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### Emil Brunner and his Idea of Christian Philosophy

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**EMIL BRUNNER AND HIS IDEA OF "CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY"**

**A thesis**

**presented to the faculty of  
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri**

**in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree**

**of**

**Bachelor of Divinity**

**by**

**Vernon Boriack**

**Concordia Seminary  
April 26, 1948**

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THE STATE OF HIS IDEA OF "CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY"

(Outline)

**Centralizing Purpose:** To investigate and criticize Emil Brunner's idea of "Christian philosophy."

**Introduction:**

A brief historical survey of the conflict between reason and revelation originating in Barth and Brunner of the

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## EMIL BRUNNER AND HIS IDEA OF "CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY"

### (Outline)

**Controlling Purpose:** To investigate and criticize Emil Brunner's idea of "Christian philosophy."

#### Introduction:

A brief historical survey of the conflict between reason and revelation culminating in Barth and Brunner of the Dialectical School.

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vertical work on the side of the Christian Church since the Church's inception some nineteen hundred and fifty years ago. Christ Himself had to struggle with it when He encountered the Sadducees, and His awareness of the perpetual antagonism between the wisdom of men and the wisdom of God is contained in His prayer: "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes." St. Paul was philosophy's ugly head among his beloved Corinthian epistle and he warned his words in warning them that "the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God." St. Paul brought the point that the Corinthians were being enticed by philosophy's four arguments, Paul warned the alike: Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit,

1. Luke 10:21 and Matthew 11:25, 26.  
 2. I Corinthians 1:19.

## EMIL BRUNNER AND HIS IDEA OF "CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY"

### Introduction

Philosophy, it can truthfully be said, has been a proverbial thorn in the side of the Christian Church since the Church's inception some nineteen hundred and fifty years ago. Christ Himself had to entangle with it when He encountered the Sadducees, and His awareness of the perpetual Armageddon between the wisdom of men and the wisdom of God is contained in His prayer: "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes."<sup>1</sup> St. Paul saw philosophy raise its ugly head among his beloved Corinthians and he minced no words in warning them that "the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God."<sup>2</sup> When Epaphras brought the report that the Colossians were being enticed by philosophy's fond allurements, Paul sounded the alarm: Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit,

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1. Luke 10:21 and Matthew 11:25,26.

2. I Corinthians 3:19.

after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world and not after Christ."<sup>3</sup>

But that was only the small beginning. Apostolic Fathers such as Ignatius, Clement and Papias, who expounded Christianity around the end of the first century were thoroughly tainted with philosophical notions. Indeed, Clement's view of the relation between Christ and the Church did not differ essentially from that of the Gnostic Valentine. The Greek Apologists who followed were so saturated with Stoic and Philonic ideologies that for most of them Christianity was little more than the highest philosophy. Justin (b. ca. 100) spoke as a true representative of that school when he said: "I found this philosophy alone (Christianity) to be safe and profitable."<sup>4</sup> Origin (d. 254) was as much a philosophical idealist as an orthodox traditionalist. Much more successful in breaking away from the adhesive tentacles of Greek and Judaistic thought were Tertullian (d. ca. 230), Irenaeus (d. ca. 202) and particularly Athanasius (d. 370). Yet notable vestiges of the foreign element remained even in their thinking, speaking and writing. Nor was St. Augustine (b. 354) completely victorious in shaking off that philosophical indoctrination which had characterized the education of his youth. And thus the struggle continued. By the time Anselm (d. 1109) appeared on the scene, the

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3. Colossians 2:8.

4. E. H. Klotsche, A History of Christian Doctrine, p. 4.



thorn of philosophy had become firmly embedded in theology's side. Being constantly pricked, rubbed, irritated and never cleanly cut away, it had created for itself a calloused, impenetrable cyst. It had become such a part of the main body of theological thought that Anselm and the rest of the Schoolmen culminating in the mental son of Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274), accepted it unhesitatingly with the whole body of Christian doctrine. They did worse than that. These metaphysicians attempted to strengthen the whole body with the diseased portion. They strove to bolster up Scripture with Aristotle. That briefly is the story of how the conflict came to cease officially within the confines of the Roman Catholic Church.

But the peace was more apparent than real: The Armege-don between philosophy and religion, between reason and revelation was destined to break out again with unexcelled fury. Martin Luther was responsible for that and in the terrific battles he waged against the unification of Christianity with philosophy, he came to loathe the Stagirite with an aversion expressed by him in strong terms like: "the blind, heathen master Aristotle," "this wretched man" and "rancid teller of fables." Even so Luther always maintained that there was a measure of value in the study of philosophy<sup>5</sup> and even some good in Aristotle. Almost at the same time

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5. Cf. Luther, Works of Martin Luther, Holman Edition, Vol. II, pp. 146ff.

Calvin and Melancthon wrestled seriously with the problem of philosophy versus Christianity. Toward the end of the seventeenth century a forceful fifth column began to invade Protestant theology commencing with "the Father of Deism," Lord Herbert Cherbury (d. 1648) of England. His ranks were soon swelled with the addition of such influentials as John Locke and David Hume. Deism and scepticism abetted the rising tide of rationalism articulated in its earlier stages by Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (d. 1716) in his Theodice. This work was basically an attempt to demonstrate the agreement of reason with faith. Leibniz had an able ally in Semler of Halle (d. 1791), who is known as "the Father of German Rationalism." Things went from bad to worse with the propagandizing of Kant's metaphysics of ethics and his purely rationalistic morality as the end of life. In opposition to the frigid Kantian school, Herder (d. 1803) and Jacobi (d. 1819) propagated their philosophies of feeling and experience as the only basis for religion. Thus they prepared the way for Schleiermacher (d. 1834) who, though he claimed to have banished philosophy from theology, constructed a curious, contradictory system of monism and dualism, idealism and realism, rationalism and mysticism, naturalism and supernaturalism, theism and pantheism, all in turn grounded on experience.<sup>6</sup> After

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6. E. H. Klotche, op. cit., p. 314.

Hegel's (d. 1831) synthesis of theology and philosophy, Feuerbach's (d. 1872) atheistic naturalism, Strauss's (d. 1874) heralding of Darwinianism and Ritschl's humanistic, Neo-Kantian ethics, philosophy had so subdued and razed Christian theology that in practically all Europe the struggle between reason and revelation had ended. There was no further enemy left to fight. What was left of true Christianity had so retracted into its own protective shell that little opposition could come from there. Man didn't any longer have to rely upon the fanciful myths and the naive God of Christianity. Being a god in himself he was becoming progressively better and would eventually effect his own salvation through his natural reason and understanding. There was, of course, a vast difference between this cessation of hostilities and that of the Scholastic period. The Scholastic thinkers recognized revelation as valid and made it their starting point in their theological system. They employed philosophy only secondarily. Nineteenth century thought, however, commenced with sheer philosophy and in most cases vehemently denounced revelation or politely forgot about it. Thomism was a harmonization of philosophy with religion; liberalism was a harmonization of religion with philosophy.

It took two World Wars to upset the great scheme of human deification and send the liberals hurrying and scurrying hither and thither like a bunch of frightened, disillusioned rodents seeking escape from a burning harvest barn.

Renovated and more conservative systems moved in to take over. John P. Clelland spoke of this remarkable reaction quite ably in a recent review in The Westminster Theological Journal:

Readers of the Journal are well aware that the older liberalism with its immanentistic theology, its optimistic view of man, its activistic depreciation of doctrine and its cheerful faith that we could 'build Jerusalem in England's green and pleasant land' is no longer the fashion even in America which tends to lag behind in its adaptation of new theological styles. It has been supplanted by the Dialectical Theology of Barth and Brunner.<sup>7</sup>

Dialectical Theology has renewed the age-old conflict between philosophy and Christianity. This new theology does contain many orthodox elements, however it definitely has not succeeded in eliminating all strains of liberalism. It is as ironical as it is true that the struggle is at the present time being waged most intensely in the very domain of the Dialectical School between the two most predominant figures: Barth, of the University of Basle, and Brunner, of the University of Zurich. Professor Brunner recognizes that philosophy has a distinctive, though limited, place within the scheme of Christian doctrine and action, while Barth loudly and unrelentingly decries any attempt to put philosophy in the employ of theology.

Of the two Brunner appears at the present time to be more widely known and received than Barth. John McCreary

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7. John P. Clelland, "A Review of Brunner's Revelation and Reason," in The Westminster Theological Journal, Vol. X, No. 1, (November, 1947), p. 57.

is right in his observation: "Whatever may be the final outcome in this historically significant debate, it can hardly be doubted that in the Anglo-American minds Brunner has found more receptive attitudes for his position than Barth has for his."<sup>8</sup> The very reason why Professor Brunner has found more sympathetic minds in the Anglo-American scene is this that the average theologian of Britain and America still bears a distinctly liberalistic hue, and consequently finds it difficult to reconcile his system with the ultra-dialectic, philosophy-intolerant, absolute transcendentalism of Karl Barth. On the other hand, Brunner's immanent transcendentalism allows a little something for man to exercise his rationalistic gums on, and therefore carries a spirit much more akin to his own. Perhaps this is also why Dr. Brunner is often referred to by the strict Barthians as "the Melanchtonian interpreter of Barth."<sup>9</sup>

It is impossible to measure the effect of the First World War on the theologians who had embraced optimistic liberalism, and the case of Emil Brunner is no exception. His whole theology has undergone a tremendous evolution from an optimistic, social humanism to a pessimistic semi-orthodoxy. The World Cataclysm of 1914-18 brought about

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8. John McCreary, "Brunner the Theological Mediator," in Christendom, Vol. XII, No. 2, (Spring, 1947), p. 186.

9. Vergilius Ferm, "Brunner's Theology of Crisis," in The Lutheran Church Quarterly, Vol 3, (July, 1930), p. 322.

the greatest single change in Brunner's development, but it was only the beginning. As late as 1938-39, upon being invited to lecture at Princeton Theological Seminary, he wrote a frank letter to President Mackay in which he stated that even 1925 was ancient history in his theological evolution and intimated that he had abandoned positions of that bygone era, positions which denied the trustworthiness and historicity of the Holy Gospels.<sup>10</sup> In the following I shall attempt to trace in greater detail the intriguing development of Brunner's life and thought.

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10. Donald G. Barnhouse, "Some Questions for Professor Brunner," in The Presbyterian, Vol. CVIII, No. 18, (May 5, 1938), p. 8.

## I. Brunner's Theological Development

Emil Brunner, the famous Swiss theologian, was born in Winterthur, Switzerland, on December 23, 1889. Like Luther before him, Dr. Brunner proudly returns to the roots of his life and says: "I am deeply rooted in the Swiss soil, for my people lived as farmers in the canton of Zurich for centuries."<sup>11</sup> However, his father was a teacher of Bible and religion in the public schools, and he is said to have performed his task so well that neither Jews nor Catholics objected. Again like Martin, Emil had a devout mother who taught him the truth and reality of God by the time he was three years old, so he declares.

About this time his parents moved to Zurich and there, at the tender age of four, Emil saw his first social preacher in the form of Christoph Blumhardt (1842-1919), son of the notable Johann Christoph Blumhardt (1805-1880), and leader of Social Democracy. Brunner even to this day acknowledges that the spirit of these great men who united spiritual power with social passion are at "the very roots of my life."<sup>12</sup> His second leader of religious socialism, Herman Kutter, whose niece he later married, Brunner came to know

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11. Dale Moody, "An Introduction to Emil Brunner," in The Review and Expositor, Vol. XLIV, No. 3, (July, 1947), p. 312.

12. Ibid.

while in high school. It was this great philosopher and scholar, reader of Plato and the Church Fathers in the original, and renowned preacher, who catechized young, impressive Emil. It is he whom the white-haired Dr. Brunner still reverences with the words: "He was the greatest man I have ever met in my life."<sup>13</sup> But student Brunner was yet to become acquainted with the very founder of Religious Socialism in Europe. Leonhard Ragaz became Brunner's Professor of Systematic Theology at Zurich. "He was our Rauschenbusch - plus Carlyle, and he taught me more than all my liberal teachers combined,"<sup>14</sup> thus Brunner still lauds him. Brunner furthermore credits him with instilling within him the immeasurable worth of personality and community over against all impersonal systems like Nazism and Communism.

Graduation from Zurich saw him change residence to a boy's school in England, where the German speaking Brunner taught French to learn English. He is to this day a brilliant trilinguist to the extent that he bears a typical English accent when he converses in that tongue. This linguistic ability enabled him to keep in touch with every important theological development. The outbreak of World War I forced him to leave England and to become a soldier in the Swiss army. After the war he held a pastorate in Obstalden for some years. Here he discovered two writers who, all in all,

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13. Ibid., p. 313

14. Ibid.



almost had as much influence on him as Karl Barth, namely, St. Paul and Soren Kierkegaard. The Danish Socrates, he yet declares to be "the greatest Christian thinker of modern times."<sup>15</sup>

But 1917 and his first "evangelizing together" with Karl Barth and Edward Thurenysen produced the most catastrophic turn about face. Although then already did he have his first argument with the Professor from Basle, he hastened to pay lasting tribute to him as "the renovator of our theology," and in a review he did not hesitate to assert Barth's Epistle to the Romans to be a "water-shed in modern theology"! Needless to say, these young "crisis theologians"<sup>16</sup> had little difficulty breaking into prominence when the "idea of progress" became a farce and a delusion during the First World War.

The rest of Brunner's story is contained in the volumes and volumes of his writings which can easily fill a shelf three feet long. In addition to St. Paul, Christian Socialism and Kierkegaard, he acknowledges indebtedness to Irenaeus and Augustine, Luther and Calvin, and finally to the Continental personalists. Kant, Heidegger and Feuerbach

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15. Ibid. Brunner quotes and refers to Kierkegaard ad infinitum in all his writings, particularly in Revelation and Reason. As to the great esteem in which he holds his thought, cf. also the remark: "... the very significant observations of Kierkegaard, which have never been properly valued by anyone ... ." Emil Brunner, Revelation and Reason, p. 186, Note: 6.

16. For explanation of "crisis theology" cf. infra, p. 32f.

have influenced him in a negative way, while Overbach and Bultmann and Buber directed him along more positive lines.

We can hardly improve upon Dale Moody, who in his excellent article, "An Introduction to Emil Brunner," distinguishes three distinct periods in Brunner's life and writings. He characterizes these periods as follows:

"(1) the period of criticism in which Brunner searches out the weaknesses of modern theology; (2) the period of conflict in which he goes beyond Barth and the Oxford Group; and (3) the period of personalism in which Brunner comes into his own."<sup>17</sup>

(1) The Period of Criticism (1914-1928). The first notable product of Brunner's pen, his doctoral dissertation, Symbolism and Religious Knowledge (1914), was a firm attack on the false intellectualism and scholasticism which, he declared, was by no means confined to the Middle Ages but had equally wrought havoc in philosophical and theological thought from Kant to Bergson. But we must clearly note already that his solution of the problem is not a disregard of all knowledge. The solution rather lies in this that he who seeks must turn to "a deeper source of knowledge."<sup>18</sup> His criticism of the many impersonal elements in modern civilization began in a mild enough fashion taking the form of

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17. Dale Moody, op. cit., p. 314

18. Barth and Brunner, Natural Theology, trans. Peter Faenhal, p. 71, quoted in ibid.

an address at the Aarau Studentenkonferenz in 1919. Here he maintained that personality, as understood in the light of the Gospel of Christ, has been crushed.

