis had made an impression on Continental liberalism.<sup>26</sup>

In Finland and Denmark there is evidence of considerable interest in Brunner's theology.<sup>27</sup> It could well be that the Kierkegaardian influence in Denmark has helped to prepare the way for a friendly reception to Brunner's

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<sup>23</sup> <sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 185.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. v.

<sup>25</sup>Ralph Oscar Hjelm, "The Doctrine of the Word of God in the Thought of Emil Brunner and Gustaf Aulen," (Unpublished Master's Thesis, Union Theological Seminary, New York City, 1949), p. 12.

<sup>26</sup>Brunner, "Toward a Missionary Theology," p. 816.

<sup>27</sup>Hjelm, op. cit., p. 12.

thinking. Ralph C. Hjelm thinks that the dynamic character and personal appeal of Brunner's message might be a wholesome influence on the Lutheran theology, which, at its worst, tends to run the danger of encouraging complacency and distorted detachment from the human situation.<sup>28</sup>

#### Brunner's Influence on the Theology of the British Isles

In 1935 a Scottish theologian wrote,

It is too early to begin to assess the influence of the Barthian theology in Great Britain. Seven years ago it was still regarded as a strange and somewhat uncouth phenomenon, clothed in a foreign and unfamiliar garb, and even today there are many among us who have barely begun to understand it. But within the last few years a change has taken place.<sup>29</sup>

The old liberal theologians rejected the new movement but the younger theologians at least listened, even if they did not always agree.<sup>30</sup>

Another Scottish writer, David Cairns, reviewing the theological influences of Brunner, observed that The Divine Imperative (1932) has had a considerable influence on Great Britain.<sup>31</sup> Seeking for an explanation for the

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 60.

<sup>29</sup> John McConnachie, "The Barthian Theology in Great Britain," Union Seminary Review, XLVI, No. 4 (1935), 302.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., pp. 302f.

<sup>31</sup> David Cairns, "The Theology of Emil Brunner," Scottish Journal of Theology, I (1948), 299.

friendly acceptance of Brunner's thought, he commented,

Perhaps the long tradition of selfgovernment in politics of both Switzerland and Britain, and the common sober practicality of the two peoples make our minds open to what he [Brunner] has to say.<sup>32</sup>

Brunner's Man in Revolt and The Divine-Human Encounter were also well received but Justice and Social Order met with more criticism than most of his books.<sup>33</sup> Comparing the respective influence of Brunner and Barth on British theology, Cairns remarked, "As a theologian Brunner has had a far more pervasive influence than Barth, though Barth has affected a smaller number very profoundly."<sup>34</sup> At the time when Cairns wrote this, most of Brunner's works were already available in English translation, thanks to the devoted efforts of Dr. Olive Wyon. Barth's voluminous work, however, still lay buried in difficult German. Now that Barth's works are rapidly becoming available in translation, his influence, no doubt, will increase in the British Isles.

Most affected by Dialectical Theology were the English Methodists, Welsh Calvinists, and Free Churches in general. But his influence was not lacking in the Church of England.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 300.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., pp. 301-303.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 307.

<sup>35</sup>McConnadie, op. cit., p. 302.

It was high praise indeed and an indication of Brunner's influence in the British Isles when the late Donald M. Baillie admitted that "there are few theologians from whom I have learnt more than I have from him [Brunner]." <sup>36</sup>

It is generally true that the traditionally Reformed areas furnish a fertile ground for Brunner's and Barth's Dialectical Theology. <sup>37</sup>

#### Brunner's Influence in Japan

Brunner considered his task in Japan as a missionary endeavour. However, he did not conceive of his work in the same terms as most Christian missionaries do. <sup>38</sup> His appeal was directed particularly toward the non-Christian Japanese intellectuals. Consequently his influence in the Far East spread far beyond the traditional boundaries of the Christian Church. Dr. Joseph M. Kitagawa of the University of Chicago, an expert in comparative religions and well acquainted with the Japanese scene, informed the writer that Brunner's influence was considerable also among

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<sup>36</sup> Donald M. Baillie, God was in Christ: An Essay on Incarnation and Atonement (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948), p. 224, n. 24.