He continued his campaign for personalism in a book called Experience, Knowledge and Faith (1921). In this work he severely took to task the intellectual schematicists who had brought experience and knowledge together apart from faith, who on the basis of their philosophy of the identity of God with man had sought to escape the need of a Mediator. His Habilitations Vorlesung on the occasion of his becoming privatdozent in 1922 at the University of Zurich contained another violent criticism of mechanical, still intellectualism. The name of this work is The Limits of Humanity, and it is most significant in this respect that it contains his primal outline for the relations between revelation and reason, transcendence and immanence. Whereas most theological thinkers of the optimistic school had bound their religious philosophizing to the immanental alone, Brunner now suggested, as a result of the collapse of culture and civilization in World War I, that it is really the transcendent sphere which limits humanity. The Absolute which calls a halt to humanity and which is "the crisis of the human situation, the ground of faith is God."<sup>19</sup>

In 1924, at the age of thirty-five years, Brunner

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19. Emil Brunner, Die Grenzen der Humanität, p. 15, quoted ibid., 315.

became Professor of Systematic and Practical Theology at Zurich. This same significant year saw Professor Brunner fire the biggest blast thus far in his theological career. It was aimed directly at Frederick Schleiermacher and his attempt to substitute religious experience for revelation. Brunner's criticism declared that Schleiermacher, "The Idol of Liberalism," with his motto: "Feeling is all, name and sound is smoke,"<sup>20</sup> had made religious consciousness and speculative rationalism one and the same and had entirely removed the need for the Word of God. The Doctor followed up this initial discharge with a barrage of lesser volumes like: Philosophy and Revelation, Reformation and Romanticism, and The Absoluteness of Jesus.

Because of some friendly criticism from Barth's direction, Brunner now boarded a more constructive train of thought, but still could not relinquish altogether his penchant for criticizing modern theology. He hasn't to this day. His next two important volumes, The Philosophy of Religion and The Mediator appeared almost at the same time (1927), of which the former is prolegomena to the latter. In the former he places greater and more thorough emphasis on the relation of revelation to reason, religious experience, history of religion, and the Bible than ever before. He points out the important distinction between philosophy and

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20. Emil Brunner, Die Mystick und das Wort, p. 5, quoted ibid.

revelation in the following words:

To philosophize is to reflect on the mental grounds, with the assumption that ultimate validity belong to the complex of grounds and consequences developed by the natural reason. Christian faith on the other hand involves recognizing that this complex has been broken into by revelation. It is on this revelation that the affirmations of the Christian faith are grounded.<sup>21</sup>

The Mediator takes up the story from here and clarifies just what is meant by breaking into this complex of grounds of natural reason. It defines also just what is meant by revelation. Here Brunner distinguishes between special and general revelation. Special revelation is the chief characteristic of all popular and social religions. General revelation, on the other hand, belongs to the sphere of philosophical religion, which speaks of an "essence of religion." Concreteness is absolutely essential to special revelation, while to general revelation it is purely accidental. This means that the Christian religion is more intimately connected with popular religions because it is very concrete. It is the historical revelation of Jesus Christ. Yet it differs vastly from popular religions also because it is characterized by "uniqueness" (Einmaligkeit). Here are Brunner's own words: "The Incarnation of the Word is in its very essence a unique event, and this Incarnate

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21. Emil Brunner, The Philosophy of Religion, p. 13. Trans. A. J. D. Farrer and B. L. Woolf, German title: Religionsphilosophie evangelischer Theologie.

Word can only be one, or it is nothing at all."<sup>22</sup> Modern theology has obliterated this important distinction between general and special revelation, and has also forgotten especially that the Christian revelation comes from beyond this mundane creation by a particular, miraculous act of revelation.

(2) The Period of Conflict (1928-1937). By now Dr. Brunner had become a famous theologian, and thus he spent the major portion of 1928-29 fulfilling lecture invitations at the Theological Seminary of the Reformed Church at Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and at various universities throughout Holland. In his last series of lectures he began to accentuate Christian ethics and "the other task of theology," namely, anthropology. Karl Barth became impatient almost immediately, and now began that struggle which was destined to lead to a complete break between the two Swiss dialectical theologians. The conflict began in earnest when the Professor of Zurich in 1929 wrote an article entitled, "The Other Task of Theology." He followed the line suggested by Pascal and Kierkegaard and made human consciousness the point of contact for the Gospel. The Word is never preached to a vacuum but to a self-conscious human being, and thus the Christian theologian must come to recognize anthropology as a legitimate study, while realizing, of course, that the

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22. Emil Brunner, The Mediator, p. 340. Trans. Olive Wyon, German title the same.

message of the Gospel must always come first.

A lecture "On the Orders of God," delivered February 3, 1929, went still further and boldly grounded Christian ethics on the natural orders of Creation. Out of this preliminary lecture grew his monumental tome, The Commandment and the Orders (1932),<sup>23</sup> which Professor Whilhem Pauck of The University of Chicago has referred to as the greatest theological work published in the last generation. It is a brilliant, thought-provoking, widely discussed presentation of the problem set for ethics on the relation of the command of God to the natural orders of society. This is Brunner's reply to the lamentation of the liberals that the discussion of ethics has been sorely lacking in the Dialectical Theology. Dr. Brunner goes to great lengths in establishing Christian ethics on the foundation of the Christian doctrine of the orders of Creation (Schoepfungsordnungen), which he defines accordingly:

By this we mean those existing facts of human corporate life which lie at the root of all historical life as an unalterable presupposition, which, although their historical forms may vary, are unalterable in their fundamental structure, and, at the same time, relate and unite men to one another in a definite way.<sup>24</sup> (Examples would be: marriage, the family, labor, the state, culture, etc.)

Brunner's conclusion is that if God speaks to men through

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23. German title: Das Gebot und die Ordnungen: Entwurf einer protestantisch-theologischen Ethik, trans. Olive Wyon under the title: The Divine Imperative.

24. Emil Brunner, The Divine Imperative, p. 210.

these natural orders, then the immanence of God in the spirit of man and in nature is a problem which Christian theology is forced to face.

This volume will play a significant role in the second chapter of our discussion, "Brunner's Idea of 'Christian philosophy'," because it gives an excellent demonstration of the Christian philosopher in action.

It can be said with few reservations that it was this book that made the dialectical, crisis theology famous outside of the Continent. Professor J. McCreary correctly observes: "It was in the Brunner of The Divine Imperative that the British and American theologians first began to welcome to any appreciable degree the crisis theology that had emerged on the Continent in the opposition of Barth to Herman."<sup>25</sup> But, needless to say, it was anything but welcomed by Karl Barth. Because of its very presupposition that God does speak through nature, and that man can perceive, even though in sin, the revelation of God in the natural orders, the Professor of Basle considered it worthless, yea, worse than worthless. Yet Barth managed to contain his impatient silence until Emil Brunner issued The Question of the Point of Contact in Theology, in which he definitely relates discontinuity to continuity and states that man's formal (in opposition to his material) personality still

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25. John McCreary, op. cit., p. 210.



retains the Imago Dei, has the capacity for perception and is the point of contact for the Gospel.

In seething vexation Barth could contain himself no longer and let fly with both barrels! Three articles burst forth almost simultaneously: "Fate and Idea in Theology," "Theology and Present Day Man," and "Theology and Modern Missions." In the first he stoutly rejected any polarity between philosophy and theology. In the second and third he loudly decried any attempt of the modern missionary to find a "point of contact" for the preaching of the Gospel. A subsequent article of equally violent nature even accused Brunner of lapsing into a Thomistic natural theology. Brunner could not let his pen lie idle either in the face of such invective. He poured forth articles defending his "natural theology," and in the last of these he demanded that present day theology find its way back to a more sound natural theology. Such an order Barth could only interpret as adding grievous insult to severe injury, and so he shouted in angry retaliation with the curt and caustic Nein! He explosively declared that to grant man any "susceptibility to the Word of God," and "addressability," and "verbicompetence" is to deny explicitly the Reformation doctrine of sola gratia. Again and again he emphatically declaimed that the subjective point of contact (Anknuepfungspunkt) is created anew by grace. To say anything less than that, as Brunner was doing, was to render worthless the doctrine of total

depravity. The cleavage between the two Swiss theologians was complete and so the battle still goes on today.

Emil Brunner's second period of conflict concerned itself with Frank Buchman and the Oxford Group, but the outcome of this conflict when compared to that with Barth is as different as night and day because the attack on the Oxford Group resolved itself into a joyous reconciliation with Brunner's becoming the theologian of the group. Let that not minimize the seriousness or the severity with which Brunner precipitated the initial attack. When he went to lecture at Princeton and there found faculty and students deeply engrossed in all sorts of Oxfordian spiritual awakenings and experiences, he denounced this "error of Methodism" with the greatest vehemence. He outrightly condemned it as a "vitiating influence upon orthodox thinking" that could only result from a "deplorable misunderstanding" of Romans VII and VIII.<sup>26</sup> The Oxfordian awakenings, in a most disastrous fashion, turned the individual from the Word of God to religious experience. And at that time Professor Brunner had little room for religious experience:

Therefore faith must cling solely to the Word, but not to experience. Experience comes from faith, but faith never comes from experience. The principle of Christian life is not experience but the

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26. Emil Brunner, The Theology of Crisis, p. 21, quoted by Dale Moody, op. cit., p. 322.

Word of God, which can only be believed and cannot be experienced. (Underlining my own.)<sup>37</sup>

A second contact with this revivalistic group came when he lectured at King's College at the University of London in 1931, but it only increased the fervor of his antipathy. Yet a third contact was forced upon him when the movement began to stir the very foundations of Zurich, and directed him finally to attend a house party in Ermatinger. Then and there, almost with the suddenness and forcefulness of an Old Testament vision, it came upon him that this vigorous movement had definite possibilities for resuscitating the moribund Church about him. True enough, there was much of nonsense and superficiality in it that did not escape his critical eye, but where else had there appeared such a hopeful sign for the revival of the Church which was failing abominably to satisfy the masses' pangs of hunger for the eternal bread of life? This is abundantly certain that after his espousal of the Oxford Group, Brunner made a sharp about face from his earlier assertions that had made revelation and religious experience mutually exclusive. This is quite evident in his subsequent production entitled, The Church and the Oxford Group, which is his word of congratulation to the group and commendation to the world for the great role the Group had played in the revival of the Church.

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37. Ibid., p. 64, quoted ibid.

Therein he states quite revealingly:

According to the New Testament teaching, faith creates experience and not the contrary. But faith does create this experience, this new thing which is to be perceived in experience. He who teaches otherwise does not remain in the tradition of the New Testament.<sup>28</sup>

A vast difference is already discernible here between "faith does create this experience, this new thing which is perceived in experience," and his earlier statement before the American students at Lancaster: "The principle of the Christian life is not experience but the Word of God, which can only be believed and cannot be experienced." (Underlining my own.)<sup>29</sup>

This chasm between his earlier and later beliefs grew even more pronounced when Professor Brunner's fourth large volume appeared, his monumental Man in Revolt.<sup>30</sup> In chiefly attending to the possibilities of setting forth a Christian anthropology, the author also stresses the relation of revelation to human experience. Indeed, here faith and experience become so intimate that Brunner declares the Bible proclaims no other faith than that which is experience, i. e. "a real meeting with the real God."<sup>31</sup> The Word of God never lays claim on man apart from his experience. It is only

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28. Emil Brunner, The Church and the Oxford Group, p. 55, quoted ibid., p. 334.

29. Of. footnote no. 27.

30. Trans. Olive Wyon. German title: Der Mensch in Widerspruch.

31. Emil Brunner, Man in Revolt, p. 305.

in this way that man recognizes his "actual state, as he really is,"<sup>32</sup> his contradiction before God. Karl Barth was only one among many who well suspected that with such statements Brunner was making some rather elaborate amends for his severe criticism of experience in earlier writings. These suspicions were soon confirmed by Brunner's own confession:

For the grave injustice which undoubtedly has been done Pietism during the past twenty years, I feel it a duty, as one of those more or less responsible, to make some amends. It is precisely we - the group of 'dialectic' theologians who several years back still enjoyed some unity in being fellow combatants - who have every reason to remember Pietism with the highest gratitude.<sup>33</sup>

When we compare this present embracing attitude toward experience with the antagonism aroused by his first introduction to the Oxford Group, we may well shout: quantum mutatus ab illo! and quietly add that love at first sight may not be the strongest love after all. Incidentally, this newly found love of Brunner's only accentuates Barth's antipathy for his theological opponent.

(3) The Period of Personalism (1938 ----). While the two "B's" were taking in hand the reins of Reformed theology in Switzerland and directing it along renewed paths, also in Sweden theology was undergoing a critical state of agitation

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32. Ibid., p. 206

33. Emil Brunner, The Divine-Human Encounter, p. 39, trans. A. W. Loos. German title: Wahrheit als Begegnung.

and transition. Because Brunner had demonstrated himself as being a competent, authoritative and popular guide through the washed out beds of the very fluid modern theology, he was invited to deliver the famous Olaus Petri lectures at the University of Upsala in the Fall of 1937. The President of the Foundation at that time, Professor A. Runestam, suggested that "the relation between the objective and the subjective in the Christian faith"<sup>34</sup> be made the theme of the lectures. This suggestion struck a sympathetic chord in Dr. Brunner's soul the like of which was rarely struck before!

For years Brunner had been fighting an intense battle on two fronts, one against the false subjectivism of modernism, and the other against the false objectivism of orthodoxy. Both ruinously perverted the true conception of the Biblical tradition in their over-emphasis of their respective extreme. But now he could, with this volume, make a permanent "break-through" into the realm of the personal. But let Brunner speak for himself:

This theme has proven to be an extremely valuable starting point for reflection about the Biblical concept of truth - reflection which led to the insight, important alike for theology and for the practical work of the Church, that our understanding of the message of salvation and also of the Church's task is still burdened with the Subject-Object antithesis which originated in Greek philosophy. The Biblical conception

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34. Ibid., p. 7. (Foreword)

of truth is, truth as encounter.<sup>35</sup> (Thus the German title of his book is Wahrheit als Begegnung.)

Astonishing results were achieved when Brunner applied this conception of Biblical truth to different phases of life and practice, as he himself asserts by declaring that if his thesis be correct, "then indeed much of our thinking and action in the Church must be different from what we have been accustomed to for centuries."<sup>36</sup> That his new proposition for truth has made quite an impression already is attested to by Dale Moody of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary who announces: "This slender volume, read by the undiscerning as just another book, is likely to become a turning point in the interpretation of truth."<sup>37</sup>

Much more will be said about this significant writing in Chapter III of this discussion, for exactly the intriguing "Subject-Object antithesis" and his "divine-human encounter" principle will be the topic of that section.

A year later saw the famous Swiss again sail for America, escaping from the plaguing Barthian controversies, and bearing an invitation to lecture at Princeton Seminary. But there a controversy broke out in the Presbyterian Church engaged in chiefly by the fundamentalist Dr. Barnhouse and the more liberal President Mackay of Princeton.

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35. Ibid.

36. Ibid.

37. Dale Moody, op. cit., p. 326

This controversy proved to be more violent and intolerable than the seething theological cauldron from which Brunner had fled.<sup>38</sup> So, the very next year he returned to his beloved Zurich just as World War II exploded in Europe. The trying war years saw him busier than ever with preaching and with reconcerted efforts to apply the Christian faith to the social order, especially in the light of the peculiar problems presented by the war. Yet he took time to follow through on his Upsala lectures. Nineteen hundred forty-one saw another tremendous volume of thought and penetration go to the press, his scholarly Revelation and Reason.<sup>39</sup> The first part of this book is a reiteration of much of the thesis presented rudimentarily in The Mediator, i. e. a thorough discussion of natural theology, revelation in the Creation and historical revelation. Natural theology is the Catholic doctrine that man in his sin and without direct Biblical revelation can come to a valid knowledge of God. This sort of theology the Professor of Zurich completely disavows, and Barth praises him for it. But they come to blows again when Dr. Brunner begins discussing man as a "theonomous" being, a being related to God who is God's human partner in the process of revelation. Of course, man

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38. For a detailed presentation, cf. D. G. Barnhouse, "Some Questions for Professor Brunner," and J. A. Mackay, "Some Answers for Dr. Barnhouse," in The Presbyterian, Vol. CVIII, No. 18, (May, 1938), pp. 8ff.

39. Trans. Olive Wyon. German title: Offenbarung und Vernunft.



cannot even attain the truth of the revelation of Creation, which includes sin, by himself. Only in the "unique" breaking through of the Word made flesh into the realm of the earthly, which is the historical revelation, can he come to comprehend the revelation in Creation and his sin. This makes possible the free man, the man ruled only by agape, the man whose reason is completely set free. Whereas in the positivistic, rationalistic metaphysicist "reason arrogates to itself the right to define the whole range of truth from the standpoint of man," now reason operates from the legitimate standpoint of God, and "within the truth of revelation all that reason knows and recognizes falls into place."<sup>40</sup> The proper placement of the Christian's reason makes Christian philosophy not only possible but essential and unavoidable.

The reader has correctly surmized already that it is this work of Brunner's which will play the most important role as this dissertation advances, particularly in the next chapter which will concern itself solely with Dr. Brunner's idea of "Christian philosophy." In this book he for the first time clearly sets forth in some detail his Christian philosophy devoting an entire chapter to this theme alone, though the theme has bobbed to the fore many times in nearly every one of his previous works.

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40. Emil Brunner, Revelation and Reason, p. 213.

Two years later, 1943, Brunner put to practical test his thesis presented in Revelation and Reason in another highly significant volume which he simply called Justice.<sup>41</sup> Deploing the fact that "the Protestant Church is so unsure of itself in questions of the social order, economics, law, politics and international law and ... (that) its statements on these subjects are so haphazard and improvised that they fail to carry conviction,"<sup>42</sup> Dr. Brunner strives to restore some sense to all the chaos by defining and applying justice. Here we definitely see the Christian philosopher in action as he seeks to discover the why, wherefore and whereunto of law, politics, economics, family and society.

Emil Brunner's last great contribution to the world of theological literature thus far, and perhaps the beginning of his finest, appeared in 1946. It was the first volume of his proposed four volume systematic theology bearing the title, The Christian Doctrine of God.<sup>43</sup> After years of impatient delay, the Swiss theologian had finally found time to follow up his principle which had blazed a trail for the complete rethinking of the Christian faith, "truth as encounter," set forth first in The Divine-Human Encounter. The task of theology is also given particular

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41. Trans. Mary Hottinger. German title: Gerechtigkeit. The English edition bears the title: Justice and the Social Order.

42. Ibid., p. 1. (Foreword)

43. German title: Die Christliche Lehre von Gott, Zurich, Zwingli-Verlag, 1946.

emphasis in this production. In a few words, that task is to see to it that Christian revelation keeps abreast of the times. To achieve that end there can be no final, absolute, once-for-all system of Christian doctrine. Dogmatics must remain entirely flexible so that it can perform the task of "a mediator in between worldly science and a supra-worldly testimony of faith."<sup>44</sup> By this method Christian revelation can maintain its station unblushingly and remain vital and valid for any scientific world view that future generations may evolve. Thus today, Emil Brunner - prolific writer, brilliant lecturer, stirring preacher - has taken his stand and is zealously striving to reinterpret, theologically and philosophically what he thinks Christianity must be made to mean for his community and for the whole world at large if the Church would endure.

It may be well to discuss two terms which are inseparably united with the names of Barth and Brunner, which do not, however, make a direct debut in this dissertation, namely, "dialectical theology" and its immediate descendant, "crisis theology." All other terms necessitating elucidation will be defined as they are introduced into the discussion.

The dictionary does not assist us a great deal in defining "dialectic," but we know that the word is derived

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44. Ibid., p. 77, quoted in Dale Moody, op. cit., p. 328.

from the combination of two Greek words: *διά* and *λέγειν*. These two words mean "to speak between." Dialectics is just that, a skillful method of "speaking between." Two affirmations are made, the one is contradictory to the other, and yet they do not cancel each other out because one can always "speak between" them or withhold speaking at all. Neither of two paradoxical statements can be accepted to the entire exclusion of the other because there is never such a remaining statement that contains only a "no." Every contradictory statement, except such naive contradictions as: "this paper is white" and "this paper is black," embodies the possibility of a "yes" at the same time. Barth puts it most intelligibly of all when he says: "There is never so decisive a yes that it does not harbor the possibility of a no. There is never so decisive a no that it is not liable to turn into a yes."<sup>45</sup> An example pure and simple are the two seemingly appositional statements: "Mr. X is a bad man," and "Mr. X is a good man." Yet everyone well realizes that neither in the first case is Mr. X always bad, nor that in the second case is he always good. So when all is said and done, we conclude that Mr. X is both bad and good. Thus a dialectical situation is one about which we must say yes and no at the same time in order to

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45. Karl Barth, Das Wort Gottes und die Theologie, p. 75, quoted in Theodore Engelder, "The Principles and Teachings of the Dialectical Theology," in Concordia Theological Monthly, Vol. VII, No. 4, (April, 1936), p. 249.

rightly understand and explain it.<sup>46</sup> Brunner tells us how and why this principle must be introduced into the theological field:

I have often been asked what the 'Dialectical Theology' is really driving at. The question can be easily answered. It is seeking to declare the Word of the Bible to the world. ... What the Word of God does is to expose the contradiction of human existence, thus in grace to cover it. ... It is only by means of the contradiction between two ideas - God and man, grace and responsibility, holiness and love - that we can apprehend the contradictory truth that the eternal God enters time, or that sinful man is declared just. Dialectical theology is the mode of thinking which defends this paradoxical character, belonging to faith-knowledge, from the non-paradoxical speculation of reason, and vindicates it against the other.<sup>47</sup>

This principle of the dialectic is derived plainly a la Kierkegaard. He introduced the practice of frankly failing to complete the third side of the Hegelian triangle. Against this same optimistic, triumphant and rationalistic attainment of synthesis, both Barth and Brunner, in forming their theological systems, find it wiser, more realistic and only truthful to the Biblical and Reformation tradition to be content with an open, unresolved balance of apparent truth against apparent truth.

The dialectic is their very raison d'etre, for through it the individual Christian must remain alive, responsible

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46. Paul L. Lehmann, "The Direction of Theology Today," in Union Seminary Quarterly Review, Vol. III, No. 1, (November, 1947), p. 6.

47. Emil Brunner, The Word and the World, pp. 6f, quoted ibid., p. 8.

and a man of personal decision in any crisis situation that might and will arise in life and practice. To Kierkegaard the Church of Denmark was the institution par excellence into which the Christian might flee for refuge, and there do collectively what he would not dare to undertake as a responsible individual. Says Professor Kuhn of Asbury Seminary concerning Kierkegaard: "The primary religious problem appeared to him to be that of isolating the individual and confronting him with himself as personally culpable, and with the 'Absolute Paradox' of the entry of eternity into time in the Incarnation."<sup>48</sup> In other words, the worst thing that the Church can do is to resolve all the paradoxes, answer all the questions in legalistic dogma, take everything in hand as an organization so that Mr. Christian becomes complacent, self-satisfied, with not a care in the world. Mr. Christian must be made to face his crisis, primarily that crisis which arises when God meets him and he meets God, but also the many smaller crises that are bound to appear in Christian living.

"The word crisis," according to Brunner, "has two meanings: first, it signifies the climax of an illness; second, it denotes the turning point in the progress of an enterprise or movement."<sup>49</sup> The heavy mark of accentuation falls

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48. Harold B. Kuhn, "The Problem of Human Self-transcendence in the Dialectical Theology," in The Harvard Theological Review, Vol. XL, No. 1, (January, 1947), p. 8.

49. Emil Brunner, Theology of Crisis, p. 1, quoted in Paul L. Lehmann, op. cit., p. 6.

upon the "turning point," the lesser on the "climax." Brunner states that the course of events in any individual life or in a cultural epoch are continually moving toward one climax after another. In the crucial moment the person confronted must face the climax and make the radical turn about face required in his life if his life or culture about him is to have any meaning. The responsible person makes the decision and moves forward. Concludes Brunner: "What it all means then is that our attitude to the demand for faith is not a matter of reason, whether positive or negative, but of personal decision. The value of critical reflection lies in the fact that it necessitates personal decision." (Underlining my own.)<sup>50</sup>

The general purpose of the remainder of the paper and the particular purpose of Chapter II will be to investigate Brunner's idea of "Christian philosophy" in theory and in practice. Following out his doctrine of man's reason we shall see why Christian philosophy is not only possible but absolutely inescapable since the Christian must live in the State and play a role in culture, science and education. He cannot avoid doing so. Part of Brunner's thesis is due great commendation and praise, while other aspects of it are by no means invulnerable to adverse criticism.

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50. Emil Brunner, The Philosophy of Religion, p. 188.

The third and final chapter will concern itself with our principal exception to Dr. Brunner's thesis. This principal criticism is directed against the result that theologian-philosopher Brunner obtained when he began to investigate the age old problem, "What is truth?", that is, in particular, Christian truth. His conclusion is that there can be no real Christian truth except where the Philonic Subjective-Objective antithesis is cast out entirely and the "Biblical" "divine-human encounter" principle is employed. We maintain that in projecting this "truth as encounter" principle as a Biblical one, Brunner is overstepping his bounds, introducing reason into revelation and thus violating one of his own basic laws.

Of course, this attempt is little more than an introduction to an immense mind which has produced some classic tomes exhibiting keen thought, deep penetration and scholarly research in a host of subjects. Not only has Brunner achieved great respect from the alert theologian, but he is also well recognized by various authorities not of theological bent. As John McCreary points out: "Brunner has found sympathizers among those who have difficulty in accepting his 'transcendentalism' - who, working in the fields of social psychology, ethics, and social philosophy, realize nevertheless the numbing effect of a mere description of 'what is done in various cultures'."<sup>51</sup> For the student

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51. John McCreary, op. cit., p. 330.



who would like to probe deeper into Brunner's thought there are such interesting and profitable subjects as: the Word, faith, revelation, natural theology, Imago Dei, mysticism, anthropology, ethics, the State, marriage, the family, justice, economics and Christian psychology and sociology. On all of these Brunner has much of great value to say.

## II. Brunner's Idea of Christian Philosophy

"Christian philosophy is a fact."<sup>1</sup> With this rather bold assertion Emil Brunner opens Chapter 25 of Revelation and Reason, entitled: "The Problem and Idea of Christian Philosophy." It is a fact for two reasons: First, because a great number of philosophical concepts which a philosopher employs today in his thinking and speculation have been created by Christian philosophers. One simply cannot think of the history of philosophy in the West, of thinkers like Descartes, Malebranche and Leibniz, without being aware of the tremendous role that faith played in the formulations of their systems. Secondly, because no honest Christian theologian, no matter how hostile he might be to philosophy, can operate without philosophical concepts that have been coined for him by the secular metaphysicians. Therefore, "the synthesis of philosophy and Christianity, in some way or other, is a fact that cannot be undone; it is part of our destiny."<sup>2</sup>

The Christian philosophy becomes more evident and more necessary when the theologian is forcefully reminded that the Bible does not furnish all the answers, in spite of the fact that Barth tries to maintain that it does. "The Gospel,"

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1. Emil Brunner, Revelation and Reason, p. 374.
  2. Ibid., p. 375.

he says, "as the message of Jesus Christ, reveals to the 'cultured' man or woman the possibility, the necessity, the meaning, the range, and the solution of the task of culture."<sup>3</sup> In stern opposition to this Barthian view that Christian revelation has the first, last and only word even in matters of secular knowledge and in the ordering of the world ( the State too), Brunner declares:

Can anyone seriously maintain that all questions in mathematics, physics, biology, and astronomy are 'answered in the Word of God'? Does anyone seriously content that in the future, instead of turning to Euclid for geometry, to Galileo for physics, to Lyell for geology, we must turn instead, for everything, to the Holy Scriptures?<sup>4</sup>

The naivete of such a view is excelled only by its sheer impossibility because ~~because~~ rational activity is already presupposed in the grammatical understanding of the Bible. Here already there must be logical thinking and training in the use of ideas. Hence this exclusive, arbitrary emphasis on the Bible as the source of everything does not solve but only confuses the problem set up by Christian philosophy. To toss the whole problem out of the window is no solution. Barely has one done that when he stumbles against the hard truth again: "Reason is reason; there is only one reason . . . . All who wish to think at all must think according to the rules of this one reason, which is exactly the same for all; if a man does not think in this

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3. Karl Barth, Evangelium und Bildung, p. 10, quoted in ibid., p. 377.

4. Ibid., p. 378.

way, he is not 'thinking' at all; he is merely indulging in fantasy."<sup>5</sup>

"Reason" as employed by Brunner in his writings needs elucidation. Nowhere does he clearly define in so many words just what he means by reason, but through a typological analysis we can perceive that he uses it in three general senses.<sup>6</sup> He uses it first in the sense of man's general capacity for thought, for speech and for communication. It is identified also as the humanum, or the natural endowment of intelligence that God bestowed upon man at the time of his Creation. The human being can never lose this essential characteristic which is a reflection of the divine image in him, for to do that would be to cease to be a human creature. Even the Fall did not eradicate this primary feature. "The imago, in the first sense of the word (formal sense as distinguished from material), cannot be lost, for it distinguishes man as man, in his nature; it is true of it, manet sub peccato adhuc."<sup>7</sup> This first interpretation of man's reason is vastly important because it is this primal reason that makes man responsible and gives God a "point of contact" in man. "Man's reason therefore is also the cause of his eternal unrest . . . . It is precisely the activity of the reason which is the unmistakable sign

5. Ibid., p. 375.

6. Outlined by D. D. Williams in "Brunner and Barth on Philosophy," in The Journal of Religion, Vol. XXVII, No. 4, (October, 1947), p. 243.