<sup>37</sup> Cairns, op. cit., p. 308.

<sup>38</sup> James Scherer, "Emil Brunner in Japan," Christian Century, LXXI (1954), 922.

the Buddhist intellectuals in Japan.

Perhaps as good an indication as any, of the extent of Brunner's influence on Christian thought, is the fact that his popular summary of the Christian faith, Our Hope, has appeared in English, French, Dutch, Danish, Hungarian, Japanese, Spanish, Italian, Malayan, Tamil, and Korean translations.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Emil Brunner, Our Faith, translated by John W. Rilling (London: SCM Press, LTD., 1956), p. 10.

## CHAPTER X

### A BRIEF SUMMARY SKETCH OF THE CRITICAL PERIOD OF BRUNNER'S THEOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENTS AND WRITINGS

This chapter reviews the highlights of Brunner's Critical Period in the light of his theological developments and writings. Details are omitted for the sake of emphasizing the main structure of the study. Special consideration is given to the course of development of Brunner's theology.

The events and developments in the nineteenth century had a profound effect on the environment in which the young Brunner began to labor. The nineteenth century is best characterized by change and disintegration. Political maneuvering, rising nationalism, and imperialism culminated in a catastrophic World War in the early part of the twentieth century. Marx and Engels in their social theories attacked the very foundations of society. Lamarck, Huxley, Darwin, Freud, and Jung revolutionized the scientific thinking of the age by looking at man as a member of the animal kingdom rather than the crown of God's creation. In religious thinking Schleiermacher's mystic romanticism dominated most of the nineteenth century. His approach to religion was succeeded by Ritschl's and Harnack's



historical critical research and Troeltsch's Religions-geschichtliche Schule. For the majority of cultured Europeans Christianity became just one religion among many, and not the only true religion. Political dreams, utopian economic schemes, faith in scientific progress, and liberalism in religious thinking were shocked back to reality by the cruelties of the First World War. Both winners and losers came to the realization that man cannot be entrusted with the destiny of humanity. Many were ready to accept the message of the new theological movement, the Theology of Crisis, which denounced subjectivism and relativism as vehemently as it proclaimed the wholly other God Who reveals Himself in Jesus Christ. The Crisis in human affairs and theology had prepared a welcome for the Theology of Crisis.

H. Emil Brunner, a Swiss theologian, is one of the outstanding representatives of the new theology which is most correctly designated as Dialectical Theology. He was born in 1889 in Winterthur, near Zürich. During his formal education he came under the influence of the evangelical socialism of Leonard Ragaz and Hermann Kutter. From 1914 to 1928, his Period of Criticism, Brunner was active first in the parish ministry and later served as professor of theology at the University of Zürich. At this time he met Karl Barth and Eduard Thurneysen. Together with them he shaped the message of Dialectical Theology.

During the years that followed, the Period of Conflict (1929-1936), Brunner and Barth parted company after a bitter theological disagreement, mainly in the area of natural theology. At this time Brunner had his first contacts with the Oxford Group movement. In the Period of Personalism (1937-1953) a significant development occurred in Brunner's theology. Beginning with the *Clavus Petri* lectures in Sweden he espoused the symbol of truth as encounter, most likely his major contribution to theological thinking. In his mature years (1953-1955) Brunner became a missionary to the Far East. He believed that God had chosen him for the task of making the Gospel meaningful to the intellectuals in Japan and in the neighboring countries. His Missionary Period came to a premature end when, for reasons of health, he was forced to relinquish his chair at the International Christian University of Tokyo and return home. In recent years Brunner's time has been occupied by writing, occasional lectures, and preaching.