7. Emil Brunner, op. cit., p. 69.

that man comes from God."<sup>8</sup> The human creature differs from the other creations of God as rocks, trees and animals precisely because he has this "point of contact." He could not enter the community of believers without it. As Brunner expresses it:

One does not have to have a great mind to be a person who truly believes and loves; but if one has no mind - as an idiot - one cannot even believe. The presupposition for the understanding of the Word of God is understanding in general, the understanding of words, in the general, purely human sense. What that poor creature which, in the extreme case, so far as we know, has not a spark of intelligence means in the Family of God, we do not know; we only know that in this life it cannot become a believer,<sup>9</sup> because it cannot understand human speech.

In Brunner's second use of reason, the classification has broadened out to include all the activities and principles of "reasoning" as they are demonstrated in logic, science, ethics and metaphysics. All these practical applications of reason grow directly out of man's humanum. Under this second grade of reason Brunner would also rate our God-given common sense. As before cited in the case of those "radical fideists" who would make the Bible the source of everything sacred and secular, this second use of reason is as inescapable as the first. What intelligent Christian man doesn't think according to logical rules, use his common sense, accept the established finding of science, attempt to apply his Christian learning and experience to practical

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8. Ibid., p. 56.

9. Emil Brunner, Man in Revolt, p. 341.

problems of moral living, and ask the proverbial question, "What is truth"? The Christian theologian must and does always employ this second use of reason. "Even in a definitely Christian theological anthropology there can never be any question of depreciating the reason, of hostility to reason, or of setting up a plea for irrationalism. If we must choose between two evils, then without stopping to reflect for a moment we shall choose to be rationalists rather than irrationalists."<sup>10</sup> When the theologian in all honesty and humility employs his reason here, he is not distracting from or violating his faith, for, "It is not reason as such which is in opposition to faith, but only the self-sufficient reason . . . . There is war between faith and rationalism, but there is no war between faith and reason . . . ."<sup>11</sup>

But since already here in his natural thinking about ethics, ontology and the meaning of life, the human person is coming to grips with questions and decisions of absolute truth and value he is approaching Brunner's third use of reason. It involves the natural man's attempt to arrive at absolute truth about existence and about God apart from the transcendent knowledge of revelation. This is philosophy in Brunner's usual sense of the term, and is, of course, strictly verboten. Philosophy - Theism, Naturalism, Pantheism and Materialism - sets up its own system in the place of

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10. Ibid., p. 243.

11. Ibid.

God's, makes human reason supreme, and consequently worships an idol of its own fashioning. The majority of Brunner's work and writing takes the form of a scathing polemic against this third type - this impersonal, abstract reason. "The abstract reason," he declares, "is that which is already severed from God, the falsely autonomous, falsely independent reason, the reason of the man whose whole self has been isolated."<sup>12</sup> And though "the human mind may find elevation and satisfaction in this rational theology; it will not find in it the 'truth which makes us free'."<sup>13</sup> The entirety of his constant battle against philosophy can be summed up in Augustine's classic words, "Si comprehendis, non est Deus."

Just as one arrives at no solution to the problem of Christian philosophy by rejecting it altogether and acknowledging no validity of truth outside Scripture, neither does one find any solution by denying the validity of all truth inside Scripture. While we all (nearly all) agree that the multiplication tables and the laws of logical thought are the same for all men, Christians and pagans alike, we do not agree that all hold the same doctrine of man and his responsibility. There is definitely a singular Christian doctrine of freedom and responsibility, of existence, of marriage, and of the calling. Therefore even the rationalist has to admit that he comes into decided conflict with a host of

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12. Ibid., p. 430

13. Emil Brunner, Revelation and Reason, p. 362.

other thinking human beings when he flatly discredits all revelation and strives to solve the above problems by rationalistic methods alone. At the same time, "Even the most doughty champion of the Biblical truth of revelation as the sole solution of these 'ultimate' questions"<sup>14</sup> must confess that there are areas of secular and formal knowledge and activity, as logic and mathematics, where reason alone is competent. The Bible simply does not furnish information in these areas. In other words, there is a distinct dualism present here, the extreme roles being played by the "fideist" on the one hand and the rationalist on the other. It is plainly not satisfactory to try to solve the problem by forming a false monistic synthesis between reason and revelation, philosophy and theology.

The question that confronts Christian theology then is not whether reason has any rights or whether reason has any authority to judge the false and the true, for it certainly does. God has created a world. In this world there are impersonal, objective truths like the truths of mathematics and science which are by no means eliminated by the revelation of Jesus Christ. Besides these there are the impersonal truths which are not concerned with "things." All these latter impersonal truths constitute the world of ideas, the intellectual world. "These are not merely aids to our thinking,

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14. Ibid., p. 379.



but principles which have their basis in the thoughts of God. We are meant to use them also, and they are not above us, but under us."<sup>15</sup> Of all the creatures known to us God gave to man alone the capacity to know this world as He established it in His Creation. "This capacity we call 'the power of rational perception'.<sup>16</sup> God has revealed Himself not only through the Word but also in the Creation. On the basis of this primary revelation in the Creation and passages like, "The earth has He given to the children of men,"<sup>17</sup> man has been given the power to know and dominate the Creation by means of his reason. When Adam and Eve were in the Garden and ate only of the fruit of the allowed trees there was no problem because there was no discrepancy between their reason and God's revelation. The problem was first introduced by the Fall and sin. Sin threw everything out of perspective. Sin set up a "peculiar, irrational barrier" to God's original revelation. Reason transgressed its bounds and ate of the forbidden fruit. It refused to respect the holy center and attempted to partake of God's divine mystery thus exalting itself beyond measure. Sin created the terrific problem between reason and revelation with which every Christian and particularly every theologian must now wrestle.

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15. Ibid., p. 379.

16. Ibid., p. 381.

17. Psalm 115:16.

Because reason is not evil per se, but only in so far as it is affected by sin and thus is constantly in danger of overstepping its boundaries, the problem of reason versus revelation is mainly one of delimiting the autonomous reason. It is against the reason that would make absolute and ultimate claims that the Christian must constantly fight. Consequently, the problem finally resolves itself into "one of defining the sphere of reference."<sup>18</sup> Or it might also be called the problem of the "specialist." No Christian however deeply his faith is grounded in revealed Scripture will seriously maintain that the Bible supplies all or even adequate information in the fields of special or expert knowledge. The Word of God cannot be a substitute for what the specialist "knows of himself" about the making of machinery, about counterpoint, about the intricacies of semantics, or about balancing the powers of the State. "In all these questions reason is supreme, and reason alone."<sup>19</sup>

However, it is impossible to sever even this expert knowledge from the whole context. Here the problem arises again. All these specialists callings a man must carry on as a man, and hence they cannot be isolated completely from the context of his entire life. Where his entire life is viewed there theology or faith must also be viewed. The problem does not arise from the specialist knowledge as

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18. Emil Brunner, Revelation and Reason, p. 380.

19. Ibid.

such, but from its integration into the whole. Here he must listen to the voice of faith, the Word of revelation given to faith. The nub of the matter is ultimately this: "The problem of Christian philosophy is the problem of the interpenetration of the two spheres, of the secular and knowable, and the supernatural and revealed. It is the question of the limitations of the specialist."<sup>20</sup> As already stated, it is because of sin only that the question arises at all, that the specialist must be limited.

How does Dr. Brunner propose to limit the specialist affected by sin and thus solve the problem of the interpenetration of the two spheres? He does that by the formation of a clever proportional thesis called the "law of the closeness of relation."<sup>21</sup> He leads up to the formation of this thesis by declaring again that no theologian thus far known to him has held that our mathematical knowledge or our formal logic is affected by sin. However, on the other side of the fence, all are agreed that our knowledge of God - as regarding our personal relation with Him - is most deeply affected by sin. Indeed, that broken relation is the nature of sin itself. But even sin and faith, the wrong and right relation with God, presuppose the employment of formal reason. Now this state of affairs cannot be indicated by drawing any absolute line of demarcation, but

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20. Ibid., p. 381.

21. Ibid., p. 383.

only by the proportional statement:

The nearer anything lies to the center of existence where we are concerned with the whole, that is, with man's relation to God and the being of the person, the greater is the disturbance of rational knowledge by sin; the farther anything lies from this center, the less is the disturbance felt, and the less difference is there between knowing as a believer and as an unbeliever.<sup>22</sup>

In theology this disturbance reaches its maximum extension, in the exact sciences it attains its minimum and in the sphere of the formal it hits zero. Consequently it is a meaningless and a useless application of the adjective to speak of a "Christian" mathematics. On the other hand, it is extremely important and absolutely essential to speak of "Christian" conceptions of freedom, the good, community, and still more of God. In each of the above cases cited "Christian" suggests the manner in which the rational knowledge in these fields is to be corrected by the Christian faith, but the degree of that correction varies proportionately. In the example of God it ceases to be a correction altogether and becomes an absolute substitution of revelation for reason, while in the case of mathematics (the formal) the correction disappears completely.<sup>23</sup> This "law of the closeness of relation" also makes us aware of the

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22. Ibid.

23. In the sphere of mathematics this is true only when one is concerned with mathematical problems pure and simple. As soon as one begins investigating the foundations of these problems, then "once again the sphere of knowledge is affected by the mysterious background of the whole," which means God and sin. Ibid., p. 383. More will be said about this indispensable observation when we criticize Brunner's position.

existence of several problems which lie "midway," in which purely rational knowledge and faith interpenetrate and even cooperate, as, for example, in the spheres of law, the State, history, time, et cetera. There is no "Christian science of law" in the same sense that there is a "Christian theology." Yet because law involves justice and justice is inseparable from the Just and therefore also from the theological idea of divine justice, one cannot escape the influence of revelation in this midway sphere. Again, however, the more formal the thinking of the jurist the less will his conclusions be affected by revelation, and the less will be the difference between the Christian and the non-Christian juristic conclusions. Rational knowledge needs modification only to the extent and degree that it is concerned with human beings as responsible persons. "In other words, the more we are concerned with the world, as the world, the more autonomous is the reason; but the more we are concerned with the world as God's Creation, the less autonomy is left to reason."<sup>24</sup>

Emil Brunner has almost from the beginning of his career been investigating the relation between revelation and reason, and the role that the Christian must play in culture and the world. Upon becoming privatdozent at the University of Zurich in 1923, he issued The Limits of Humanity. It contained the rudimentary outline of the affinity between reason and revelation, and it grounded culture in the transcendent

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24. Ibid., p. 384

sphere of God. The Philosophy of Religion (1927) continued from there allowing even a Christian philosophy of religion in a secondary, limited sense. More important to our theme is the embryo of the Christian philosopher which we find taking shape in the conclusion of the volume:

But, as faith is not sight, and as in faith we only overcome the contradiction that trammels human existence if at the same time we endure it, if we persist in it "in the body", for this reason the believer does not withdraw from a rational life that aims at knowledge and culture. He takes his part in them, they furnish the material of the activity by which he has to prove himself as a Christian, a member of the ecclesia militans.<sup>25</sup>

In The Mediator the embryonic Christian philosopher continues his slow, steady growth. He makes quite an impression already in the last chapter of the work where Brunner discusses the layman in Christian action. The actual birth of the Christian philosopher takes place in The Divine Imperative (1933) in conjunction with Brunner's primal use of the "law of the closeness of relation." This law went by a slightly different name then: the law of the "personal centre."<sup>26</sup> The Professor of Zurich employed it in this volume on ethics to solve the enigma of the Christian's participation in the State, in culture, science, education and in church polity. The next major work of Brunner's, Man in Revolt (1937), viewed the law of the "personal centre"

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25. Emil Brunner, The Philosophy of Religion, p. 190.

26. Cf. Emil Brunner, The Divine Imperative, pp. 490, 495f, 506, and 547.

as applied to one particular area; namely, Christian anthropology. In this sphere the Christian philosopher discovers a wide interpenetration of reason and revelation, hence both are valid and must cooperate.

The Christian doctrine of man maintains that, although it understands man from the point of view of the truths of revelation, which are not accessible to experience, yet it does not in any way contradict what can be known of man in and through experience; on the contrary, it incorporates this knowledge gained by experience into its rightful context.<sup>27</sup>

Once again the relation between revelation and experience, or reason, works itself out when the law of the "personal centre" is brought into proper focus.

The more closely we are concerned with the centre, with man's personal relation with God and man's personal being, the greater will be the influence of unbelief upon the higher life of mind and spirit. The further we move away from this central point the less evident does it become, and it is therefore still more difficult to recognize it. If a person studies anatomy or physics it will be impossible to tell from his scientific work, pure and simple, whether he is a Christian or an unbeliever. But his faith or his unbelief will come out very clearly in his way of thought and life as a man.<sup>28</sup>

It wasn't until the appearance of Revelation and Reason (1941) that the Christian philosopher reached the real age of discretion in Brunner's development of him. In this work the Christian philosopher's role is made obligatory and inescapable. At the same time his role is

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27. Emil Brunner, Man in Revolt, p. 61

28. Ibid., p. 255.

made less perilous by a detailed presentation of the "law of the closeness of relation" for solving the difficult boundary problem between the Christian philosopher's two realms: revelation and reason.

Having now received a basic picture of the growth of Brunner's "law of the closeness of relation," let us return to the beginnings of the law as found in his book on ethics and the orders, The Divine Imperative. Although Brunner hadn't fully developed the law then and hadn't even given it its present day appellation, yet his application of it to the orders is so skillful, revealing and meaningful that we dare not overlook it. First, we shall see how the law comes to be applied in the Christian's relation to the State; and secondly, how it must be applied in the area of culture.

The attitude of the Christian to the State,<sup>29</sup> must always be Januslike for the simple reason that the Christian belongs both to the State and to the Kingdom of God. The State in its reality has always been and will always be basically organized selfishness. It is furthermore absolutely supreme in its own sphere, but the alluring temptation is ever present to make itself absolute and sovereign in the ultimate, religious sense of the word. When it does that, then the Christian must oppose it in obedience to the Biblical injunction: "We must obey God rather than man."<sup>30</sup> Thus

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29. Cf. Emil Brunner, The Divine Imperative, pp. 460-482.

30. Acts 5:29.



already the relative character of the State is perceived. Even though the Christian cannot say "yes" to the sinful, selfish and secular methods which "this greedy and daemonic monster"<sup>31</sup> has always employed and will always employ for increasing its power, yet "it is equally impossible for the Christian to say 'No' to the State."<sup>32</sup> Why? because the State is first a gift of God; secondly, a necessary protection against the unrighteousness of both unbelievers and believers; and thirdly, an essential part of our calling in rendering service to our fellow man.

As much as the Christian would sometimes desire it, he cannot expect the State to be governed in accordance with the law of love. That would do away with the fundamental meaning of the State, for the meaning of the State is power. Love and justice can at best be only regulative principles, not constitutive principles, for the reason that no State has ever sprung from the principles of justice or love. "The State is primarily not a moral institution but an irrational product of history; the Christian State never has existed and never will. Where the State is concerned ethics always lag behind."<sup>33</sup> At the same time, though not primarily, the State must incorporate the just for its own health's sake and for the moral energy of its people. "A brutal will to

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31. Emil Brunner, op. cit., p. 461.

32. Ibid.

33. Ibid., 463

power is bad statesmanship."<sup>34</sup> Christianity makes its debut at this point as an influence in regulative justice.

It is the Christian's duty then to oppose equally both errors in the sphere of the State: First, the "quietistic conservatism" which emphasizes the autonomy of the State to such an extent that it denies that Christian influence has any value in it. Second, the "sentimental radicalism" (Tolstoy) which desires to overcome the State completely by faith or reject the State altogether. To what extent should the Christian bring his influence to bear avoiding both of these extremes? That depends on the law of the "personal centre." "Here, too, the law will hold good, that the further the particular sphere is from the personal centre the less can be the influence of this regulative principle."<sup>35</sup> The Christian's influence will reach zero in the purely formal juridical questions; "the less difference is there between 'Christian' and 'non-Christian'... ."<sup>36</sup> Also, for the same reason, as Brunner clearly states in Justice and the Social Order,<sup>37</sup> in the matter of justice in the social and economic order of the State, Christian thinkers have found it to their great advantage to sit obediently at the feet of philosophers and pagan jurists. Justice is a quality inherent in all men. It is a characteristic instilled by an

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34. Ibid., 464.

35. Ibid., p. 490.

36. Emil Brunner, Revelation and Reason, p. 384.

37. Emil Brunner, Justice and the Social Order, p. 10, 90f.

order of God's Creation, the State. Hence, Plato, Aristotle, and the Roman jurists can and do have much of validity to say here. The Christian's influence is at a necessary minimum in these matters of the specialist and the expert.

But the Christian has plenty to say when the State approaches too closely or transgresses the sacred boundaries of the "personal centre," when it tries to make itself sovereign in matters religious, or when it attempts to interfere with the Christian's service toward his fellow man. Having discussed the duties of the Christian toward his fellow, and how the State is tempted to and often does interfere with these duties, Brunner declares forcefully: "... we are called - and who else is called if not Christians? - to raise our protest against every form of absolutism and omnipotence."<sup>38</sup> Thus the Christian is obligated to play the dual role of citizen and Christian. The "law of the closeness of relation" or the "personal centre" is to tell him which he is to assume at any given moment, and is to define the limits of his participation.

This law still better adapts itself to the Christian's activity in culture.<sup>39</sup> By culture Brunner means that intellectual activity which is not a means to an end (as civilization), but a relative end in itself as science, art and education. In commencing it is all-important to note that

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38. Emil Brunner, The Divine Imperative, p. 462.

39. Ibid., pp. 483-516.

culture is not the result of any Christian faith or morality, but is the result of the "spiritual 'natural impulse'."<sup>40</sup> It is a part of man's very nature bestowed upon him in the Creation to create culture. In giving man his reason, of which "God is not the enemy,"<sup>41</sup> God gave man his formal freedom. "This freedom lives in every rational act, whether in the creation of the artist, in the thought of the scientist, or in the activity of the educationalist."<sup>42</sup> It is between this formal freedom which man still retains and the material freedom which man lost in the Fall that we must always distinguish, otherwise the relation between revelation and reason, between faith and culture becomes hopelessly confused. The formal freedom gives reason and culture an undisputed autonomy. Science, art and education all must have their own immanent laws. Even the theologian and every Christian who prays follows the independent laws of reason. But that is only part of the picture. Because of the same reason that God has created the reason and given it an autonomy, He has also thereby limited it. Reason is and never can be Absolute. It can only live off the Absolute. Man is incomplete in himself. He is only complete when he comes into the correct relation with God. Only then does he reach the material nature of freedom. Now man can only believe through his reason. An animal cannot believe. But when man

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40. Ibid., p. 384.

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid., p. 485.

refuses to believe, to respond through faith, then the relative end and relative autonomy of reason - and culture - has become an absolute self-end, an autonomy. Culture has set up its own God, which is plainly an idol. Man indulges in the third classification of reason, philosophy, which is expressly forbidden. Sad to say though, since time memorial culture has always worshipped its own idol, reason.

This is where the fundamental opposition between faith and culture takes place. The Christian is aware of the perpetual sinfulness of culture, but still he cannot withdraw from culture. He must have something in which to express his faith, and hence he must to a certain extent cooperate with the conditions of this sinful culture. "The Christian cannot produce a Christian culture, any more than he can bring into existence a Christian State or a Christian economic system."<sup>43</sup> Even the culture which he will help to create will be sinful. So while his faith cannot be a constitutive element in the construction of culture, it can and must certainly be a powerful regulative and critical principle. In so far as it is a regulative principle it can produce a very restricted "Christian" art, science and education. Again, "the law will hold good, that the further the particular sphere is from the personal centre the less can be the influence of this regulative principle."<sup>44</sup>

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43. Ibid., p. 489.

44. Ibid., p. 490.

In concrete application this means that in the cultural sphere of science it is foolish to speak of a Christian mathematics or a Christian physics. However, when in sociology, psychology and particularly anthropology, science begins to investigate personality, which constitutes part of the "personal centre," then the adjective "Christian" will make a great and meaningful impression. Yet here too the autonomous element is always at the same time present. This abstract scientific law gains ground as it moves from the personal center, but it consistently loses ground as it approaches that center where the real human being is being investigated. Here at the personal center "Faith gains not merely a regulative but a constitutive significance."<sup>45</sup> In art and education faith and revelation plays a more regulative and constitutive role because both of these are more closely related to the personal center. "Art is always the child of the longing for something else."<sup>46</sup> Education can never be separated from the whole view of man and his responsibility. Even so, both of these have their autonomous, abstract rules too, which are not a part of faith. The Christian philosopher must always recognize this rightful realm of reason in art and education though he will be guided more by faith and revelation in their development.

Having now defined, applied and established his "law of the closeness of relation," Brunner draws two conclusions

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45. Ibid., p. 496.

46. Ibid., p. 499.

toward achieving a solution of the problem of "Christian philosophy." The first is that the Christian faith is something entirely different from philosophy. Christian faith arises from the "personal encounter"<sup>47</sup> of God and man. Philosophy originates through systematic thinking controlled only by man. The second conclusion is that philosophy should not be the primary interest of the believer. "For his primary interest is, and ought to be, 'to seek the Kingdom of God and His righteousness'."<sup>48</sup> But this by no means requires that a Christian cannot have any interest in philosophy or may not use or study it. "All things are yours."<sup>49</sup> "If a Christian may study music - which until now has never been disputed - then why should he not study philosophy?"<sup>50</sup>

But while Christian faith is something primarily different from philosophy, yet the Christian philosopher - and this is important - does not differ essentially from the Christian theologian. This is so because, according to Brunner, "The break (between revelation and reason) does not occur between theology and philosophy, but between theology and faith."<sup>51</sup> So the difference between the Christian philosopher and the Christian theologian is one only of subject, not of method. "The difference between Christian philosophy and Christian theology is therefore not one of principle,

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47. On "personal encounter" cf. last chapter of this paper, Chapter IV.

48. Emil Brunner, Revelation and Reason, p. 384.

49. I Corinthians 3:22.

50. Emil Brunner, loc. cit.

51. Ibid., p. 389.

but it is a fluid transition."<sup>52</sup> Every systematic theologian is already philosopher and theologian in the same body. He is a theologian in so far as he is concerned with setting forth the problems of the Holy Scriptures themselves, but he is a philosopher in so far as he deals with the problems that are in the background of Scriptural revelation. For example, a man like Karl Barth who in his Dogmatics reflects on time and distinguishes between "God's time and our time," "the time of expectation," "the time of fulfillment" and "the time for revelation" is already penetrating the domain of philosophy.<sup>53</sup> This means that theology is not "sacred science," though it is hallowed by the Word of God. "Theology itself is secular like every other academic subject."<sup>54</sup> Because of the deadening influence of orthodox tradition, Protestant theology has assumed the erroneous, "prejudiced view that revelation is revealed theology, and that theology itself is therefore a 'revealed,' that is, a 'sacred' science."<sup>55</sup> This has been disastrous in so far as it has led to the "sacred" isolation of theology. This is contrary to the spirit of the Reformation theology, and it likewise conflicts with the "priesthood of all believers." The Christian philosopher, the Christian jurist, philologist and natural scientist all should stand alongside of the

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52. Ibid., p. 390.

53. Quoted in ibid.

54. Ibid., p. 391.

55. Ibid.



Christian theologian on equal footing. The "law of the closeness of relation" will in turn reveal the limits to which each might proceed.

Since it is between faith and theology that the break already occurs, here the theologian as well as the Christian philosophizing layman must be most careful. "... This transition is, so to speak, to be accomplished only at the risk of one's life."<sup>56</sup> Why? simply because faith is something entirely personal. It is truth as encounter between God and man. On the other hand, theology and Christian philosophy are doctrine or thought about that personal encounter. They are already "truth as idea." For a fact, that cannot be helped because we human beings are made to think in the form of ideas; we cannot do otherwise. But the enticing temptation is always before us to lose sight of the "faith truth," the "encounter truth" and see only the "idea truth." This is the terrible calamity that Greek intellectualism has inflicted upon ecclesiastical thinking almost from the beginning.<sup>57</sup> It has resulted in Catholicism, dead orthodoxy, Biblical popery and other stifling approaches which have sucked the very life blood from the Church. The Church's teaching and preaching has become, in many places and respects, purely intellectual and abstract. "The Church turned the revelation of the Son into the revelation of an

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56. Ibid., p. 389.

57. For a more extensive treatment of this terrible Greek calamity of. Chapter IV of this dissertation.

eternal truth 'about the Son'.<sup>58</sup> In order to avoid seeing only ideas while he must still ever employ ideas, the Christian philosopher should constantly return to the starting-point, which is his faith and which is "truth as encounter" and not "truth as idea." The Professor of Zurich puts it well in the words:

Christian action needs to return to the starting-point continually in order that it may not become something different, or something wrong. For always the one thing that matters is this: that we live by faith, that God should be honoured; it consists in creating room for God ... .<sup>59</sup>

The dangers that the Christian philosopher will encounter are indeed great, but still he must face them. He cannot withdraw from the world because he cannot cease to think. "Christian philosophy is therefore both possible and necessary because as Christians we neither can nor should cease to think."<sup>60</sup> Christian philosophy appears impossible only from the point of view of rationalism, not from the vantage point of reason. Philosophy's legitimate purpose - which does not conflict with God-given reason - is to set in order the varieties of impressions gained by experience, whether they be mental, moral, artistic or religious.<sup>61</sup> The deduction of the whole world from a given principle, which philosophy has followed since Ionic days, is really a usurpation by the scoundrel, rationalism. Sheer

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58. Emil Brunner, Revelation and Reason, p. 149.

59. Emil Brunner, The Mediator, p. 616.

60. Emil Brunner, Revelation and Reason, p. 392.

61. Cf. Brunner's second use of reason, supra, p. 38f.

critical thinking has shown that method to be erroneous time and again.<sup>62</sup> The Christian philosopher has been the most critical of all. That is as it should be because he is in constant communion with the correct ground of experience by faith with the living God. His faith has set him free, made him immune to any rationalistic, dogmatic absolutism, and lead his reason back to its original purpose. His reason has at the same time been given previously unknown power and alertness.

It is true, of course, that no one becomes a mathematician or an artist or a thinker of genius simply because he is a genuine believer. But when he becomes a believer powers are released which he did not know he possessed before. If in Jesus Christ 'all the treasures of wisdom are hidden,'<sup>63</sup> the believer gains a perception which, without being on that account 'genius,' pierces more deeply into truth, and soars to greater heights than all wisdom and philosophy.<sup>64</sup>

Just how powerful faith might be, Brunner shows by declaring later: "I am not so sure that the Christian faith could not throw light on certain problems of mathematics."<sup>65</sup>

Mathematics carries us back to the expert, and the expert in turn carries us back to the Christian layman who might be engaged in this particular area of activity. Again and again Brunner stresses that precisely the most beautiful thing about his Christian philosophy is that it gives the

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62. Cf. Brunner's third use of reason, supra, p. 39f.

63. I Colossians 2:3.

64. Emil Brunner, Man in Revolt, p. 343.

65. Ibid., p. 544.

layman plenty of opportunity for thinking and acting - his God-given right and privilege under the "priesthood of all believers." For too long the Church of the Reformation has been burdened and hindered by the idea that the intellectual aspect of Christianity must be theology."<sup>66</sup> It is this misunderstanding, this foul interpretation which has widened the gulf between the pastor and the layman to such a degree that the Church has suffered tremendously. The theologian was the only person who was permitted to think as a Christian. But there soon arose many lay-questions in the realm of specialist and expert knowledge that he could not answer. There were no laymen - jurists, philologists, historians, natural scientists, political scientists - who were so sure of their Christian position and truths that they dared to be Christian jurists, historians and scientists. This is one of the outstanding reasons why the Enlightenment, Idealism and Positivism could so easily conquer the universities during the 18th and 19th centuries. For partly the same reason the layman has become disillusioned with the Church. "The contemporary Christian intends to share responsibility, intends to give his strength to the service of the Church, and is disillusioned by the Church if it withholds from him the right of service. A Church that gives him nothing to do cannot satisfy him."<sup>67</sup>

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66. Emil Brunner, Revelation and Reason, p. 394.

67. Emil Brunner, The Divine-Human Encounter, p. 194f.

The catastrophic events of the past few decades have demonstrated to us once and for all that the Church must emerge from its "fatal theological isolation."<sup>68</sup> "The events of our own day have at last shown us that all culture needs a Christian foundation."<sup>69</sup> The business of establishing this foundation cannot be left to the theologian alone because the Bible simply does not answer all questions.

We need Christian specialists in all spheres of life; hence we need a Christian philosophy, which, from the standpoint of the Christian faith, can penetrate into the region which the theologian does not enter, because he also is only a specialist in a particular sphere of knowledge, namely, in that of reflection upon divine revelation. The co-ordination of the various spheres of life is the task, not of the theologian, but of the philosopher. But if this co-ordination is to take place from the standpoint of the Christian faith, then we need precisely a Christian philosophy.<sup>70</sup>

The problem of Christian philosophy is so very urgent because there is such a tremendous need for the penetration of all spheres of life by the Christian spirit. This penetration will only occur when we understand that theology is not above Christian philosophy just as the pastor is not above the layman. Christ is the head of both and

They both stand under Christ, the one in an inner, the other in an outer, circle; the one with the task of understanding the message of Jesus Christ in its inmost depths of meaning,

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68. Emil Brunner, Revelation and Reason, p. 395.