A study of the development of Brunner's thinking reveals that many influences have been at work in producing what makes up the theology of Brunner today. More than the other dialectical theologians he has been influenced by the philosophical heritage and environment. The critical methodology of Immanuel Kant made a lasting contribution to his thought processes. Søren Kierkegaard, the father

of dialecticism, taught Brunner the concepts of Augenblick, Krisis, Entscheidung, Gleichzeitigkeit, Angst, and Paradoxon. No doubt, Kierkegaard's work was the most important single influence on Brunner's theological development. Franz Overbeck convinced Brunner that the events in the history of salvation must not be confused with secular history. Brunner relegates most pivotal events in Christianity to the realm of primordial history (Urgeschichte). Existentialism, a popular philosophical movement of the second quarter of the twentieth century, impressed on Brunner the need of taking the whole person in the totality of life seriously. The predicament of modern man was not something to be ignored but to be diagnosed and healed. The personalism of Ferdinand Ebner and Martin Buber helped to clarify Brunner's thinking on the personal relationship between God and men. The emphasis on personalism was already in evidence in Brunner's early works but reached mature expression in The Divine-Human Encounter. The strong emphasis in Brunner's message on the other task of theology, relating Christianity to secular life, goes back to the evangelical socialist movement. The Blumhardts, Ragaz, and Kutter impressed Brunner to such a degree that he was in danger of equating evangelical socialism with living Christianity. Henri Bergson's philosophy appealed to him mainly because of Bergson's attack on intellectualism.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to evaluate Brunner's theology without some acquaintance with the theological thinking of the past which has, directly or indirectly, helped to mold his thinking. Of the Biblical writers, Paul and John have offered most towards the construction of his theology. In Paul's writings Brunner finds an emphasis on the atonement and on general revelation. Johannine lectures underscore the fact of the special revelation. Of the Church Fathers, Irenaeus occupies a special place of esteem in Brunner's theology, but Athanasius and Augustine are not taken lightly. Brunner has a deep respect for the theology of the Reformation. He was impressed and influenced by Luther's vigorous personality and the bold writings more perhaps than by the systematic treatises of Calvin or the life-related message of Zwingli. It is true, however, that Brunner drew upon the theology of all three Reformers. Much of Brunner's early writing reflects a reaction against Schleiermacher's romantic mysticism which found an expression in Gefühlstheologie. Both Ritschl's and Harnack's studies of the development of dogma and interpretation of the central Christian message inspired a good deal of Brunner's critical theology. Their historical critical methodology, however, was adopted to some extent by the Swiss theologian. Brunner also learned from his contemporaries, Karl Barth, Friedrich Gogarten, Eduard Thurneysen, and others. Particularly

influential was Barth's Der Römerbrief.

Brunner has been a prolific writer from the very beginning of his theological career. During the Critical Period twelve works appeared from his pen. To this must be added a set of popular lectures delivered in America in 1928. They appeared in print a year later as The Theology of Crisis. A study of his writings of this period indicates a definite trend in his theological development. The early writings, particularly Das Symbolische in der religiösen Erkenntnis (1914), indicate unmistakable interest in philosophical argumentation. In Denken und Erleben (1919) he attacked unwarranted reliance on reason in spiritual matters. A short historical work, Die denkwürdige Geschichte der Mayflower-Pilgerväter (1920) added little to Brunner's theology but showed his vital concern for religious liberty and admiration for those who had the courage to stand up for their convictions. Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube (1921) must be considered as the first important work of the Critical Period. It characterizes Brunner's thinking of that time by pointing out that experience, as understood by the romanticists, and knowledge, as understood by the rationalists, do not offer a solution for religious knowledge. Only by faith can man know the wholly other God. The appearance of the book marked Brunner as a dialectical theologian. The following year he dealt again with the inadequacies of reason and feeling

in the realm of spiritual matters (Die Grenzen der Humanität). Die Mystik und das Wort (1924), a comprehensive critique of Schleiermacher's epistemology, contained a bitter attack on Gefühlstheologie. The work has more historical value than theological significance. It, however, established Brunner as a talented theologian from whom much could be expected in the future. During 1925 and 1926, which might be called a transition period, a tried of short critical works appeared. Reformation und Romantik, Philosophie und Offenbarung, and Die Absolutheit Jesu dealt respectively with the weaknesses of romanticism, the relationship of reason and revelation, and the absolute character of man's faith in Christ. Especially in the last mentioned work it is evident that Brunner's interests were beginning to turn toward conservative theology.