69. Ibid. This view of Brunner's is the result of quite an evolution since the days of The Divine Imperative (1932), in which he states definitely: "It is not the business of the believer as such to create culture. That is the task of man apart from faith ... ." And again: "The Christian cannot produce a Christian culture ... ." p. 489.

70. Ibid.

and thus purifying the proclamation of the Gospel and ever anew basing it on the Word of revelation; the other with the task of making clear the truth of faith in order to throw light on the problems of Christian living in the world, and to help them to deal with these problems in a creative way.<sup>71</sup>

### Criticism

The teachings, postulates and positions of Emil Brunner are difficult to criticize. This is not because he furnishes a perfect system that defies anything but constructive criticism, far from it. It is rather because of his elusive, dialectical method. As Daniel D. Williams of the University of Chicago analyzed the problem, "Brunner's writing has a deceptive smoothness and simplicity on the surface. Underneath there is a dialectical restlessness and a continuous subtle movement."<sup>72</sup> It is exactly this "dialectical restlessness" that makes the final pinning down of any single doctrine of Brunner's tricky and perplexing. His mass of unresolved paradoxes, contradictions and seeming inconsistencies leave one hanging in a quandary as to his exact position. The reader is prone to take a "dialectical" attitude and approach as regards him. He would never like to state such a definite "no" that he could not recover it with a "yes." He would like to allow sufficient room to backtrack with the qualitative condition: "to a certain extent Brunner

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71. Ibid., p. 396.

72. D. D. Williams, op. cit. p. 241.

says this, to a certain extent this is true concerning him, that is false." In a word, one finds it an arduous task to come to a decisive conclusion without doing the Professor of Zurich an injustice in some way or another.

One example to illustrate this difficulty of knowing just what Brunner means is his position regarding the Fall and Creation. He declares: "Neither this original revelation nor original sin can be placed within the historical category."<sup>73</sup> Yet while the historical fact is gone, in the very next breath he states that the concepts and the truths of the concepts are still in vital force. He then conveniently relegates the Fall and Creation to the vague category of "supra-history," which no one I have met thus far can quite penetrate. We are inclined to agree with J. P. Clelland who said in his review of Revelation and Reason:

These are all limiting concepts and at once we feel ourselves drawn into the dizzy whirl of dialecticism with its yes-no, true-false, black-white, 'tis-'taint, until we no longer know whether we are coming or going. God is revealed, yet He is hidden; the Scriptures are the Word, yet they are not the Word; man is saved, yet he is lost.<sup>74</sup>

Another thing that makes Brunnerian principles difficult to investigate thoroughly is the conspicuous lack of definitions of terms, particularly crucial terms like reason and philosophy. Daniel Williams speaks again:

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73. Emil Brunner, Revelation and Reason, p. 264.

74. John P. Clelland, "Review of Brunner's Revelation and Reason," in The Westminster Theological Journal, Vol X, No. 1, (November, 1947), p. 61.

"... he never defines these terms. To be sure, he gives many quasi-definitions; but he never says: 'Here is exactly the sense in which I mean to use these words'."<sup>75</sup> Brunner's approach is mainly what is called the "typological." He gives a host of illustrations, examples and contrasts and let's it to the reader to be able to see the clear meaning of a term sitting out by itself. This method becomes quite confusing sometimes, and it puts Brunner in a position that leaves him vulnerable to misunderstanding.

On the other hand, to say that Dr. Brunner is not one of the greatest writers, thinkers and theologians of our day is to do him <sup>an</sup> injustice. His living, popular tomes are loaded with penetrating, stimulating and inspiring thought. Emil Brunner's influence is already measured in decades and will continue to be so computed. His prime purpose to awaken a more living Christianity, to arouse a more influential Christianity in every sphere of human activity is most laudable. Nels F. S. Ferré sums it all up well in his resume of Revelation and Reason:

To me he (Brunner) is one of the most all around Christian writers of our time. ... My settled opinion is that though Brunner hardly has all it takes to meet our modern problems, yet he has so much to say of critical importance and wise insight, that for any alert thinker to miss reading him is a distinct misfortune.<sup>76</sup>

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75. Daniel D. Williams, op. cit., p. 243

76. Nels F. S. Ferré, "Book Review on Brunner's Revelation and Reason," in Theology Today, Vol. IV, No. 1, (April, 1947), p. 143.



It is our conviction that there is much to be learned from Dr. Brunner's inquiry into the age old problem of the relationship between reason and revelation and his Christian philosophy that grows therefrom.

Even though the world is sinful, even though a perpetual Armageddon has arisen between reason and revelation because of the sinfulness of the world, yet the Christian cannot withdraw from the world. He cannot withdraw from his own reason. Positively, the more earnestly and diligently the Christian plays his role in the world the more will this evil world be held in check. Certainly the spirit of Christ and the New Testament is in contradiction to any withdrawal from the world and any ascetic denial of the world in the vein of St. Anthony or Simon the Stylite. St. Paul writes: "For every creature (better 'creation') of God is good, and nothing to be refused,"<sup>77</sup> "Unto the pure all things are pure"<sup>78</sup> and "All things are yours,"<sup>79</sup> Such passages preclude any ascetic denial. Rather they give the Christian a positive, free and activistic position in society. This position in society imposes on the Christian the use of his God-given reason. "Replenish the earth and subdue it," certainly presupposes the use of the mind and reason. Without it man could subdue nothing and would be on the same plane with the animals.

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77. I Timothy 4:4.

78. Titus 1:15.

79. I Corinthians 3:21.

It is almost too trite to repeat - but possibly because of its triteness it is often overlooked - that the explanation to the First Article, recorded three times in our Confessions, recognizes reason as God-given. "I believe ... that he has given me my body and soul ... my reason, and all my senses ... ."80 Luther, the author of these words, regarded reason to be the gift of God even though he allowed no place for reason in matters spiritual. He declares: "Therefore the attempt to establish or defend divine order with human reason, unless that reason has previously been established and enlightened by faith, is just as futile as if I would throw light upon the sun with a lightless lantern, or rest a rock on a reed."81 But the matter was wholly different after reason has been enlightened by faith. Luther's reply to Dr. Henning on this matter is well known: "... but in the hands of those who believe, 'tis an excellent instrument. All faculties and gifts are pernicious, exercised by the impious; but most salutary when possessed by godly persons."82 Perhaps Luther paid his greatest compliment to reason when in the critical hour of Christendom he declared: "Unless I am proved to be wrong (convictus fuero) by the witness of Scripture or by evident reasons (ratione evidente), ... I neither can nor will make any retraction ... ."83

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80. Concordia Triglott, pp. 532,2; 681,3; 871,38.

81. Luther, Holman Edition, Vol. I, p. 346.

82. The Table Talk of Martin Luther, trans. William Hazlitt, Esq., p. 41.

83. Luther, W. A. VII, p. 838, Quoted in Emil Brunner, Revelation and Reason, p. 380.

In accord with this utterance Luther was not of the opinion that men might not know or study philosophy. "I don't say that men may not teach and learn philosophy; I approve thereof, so that it be within reason and moderation."<sup>84</sup> Though Luther hated scholastic Aristotelian metaphysics with an intense hatred yet he stated that he would like to see the Stagirite's books on Logic, Rhetoric and Politics retained for use in teaching and preaching.<sup>85</sup> This statement is closely akin to Brunner's previously cited position<sup>86</sup> that in some matters, politics for example, the Christian thinker might do well to sit at the feet of Aristotle and the other philosophers.

The Lutheran orthodox dogmaticians have never contested the ministerial use of reason (*usus rationis ministerialis, organicus*) as the means by which man perceives and thinks. "Reason in this sense has a legitimate and necessary place in theology, since the Holy Spirit implants and preserves saving faith through the Word of God which is received into the human mind."<sup>87</sup> To this ministerial use of reason is added the study of languages and particularly the use of grammar and logic "because the Holy Spirit was pleased to accommodate Himself to the laws of human thought and speech."<sup>88</sup>

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84. The Table Talk of Martin Luther, p. 27.

85. Luther, Holman Edition, Vol. II, p. 147.

86. Cf. supra, p. 17.

87. John T. Mueller, Christian Dogmatics, p. 92.

88. Ibid.

The Lutheran theologians then raised the question: "Is reason and philosophy altogether opposed to faith and theology?" Their answer was no. Faith and theology are for them merely above legitimate reason. But they are contrary to the arbitrary, corrupt and perverted reason. Quenstedt: "Philosophy and the principles of Reason are not contrary to Theology, nor the latter to the former."<sup>89</sup> And Gerhard: "In themselves considered, there is no contrariety, no contradiction between Philosophy and Theology, because whatever things concerning the deepest mystery of faith Theology propounds from revelation, these a wiser and sincere Philosophy knows are not to be discussed and estimated according to the principles of reason, lest there be a confusion of what pertains to entirely different departments."<sup>90</sup> Only when reason leaves its banks and overflows into the private field of revelation must it be condemned, as Quenstedt states again: "Theology does not condemn the use of Reason, but its abuse and its affectation of directorship, or its magisterial use, as normative and decisive in divine things."<sup>91</sup> In complete accordance therewith our Lutheran dogmaticians never depreciated the proper use of philosophy, but condoned it as having value even for the theologian, though in a very restricted sense. Its value was felt when the theologian

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89. Heinrich Schmid, The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, trans. Hay and Jacobs, p. 32.

90. Ibid., p. 33.

91. Ibid., p. 35.

approached the so-called "mixed" articles of Holy Scripture, truths which could be known also somewhat by reason. In regard to them Quenstedt says: "In the mixed articles we grant that philosophical principles may be employed; not, indeed, for the purpose of decision or demonstration, but merely for illustration, or as a sort of a secondary proof of that which has already been decided by the Scriptures."<sup>92</sup> Gerhard adds thereto: "In this latter manner the Theologian becomes indebted, for some things, to the philosopher ... ." <sup>93</sup> Thus we see here also that the theologian cannot escape dealing with the problem of philosophy and theology, or reason and revelation no matter how fundamental and devoted a Bible student he might be. It is a question he is forced to face even though many calamitous perversions have resulted in these two areas when subtle philosophy broke from its reins and overran theology. Thus far we are, therefore, in almost perfect harmony with the principles as set forth by Dr. Brunner.

When our theologians distinguished "mixed" articles from "pure" articles, they were in effect saying that there are some articles which are not as closely related to the absolute center of God and man and revelation as others. In the "pure" articles man could only know through revelation and reason could never be valid. Yet in the "mixed" articles reason could be valid too in a restricted sense

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92. Ibid., p. 37f.

93. Ibid., p. 37.

because man could know in part by his God-given reason. Of course, they were most careful to repeat that just because the "mixed" articles had some validity before the bar of reason was not the cause for the Christian's believing them. His cause for believing them was simply Scriptural revelation. Still and all, certainly the doctrine of salvation by faith in the atoning Jesus Christ is more closely related to the center - it is the center of Scriptural teaching regarding a man's salvation - than the doctrine of the natural knowledge of God, which any Aristotelian, Hindu or Hottentot can know, though not perfectly, through his natural reason. There is a sort of a "law of the closeness of relation" even in theology. Whether or not there is much value in employing such terminology in this area is another question.

But the "law of the closeness of relation" does have value when the Christian layman finds himself face to face with problems and questions concerning which there is no answer in Scripture. Our sanctified common sense already tells us that in such matters as pure mathematics, logic, architectural drawing and some related subjects the Bible has little to say. In these fields the Christian will have more "freedom" than in the pursuit of activities like psychology, sociology, anthropology or their kin. Furthermore, in the former his thinking pure and simple will differ little or none from the non-Christian's thinking, while in

the latter his thinking will necessarily differ vastly from the unbeliever's. Psychology, sociology and anthropology nearly always suggest definite ethical implications and injunctions. The true Christian can never escape facing a Scriptural judgment on any system or suggestion or naturalistic ethics. The "law of the closeness of relation" is valuable in so far as it gives the Christian a helpful tool with which he can work in measuring wherein and how far he must differ from his unbelieving associates in study and research. The result will be, let us say, no "Christian" formal mathematics, but will certainly be a Christian study of man or anthropology. Whether or not the Christian anthropologist now wishes to call himself a "Christian philosopher" rests entirely with him. De gustibus non est disputandum! With Brunner the designation "Christian philosopher" is a very fluid, non-frightening and arbitrary term. Brunner begins to apply it to the Christian as soon as the Christian embarks upon thought or action outside of the strictly formal sphere of logical thought perception or common sense. In other words, for him the Christian jurist who thinks about political or social justice is already a Christian philosopher.

We heartily agree with Dr. Brunner that the Christian layman ought to take a most active part in whatever secular calling he happens to choose. He ought to make his Christianity known and felt in his particular calling too. He

ought surely to differ from his non-Christian associate in so far as a difference is possible and necessary. That is to say, a difference is hardly possible in purely formal geometry, but it is certainly necessary in anthropology. To the extent that the Christian working in anthropology must differ from his non-Christian partner, he must develop his own system of anthropology which does not conflict with Scriptural revelation in any case or point. This is not to say that everything in his system will be directly defined by Scripture. Scripture does not and was not made to answer every question about the study of man and his movements.

This "law of the closeness of relation" can, however, easily mislead. It can induce the Christian who happens to be a mathematician into believing that since he is moving about on the outer periphery, he need not concern himself with the center at all. While his disconcern is possible with regard to the purely formal aspect of his interest, it is definitely not possible in the material aspect. The material aspect rises into prominence when the mathematician views the whole mysterious background of his subject or takes into consideration motives and desires. The familiar story about Albert Einstein well illustrates the "mysterious background" of even a formal subject as mathematics. After Einstein has filled his fourth or fifth blackboard with intricate formulas and elaborate equations in search



for some unknown, he begins to mutter: "He's uncanny! He's uncanny!" Brunner likewise acknowledges: "Even the simplest atom of hydrogen has its 'metaphysical background,' as indeed, all and each have its definite place in the whole plan of the Creator and Redeemer."<sup>94</sup> And from the point of view of motives the Christian differs most widely from his non-Christian associate. The Christian promotes the glory of God and the welfare of his fellow man. The non-Christian may have the service of his fellow brother in mind, but he altogether lacks that motivating fear and love of God. The crucial question arises: Can motives ever be separated from thinking or acting? We doubt if any separation exists beyond the mind. We believe that in actual practice motives cannot be separated from actions. Even the Christian judge will be impelled by a different motive than the non-Christian. We firmly believe furthermore that in his enthusiasm over his discovery Brunner sometimes loses sight of this significant factor of motives. Still the distinction between the formal and the material, and the "law of the closeness of relation" that grows out of this distinction, is both valid and necessary. It is as valid as our distinction between justification and sanctification. It is as necessary as the Christian's duty to engage in secular pursuits. If there were no formal side to mathematics, jurisprudence,

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94. Emil Brunner, Revelation and Reason, p. 382.

business, mechanics and similar areas of human interest then every Christian would have to become a hermit. He could not be a "salt" or a "light."