Christlicher Glaube nach reformierter Lehre (1926), a short dogmatics in outline, offered further indication that Brunner was ready to begin a constructive reevaluation of the Christian dogmas. The Philosophy of Religion (1927), a compact summary of Brunner's critical work, may be considered a prolegomena to The Mediator. The Mediator (1927), a comprehensive study of Christology, has no equal in Brunner's writings of the Critical Period. It clearly demonstrates that the author had ripened into a mature theologian who was even more capable in formulating theology than he had been in exposing its past weaknesses. It also

indicated that the author regarded Christology as the central doctrine of the Christian faith. The American lectures (1928) offered a popular introduction to Dialectical Theology.

A study of Brunner's periodical literature of the Critical Period shows the wide variety of interests and activities which claimed the author's attention. A number of the articles describe the critical situation of Protestant theology. Another group of essays and shorter articles deals primarily with theological issues. Emphasis is laid on the concept of revelation, but a variety of subject matter is considered. The stress on practical theology, which is lacking in Brunner's books of this period, is prominent in periodical literature. Pastoral concerns, educational issues, homiletics, and related subjects receive frequent consideration. The articles indicate clearly that Brunner did not conceive of his theology in a vacuum but only in relation to the needs of the people. Also man's social needs are taken seriously. This is another area where the periodical literature adds to the total picture of Brunner's theology during the Critical Period. Several magazine articles dealing with Brunner's evaluation of his contemporaries are of interest. His comments on Karl Barth's Der Römerbrief and Ludwig Köhler's interpretation of the historicity of the Old Testament accounts deserve special attention.

Several major themes are recognizable in Brunner's early theology. Much of his energy was channeled into exposing the weaknesses of subjectivism and rationalism. Once the ground was clear of past misconceptions, he began to construct a theology which spoke of the wholly other God Whom man could know only through revelation. Brunner acknowledged a natural knowledge of God but insisted that Christ the Word is the only form of revelation through which man can know the true nature of God and His will. God meets man personally in Jesus Christ. The Bible is both a human and a divine book. According to Brunner, it contains erroneous statements, but it also proclaims the Eternal Word Who became flesh and brought reconciliation. Sin is taken seriously, and so is the atonement. By the atonement the discontinuity between man and God is overcome so that man once again is able to respond to God's call. Brunner offers no scientific proof for the theology that he has outlined. He contends that man cannot know spiritual things by reason, experience, or external authority. Only faith, a breakthrough to Jenseits, can fill the meaninglessness of existence with the assurance of salvation.

Only some indication of the importance and influence of Brunner's theology can be given at the present time. Future generations will be in a better position to judge the lasting value of his theology. There seems little



doubt, however, that his services in helping to construct the Theology of Crisis, have secured him a prominent place in the history of twentieth century theology. At present his compatriot, Karl Barth, seems to overshadow Brunner's accomplishments. It must be kept in mind, however, that Brunner's efforts to interpret Dialectical Theology to the world and relating it to contemporary civilization are surpassed by none of the dialectical theologians. When Brunner first lectured in America, the liberal theologians failed to grasp his message. Although through the years his influence has grown in American Protestant circles, many groups reject his theology completely. Theologians with liberal tendencies regard his message as a new orthodoxy. The fundamentalistic Reformed theologians, on the other hand, are convinced that his theology must be considered a new modernism. There are, however, Protestant groups in the United States which are willing to pay attention to what Brunner has to say.

Continental Protestantism is heavily dominated by a Barthian brand of Dialectical Theology. Of the Scandinavian countries, Denmark and Finland are most susceptible to Brunner's formulations of the kerygma. Brunner's influence on the theology of the British Isles has been of considerable importance. Particularly the Scottish Free Churches have been friendly. His influence extends to the Far East where it has made an impression even on the non-Christian intellectual elements.

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