Where we do differ wholly from and draw a sharp line of contention with Brunner though, is where he states:

The break (between revelation and reason) does not occur between theology and philosophy, but between theology and faith. That transposition of the encounter of faith - of that conversation between God who addresses man and the man who responds - is accomplished already in the doctrine of the Church by the transition from the sphere of the personal into that of the idea. 'Thinking it over' is the beginning of the process that will be carried farther by a Christian philosophy.<sup>95</sup>

On the immediate surface this does not appear so bad, because, true! the theologian is required to "think" even as any jurist or artist. Furthermore, we agree that theology is not the same as faith because a person may be a master theologian and still not have faith. But because this seeming inconsistency is possible does not mean that now the break between revelation and reason must come somewhere before theology and philosophy. The Bible tells us time and time again that man can and does resist the workings of the Holy Spirit through the Word. Indeed, of himself man cannot do otherwise. Why then some are converted and others are not, is an enigmatic question that the Bible leaves unanswered, and so do we. Brunner tries vainly to answer this

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95. Ibid., p. 389.

unanswerable question by placing the break between revelation and reason already between faith and theology: between "the personal encounter of God and man" and "the thinking over" of this encounter by man. Not only does he fail to arrive at a satisfactory solution to the problem, but at the same time he commits the gross error of stating: "the break does not occur between theology and philosophy."<sup>96</sup> Between theology and philosophy is precisely where the break occurs! Theology is on all sides closely bounded, limited and guarded by the Holy Scriptures. As soon as theology goes beyond Scripture in substance or in thought it ceases to be Christian and Biblical theology, for, as Quenstedt declares: "The sole, proper, adequate, and ordinary source of Theology and of the Christian Religion is the divine revelation contained in the Holy Scriptures; or, what is the same thing, that the canonical Scriptures alone are the absolute source of Theology, so that out of them alone are the articles of faith to be deduced and drawn."<sup>97</sup> For the true, orthodox Christian theologian the break will ever come between theology and philosophy because as long as the true Christian theologian is working in the field of theology he must abandon all philosophizing and rationalizing. He must not substitute his human machinations for or essentially weave them into the pattern of revelation. Quod non est Biblicum, non est theologicum. One more pertinent statement

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96. Ibid.

97. Quenstedt, quoted in H. Schmidt, op. cit., p. 27f.

by Quenstedt: "Divine revelation is the first and the last source of sacred Theology, beyond which the theological discussion among Christians dare not proceed."<sup>98</sup>

For Brunner the break between revelation and reason can and already does occur between faith and theology.<sup>99</sup> It occurs there because he plainly violates "revelation as the first and last source of sacred Theology, beyond which theological discussion among Christians dare not proceed." To the Word of Revelation contained in Holy Scriptures he adds reason.

Reason tells him first of all, in contradiction to clear passages of Scripture, that he cannot identify the Word of God with the entire Holy Scriptures of the Canon. Dr. Brunner states: "The Scriptures are the Word of God, because, and in so far as, they give us Christ." (Underlining my own)<sup>100</sup> Also, "... Holy Scriptures; the latter has authority only in so far as it is the Word of God, not in itself, and therefore never as an entity which is at the disposal of theology

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98. Ibid., p. 28.

99. Our contention with Brunner is much more than a petty argument over semantics. It involves much more than whether we mean the same thing but disagree over the use of the word "philosophy" in theology. As before stated, "thinking it over," employing grammar and logic, for Brunner is already philosophizing. Thus far the disagreement is one only of words. But when we note later in our discussion that Brunner challenges basic Biblical doctrines on the shaky foundation of scientific hypotheses and metaphysical principles, then we see how very much more is involved, and why for him the break must happen between faith and theology. Theology has already become philosophy, and "rationalistic" philosophy too, not merely "grammatical" or "logical" philosophy.

100. Emil Brunner, Revelation and Reason, p. 280.

or ecclesiastical law."<sup>101</sup> We now understand why for Brunner the break has to occur between faith and theology. Theology for him must appeal to something in addition to the Bible, namely, reason. The Bible has authority only in so far as it is the Word of God. Much of the Bible isn't the Word of God, but "is the human, and therefore not the infallible, witness to the divine revelation."<sup>102</sup> In theologizing, consequently, one cannot employ it as an absolute law but must also accept with it the findings of higher criticism and of science, particularly in the areas of space, time, and evolution. Thus, "... historical criticism ... has pointed out various contradictions in the book of Acts, and has discovered various inconsistencies in the assignment of certain definite writings to well-known Apostles as their authors."<sup>103</sup> Darwinianism, which demonstrates the old orthodox view of the Creation, the historical Paradise and the Fall to be untenable, "... has become scientific truth, with which all honest theology has to come to terms ... ." <sup>104</sup> Furthermore, "the doctrinal differences of the Old Testament are great; the contradictions seem to mock all efforts to gain a unified view. Indeed, anyone who tried to make a scientific unity of view out of all these different and

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101. Emil Brunner, Man in Revolt, p. 295.

102. Emil Brunner, Revelation and Reason, p. 276.

103. Ibid., p. 285.

104. Ibid., p. 279.

contradictory elements would only knock his head against a wall."<sup>105</sup>

For Brunner the break must take place between faith and theology because the theologian to be fit must be more than an intelligent, believing Christian. He must be anthropologist, scientist, sociologist, archeologist, jurist and philosopher combined. The expert in all these fields is competent to sit in judgment on Biblical revelation in deciding what is the actual Word of God. The findings in these fields are furthermore to be woven into any theological system.

The dismal truth is that the findings in these fields are too often the products of mortal reason. They are often fallible human hypotheses and speculations as history has repeatedly shown. These "scientific" findings can be readily mistaken. But even this fact does not perturb Brunner too greatly because for him theology must always remain pliable and subject to change. It must never become dogmatic or literalistic. Indeed, this was the basic fault of the old orthodoxy. And it failed so miserably because it could not adjust itself to the critical, rationalistic and scientific findings of the Enlightenment. Dr. Brunner declares: "... in Protestantism everything was staked on the Bible, and within Orthodoxy upon the legal authority of the actual letter of Scripture. Hence when this foundation was destroyed,

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105. Ibid., p. 291f.

the whole building began to totter."<sup>106</sup> "This was caused by the Enlightenment."<sup>107</sup>

According to Brunner's rule no system of dogmatics can be a final statement of faith and religious truth. As previously stated, it is the task of the theologian to make dogmatics "a mediator in between worldly science and supra-worldly testimony of faith."<sup>108</sup> The carrying through of this principle out to its logical, consistent conclusions and implications will by sheer necessity demand a break between faith and theology. The boundaries of theology have already been wiped out by the encroachment of human reason. Theology has become philosophy. Brunner therefore concludes: "The difference between Christian philosophy and Christian theology is therefore not one of principle, but is a fluid transition."<sup>109</sup>

Our second main objection to the theology of Emil Brunner involves his dialectical approach. In investigating Brunner's dialectical approach one discovers further evidence as to why it is essential for him to declare the break between faith and theology. The dialectical approach to theology introduces a foreign element into theology, namely, philosophy. For Brunner this approach is inescapable for apprehending the truths of revelation and must always be

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106. Emil Brunner, The Mediator, p. 105.

107. Ibid., p 34.

108. Emil Brunner, Die Christliche Lehre von Gott, p. 77, quoted in Dale Moody, op. cit., p. 338.

109. Emil Brunner, Revelation and Reason, p. 390.

employed. "It is only by means of the contradiction that we can apprehend the contradictory truth that the eternal God enters time ... ."110 We would never deny that the dialectic does have its value in logic and thinking, even as the Hegelian synthesis has its value, but we strongly protest against its employment in theology as a kind of a support and buttress. The dialecticians, including Brunner, have made the dialectic a pivotal point in their whole theology, and Scriptural authority has suffered greatly because of it. As Dr. Th. Engelder puts it: "They do say that their sole authority is the Word of God; but if we ask them why they are then filling their books with the metaphysical discussions of the law of the dialectic, they will have to answer that they do it for the purpose of establishing or at least strengthening their theology."111

Luther said, and every Christian will agree with him, that Scriptural truth contains many unresolved paradoxes. One of the foremost is the paradox of the Law and the Gospel, the apprehension of which, as Luther plainly said, requires a very skilled "dialectician." But that does not mean that our whole approach to the Bible must be dialectical. It is not by the sheer force of the dialectic that we believe Scriptural doctrine. But this is precisely what the dialectician proposes. Where there is sin, there must be

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110. Emil Brunner, The Word and the World, p. 6, quoted in Theodore Engelder, op. cit., p. 250.

111. Th. Engelder, op. cit., p. 250.



grace. Where there is God as veiled, there must be God as revealed. And where there is death, there must be resurrection. These truths hold good not so much because clear passages of Scripture teach them, but because the law of the dialectic demands them. There cannot be one without the other. There can never be so decisive a "no" that it does not harbor the possibility of a "yes." This approach we plainly term philosophical. The Bible indeed says that where sin abounded grace did much more abound. But this truth exists not because any law of the dialectic demands it, but purely because God has so revealed it. Sin in itself does not presuppose grace.

It is possible to cite many examples of how Brunner employs the dialectic to prove or at least bolster up Scriptural truths. Here we have room for only one.

From this conception (sinner), however, there springs a remarkable dialectic, very characteristic of the Bible. This negation, sin, presupposes a positive element, of which it is the negation. ... Sin always has a history behind it. It means turning away; it is a break with the originally positive element. Turning away from God presupposes an original positive relation with God, and thus an original revelation. ... Thus the revelation that is given to the sinner is not the first one; it presupposes a previous revelation apart from which man could not be a sinner.<sup>112</sup>

We abhor all this precarious indulgence in the confusing logic of the dialectic to prove that man was once at one with God, then fell and is now a sinner. How much more

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112. Emil Brunner, Revelation and Reason, p. 25f.

authoritative and less bewildering to use the simple Scriptural story of the Creation, the Fall and the Curse of man as told in Genesis I and II.

Just how precarious Brunner's introduction of the dialectic and other philosophical arguments into his theological system is, was demonstrated by the straightlaced philosopher, J. S. Bixler:

One feels like turning Brunner's own method back against him. To put the matter in the sharply alternative way of which he is so fond - either Christ's coming was revelation, meaning by that something which transcends the ordinary laws of thought, or it was not. If it was revelation we cannot discuss it, or at least we cannot so confidently say what must and what must not have happened, for we have only our own ordinary thought forms to use. If it was not revelation it cannot be so decisively separate from ethics and reason. But Brunner himself asserts that it was revelation and still goes on trying to convince his readers by logic and argument. In spite of his own statement one is thus forced to believe that the transcendence of God and of his revelation is coupled with at least a sufficient degree of immanent qualities to enable it to be discussed ... ."(Underlining my own)<sup>113</sup>

In short, Brunner and the rest of the dialecticians are playing with fire in employing philosophical principles and arguments. They are making themselves vulnerable to abstract, rationalistic philosophy which Brunner tries hard to avoid. (Brunner's third use of reason) because they are flirting with its very daughters.

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<sup>113</sup>. J. S. Bixler, "Brunner and the Theology of Crisis," in The Journal of Religion, Vol. IX, No. 3, (July, 1929) p. 455f.

### III. Brunner's Principle of "Truth as Encounter"

Thus far we have produced two major objections to Emil Brunner's view of the relation between revelation and reason and his idea of Christian philosophy. Both of these objections sprang primarily from our main line of contention with Brunner that the breaking point between revelation and reason occurs already between faith and theology. We saw, in the first place, that for him the break must occur there because he allows reason to sit in judgment over revelation in deciding what is the Word of God. In the second place, we discussed his typical dialectic approach toward theology which again necessitates the break between faith and theology because the dialectic approach is basically a philosophical one. Brunner has already introduced illicit reason and philosophy into the private chamber of theology. As a result, his theology has become in many respects something decidedly different from the simple Christian faith as set forth by divine revelation in the Holy Canon.

Our third principal objection to Brunner's idea of Christian philosophy is the most vital of all. It enters where Brunner begins discussing faith as "personal encounter between God and man," where he asserts Christian truth to

be "truth as encounter." We object strongly at this point because Brunner here proposes theses that concern the very nature of faith and revelation. These are concepts which even the Bible does not define. No one knows, because the Holy Scriptures do not tell us, what faith is in its very essence and how God mysteriously reveals Himself to an individual and converts him through the Word. Yet Brunner is bold enough to try to unravel this mystery with his own reason. In doing so he grossly violates his own laws of "the closeness of relation" and "the personal centre," laws on which his whole idea of Christian philosophy hinges. Says Daniel D. Williams, and we agree entirely with him: "Brunner introduces a philosophical idea into his theology at the very point where he says it does not belong, namely, in the description of the encounter between God and man."<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Brunner's principal exposition of the "personal encounter" and "truth as encounter" theme is found in his book The Divine-Human Encounter.<sup>2</sup> In this work he molds this theme in bright, bold relief against the dark, drab background that he has painted of the Greek conception of truth apprehended through the Object-Subject antithesis. He declares:

The use of the Object-Subject antithesis in understanding the truth of faith ... is a disastrous misunderstanding which affects the entire content

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1. Daniel D. Williams, op. cit., p. 351.

2. The German title is much more revealing. It is precisely Wahrheit als Begegnung. Truth as Encounter.

of Christian doctrine and also operates fatally in the practice of the Church, most severely impairing the proclamation of the Word and faith among the fellowship. The Biblical understanding of truth cannot be grasped through the Object-Subject antithesis: on the contrary it is falsified through it.<sup>3</sup>

Just what is this disastrous Object-Subject antithesis? The Professor of Zurich employs the historical method in defining these two concepts, Object and Subject. These concepts assumed their basic form in the early Greek minds. The Sophists and Socrates are examples of this type of mind which was concerned solely with the philosophical problem of truth and knowledge as entities apart from being and thinking. In a few words, in their minds the Object as opposed to the Subject emerged. Greek philosophy soon cast its deadening spell over Christian thought. The erroneous idea then arose

... that the divine revelation in the Bible had to do with the communication of those doctrinal truths which were inaccessible by themselves to human reason; and correspondingly that faith consisted in holding these supernaturally revealed doctrines for truth.<sup>4</sup>

The supposition of the Object-Subject antithesis has burdened the Church's understanding of revealed truth and determined its practice ever since. The Church cannot seem to break away from this untested, unrecognized and unconscious "application of the antithesis between Object and Subject, between

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3. Emil Brunner, The Divine-Human Encounter, p. 20f.

4. Ibid., p. 19.

the objective truth of faith (Credo) and the subjective acceptance of faith (credo)."<sup>5</sup>

The over-emphasis on the Object almost immediately leads to two ruinous errors in the Roman Catholic Church. The first error of Objectivism began with the asking and answering of such questions: how long after reception does the consecrated Host of Christ remain in the stomach of the believer? Before long this entirely personal event of the Sacrament became an impersonal, physical-metaphysical object, a sort of a material medicament which is at the disposal of the priest any time he may choose. The second error of Catholic Objectivism is of a more subtle nature, though its basic purposes and tendencies are the same. It is concerned with the Word of God. God gave His Word to the Church to be proclaimed, but the power of that Word comes only from Him through the work of the Holy Spirit. The Catholic dogmaticians wanted the Word as an object to be at their own disposal. The Church desired "to be certain of God in a more direct way than is guaranteed through the promise as given to faith in prayer."<sup>6</sup> To that end the Church arrogated the authority of the Word to itself and made it an object available in a mighty system of ecclesiastical assurances and canon law of which the Pope is

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5. Ibid., p. 20.

6. Ibid., p. 25.

supreme head and infallible spokesman. At his ordination, every priest now receives the Holy Spirit from the Church and carries it about as an object to be disposed of where and when he sees fit.

This Objectivism found its counter-part in Subjectivism.<sup>7</sup> Subjectivism was the reaction against the fixed, secure, disposable authority. Its chief characteristics are freedom and spontaneity. To achieve its purpose, Subjectivism held that the Spirit is never in any fashion bound to any given Word of historical fact. "Only the individual can experience it (the Spirit), and only in his solitary experience has he the certainty of the divine revelation."<sup>8</sup> Mysticism is the common name given to this individualistic enthusiasm.

The most beautiful and significant thing about the Reformation is the fact that through its interpretation of the Word the Church found an escape from the deadly antithesis of Objectivism-Subjectivism. The Reformation discovered the all-important "secret of moving both between and beyond these extremes."<sup>9</sup>

Its 'epistemological' principle was the dialectic; that is, its form of expression was never the use of one concept, but always two logically contradictory ones: the Word of God in the Bible and the witness of the Holy Spirit, but these understood

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7. Object-Subject, Objectivity-Subjectivity, Objectivism-Subjectivism are all interchangeable terms in Brunner's vocabulary.

8. Emil Brunner, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

and experienced, not as a duality, but as a unity.<sup>10</sup>

The truths of salvation and revelation are clearly discoverable and available in the Word of Scripture, but they are never available, willy-nilly, at the Church's command in doctrine or dogma. Salvation and revelation are available only as the Word of the ever living Spirit of God through whom Christ Incarnate takes possession of our hearts and dwells there. The secret of the Reformation is contained in "the paradoxical unity of Word and Spirit, of historical revelation and God's contemporary presence, of 'Christ for us' and 'Christ in us'."<sup>11</sup> It was Luther who discovered this great secret and in doing so, he refound the original Biblical understanding of truth.

But this liberating purity in the comprehension of Biblical truth lasted for only a short time. In the controversies that inevitably followed the break with Rome, the Protestant controversialists already began reverting back to Catholicism, though quite unconsciously. They needed something tangible, fast, secure and apprehendable in their argumentations and so they resorted to the Word as an authoritative object. Before long the Word of God was again made compassable and objective doctrine became the object of faith. The fatal age in which this took place has been given

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10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.



the fitting appellation: The Age of Protestant Orthodoxy.

What precisely happened in this age? Brunner tells us:

The paradoxical unity of Word and Spirit fell to pieces; the Scriptures became a gathering of divine oracles, the essence of divinely revealed doctrine. Men have God's Word. ... the temptation could not be withstood to create a system of assurances including the confessional dogma, the notion of verbal inspiration, and the Bible understood as a book of revealed doctrine. The 'paper Pope' stands over against the Pope in Rome; quite unnoticed the position of dependence on the Word of God is usurped by the appeal to pure doctrine, which in turn is made tantamount to the Word of God. This displacement can already be noticed in a decisive way in the Augsburg Confession, even though still hidden by a living understanding of faith.<sup>12</sup>

A reaction to this deterioration in the understanding of faith was bound to follow. The counterstroke was termed simply Pietism. It bore within itself various marks of Subjectivism. Even so it was an honest effort to bring the individual back to the living, robust faith of the Bible. The successes it accomplished in the rejuvenation of the Church, in social and missionary activities are among the finest recorded in the history of the Church. With Schleiermacher, however, there began an extreme subjective interpretation of faith that no longer recognized any foundation for faith outside of immediate experience. This subjective dissolution of faith continued until it reached its apex in the American psychology of religion, so that for many

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12. Ibid., 31f.

"theologians" there was nothing left of religion except a certain social feeling or value experience.

The First World War swept away the very foundation sands of this cheap, hallowed-out "theology." Powerful reactionary movements which reverted back to the Bible, Luther and the Reformation took the stage. Perhaps the greatest opponent of Subjectivity in the last generation arose in the form of "dialectic theology." But at the same time, in avoiding the Scylla of Subjectivism, many began to veer too closely to the Charybdis of Objectivism. In the controversies that marked the theological transition period after the First World War, many a theologian wanted more manageable, ready-made, massive weapons to fight with "than the dialectically oscillating and organic-parabolic notions in the Bible itself."<sup>13</sup> Quite unawares a neo-Orthodox theology took shape carrying many of the essential features of Objectivism, such as: over-emphasis on doctrine, dogma and the formulated creeds; and too much prominence given to the objective factor in preaching and in the understanding of the Church and the Sacraments. Such is the brief but grim story of how the Church has persistently vascillated between the two extremes of Subjectivism and Objectivism to its own great hurt and harm.

Naturally, upon first thought it would seem that the solution of this problem of finding Christian truth would

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13. Ibid., p. 38.

lie somewhere between these two extremes. It is only a problem of defining the proper sphere and thus simply a question of mediation. But such is decidedly not the case! One glance at history, particularly the Reformation, will show that such a compromise can at best only obscure the solution to the problem. Brunner definitely states: "There is no middle way between Objectivism and Subjectivism: there is no correct mean between two errors."<sup>14</sup> The tremendous damage done to the Church is not the result of over-emphasizing either extreme. It is rather the consequence of the more fundamental error that the Biblical revelation was brought under this antithesis at all. For:

The Bible is as little concerned with objective as with subjective truth. The Objective-Subjective antithesis cannot be applied to the Word of God and faith. It is a category of thought wholly foreign, not only to the way of expression in the Bible, but also to the entire content.<sup>15</sup>

What then according to Brunner is the Biblical understanding of truth? It is truth as "God-truth" apprehended and comprehended only in faith. "In faith," says Brunner, "man possesses no truth except God's, and his possession is not of the kind whereby one ordinarily possesses a truth, but personal fellowship."<sup>16</sup> This fellowship, of course, begins when man believes God's self-revelation to man in His Word. It starts when "an encounter takes place between God

14. Ibid., p. 40.

15. Ibid., p. 41.

16. Ibid., p. 74.

and man."<sup>17</sup> Unique Christian and Biblical truth happens at the moment of this encounter. It is truth so unique that it cannot possibly be expressed by any sort of Object-Subject antithesis. Its constant theme is "personal encounter" with God, "personal correspondence" with God. Its only analogy lies in the encounter between human beings when one person meets another. Here a rather lengthy quotation is necessary to understand just what Brunner means by "personal encounter" and the "I-Thou relationship."

The encounter between two human beings is ordinarily not personal at all but more or less impersonal. I see 'someone.' To see someone is not essentially different from seeing something. This someone says something to me. Someone saying 'something' to me is not essentially different from my saying 'something' to myself - that is, thinking. But now let us put the case that this someone does not say 'something' but 'says' himself, discloses himself to me, and that I, while he 'says' himself to me, 'hear himself'; and more, that while he discloses himself to me, and so surrenders himself to me, I disclose myself to him and receive him while I surrender myself to him. In this moment he ceases to be for me a 'someone-something' and becomes a 'Thou.' In that moment in which he becomes a 'Thou' he ceases to be an object of my thinking and transforms the Object-Subject relation into a relation of personal correspondence: we have fellowship together.<sup>18</sup>

In the same way, when I stand opposite God and am face to face with Him who is never "something" but purely "Thou," I have nothing to reveal or disclose or think. "He alone is Discloser."<sup>19</sup> And he does not disclose "something"

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17. Ibid.

18. Ibid., p. 85f.

19. Ibid., p. 87.

about Himself, that is, mere knowledge, but He discloses Himself. He personally meets me. In personally meeting me my whole "I" existence is overthrown. I become completely changed because my "I" solitariness has been broken into. I now have God Himself. I do not have "something" or an "object" about God. As Brunner clinches it: "The antithesis between Object and Subject, between 'something truthful' and 'knowledge of this truth' has disappeared and has been replaced by the purely personal meeting between the accosting God and answering man."<sup>20</sup>

It is possible to attack Brunner and his "divine-human encounter" thesis by employing various different Biblical approaches. This becomes increasingly evident when we note that his thesis again leads him to deny the authority of the Scriptures along with their verbal inspiration and infallibility.<sup>21</sup> It is this denial of the authority of the Scriptures that results in his semi-mystical view of the Word. His "divine-human encounter" theme also induces him to confuse justification and sanctification,<sup>22</sup> and to commingle Law and Gospel all along the line.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, one might from a purely secular point of view seriously question whether Brunner is himself consistent with his denial of the Object-Subject antithesis in his understanding

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20. Ibid., p. 89.

21. Cf. ibid., pp. 171f.

22. Cf. ibid., pp. 100f and 155f.

23. Cf. especially ibid., pp. 118f.

and definition of faith.<sup>24</sup>

But, as before stated, our main purpose and objection is to show that Dr. Brunner has no right as a strict Christian theologian to investigate and define the very essence of faith and the personal revelation of God to man. It is our purpose further to demonstrate that when he does so in his Divine-Human Encounter, he is already playing the distinct role of a philosopher and not of a theologian. He is employing his third and forbidden use (rationalistic use) of reason. In doing so he transgresses the very "personal centre" of man's existence, a sphere in which he himself says that a total correction of God for man must take place.

In his Foreword to The Divine-Human Encounter, Dr. Emil Brunner makes the bold assertion: "The Biblical conception of truth is: truth as encounter."<sup>25</sup> We wholly disagree with

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24. Cf. this statement of Brunner's in Revelation and Reason, p. 180f.: "... the absolute union with the historic Mediator and the historical Word concerning Him, and with the act of atonement which has taken place once and for all on the Cross. The distinctive mark of this kind of knowledge, as contrasted with all other kinds of knowledge, is that it combines historical objectivity with a knowledge which is subjective and present.

In other words, the same faith which states that 'Christ is in me' is also the simple faith of the Bible, faith in objective facts, in this actual Book, which I have here before me, and in that historical fact which once happened, at a particular time and place. And, indeed, these objective facts are not, as they are in mysticism, merely 'occasions,' or starting points, which we can leave behind as soon as we reach 'reality,' the mystical experience of Christ; but faith in Christ is permanently and absolutely bound up with those objective facts, with this Book, and with this historical fact." (Underlining my own.)

25. Emil Brunner, The Divine-Human Encounter, p. 7.

him and stoutly maintain that the Bible never essentially defines the concept of truth, this event of the personal revelation of God to man that is faith.<sup>26</sup> Daniel D. Williams speaking about this revelation that is faith expressly declares: "There are, indeed, many notions about revelation; but no definition of it."<sup>27</sup> Brunner must be aware of this himself for he states:

Even if we brought together and analyzed exegetically all the Biblical passages in which the word 'truth' occurs, we should be hardly a step nearer our goal. Just as the Bible explicates no 'principle of interpretation' and contains no 'doctrine of the Word of God,' so we search it in vain for a 'doctrine of truth.' The more formal a theological concept is, the less it can be directly discovered or validated by the Bible itself.<sup>28</sup>

Yet in the very next paragraph, Brunner claims the right to investigate and make dogmatic statements about the "Biblical" understanding of truth and faith. This action is possible because, as he maintains, these concepts of his "are taken from nothing but Scripture itself and stand in the closest connection to all its central contents."<sup>29</sup> The situation becomes more confusing when we continue with his next sentence: "They (his concepts) are in fact none other than these very contents (of Scripture), considered in their formal aspect, which as such are never directly mentioned

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26. Lest there be some misunderstanding, "Biblical truth" and faith are for Brunner one of the same.

27. Daniel D. Williams, op. cit., p. 251.

28. Emil Brunner, op. cit., p. 45.

29. Ibid., p. 46.

in the Biblical word."<sup>30</sup> Evidently the crux for solving this apparent contradiction between these concepts not being "directly mentioned in the Biblical word," and these concepts being "taken from nothing but Scripture itself" lies in his phrase: "considered in their formal aspect." Still and all, we cannot see how this solution gives him the right authoritatively to project a definition of faith which is never warranted by Scripture.

Where then does Emil Brunner really get his definition of Biblical truth and faith as the "personal encounter between God and man"? He himself gives us a helpful hint as to its source when he discusses the Objective-Subjective antithesis as the age old criterion for discovering truth in general. He goes on to say:

It was left for the newest form of philosophy, the existential, to question the validity of the antithesis itself. It is no accident that the source of this new thinking is to be found in the greatest Christian thinker of modern times, Soren Kierkegaard. It is therefore particularly suggestive for us theologians to attach ourselves to this philosophy, the entire bent of which seems to correspond with ours.<sup>31</sup>

Though Dr. Brunner hastily covers up by immediately asserting:

Yet we must emphasize again that our considerations are purely theological, that thence they are not dependent on the correctness or incorrectness of that philosophical undertaking which seems to run parallel - apparently or really - to our own.<sup>32</sup>

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30. Ibid.

31. Ibid., p. 82.

32. Ibid.



our suspicions are already quite aroused. Daniel D. Williams gives us the cue that leads directly to Brunner's source for truth as encounter between God and man when he states: "It comes from a general conception of the nature of personal relations which has been given classic expression in Martin Buber's I and Thou."<sup>33</sup> Buber's philosophical world view rests on the distinction between two separate kinds of relations: those between persons, characterized by "I-Thou," and those between things, defined by "I-it." In order to arrive at this distinction, Martin Buber analyzed the constitutive elements in personal relations, whose distinguishing features seem to be: "the freedom of each person, the replacement of all objectivity by interpersonal subjectivity, the absence of the will to control the other, the appreciation of the other's worth as a personal object."<sup>34</sup>

Brunner has borrowed this pattern of encounter between person and person and applied it to the encounter between God and man, or in a word, applied it to faith. Therefore, as Daniel Williams points out: "The event which is supposed to transcend all philosophical understanding is described by the use of a philosophical structure, drawn from human experience and subject to the criticism by the methods of philosophical analysis."<sup>35</sup> Brunner is well

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33. Daniel D. Williams, loc. cit.

34. Martin Buber, I and Thou, cited by Daniel Williams, loc. cit.

35. Ibid.

aware of this vulnerability to criticism and struggles mightily to overcome it. He stresses the fact that the encounter of person with person is only a poor analogy of the real thing.<sup>36</sup> A more subtle cover-up is recognized in his repeated terming of Kierkegaard, Martin Buber and his other creditors as "Christian" and "Biblical" thinkers.<sup>37</sup> Here is one example:

It was as a Christian philosopher that Kierkegaard created the 'Existential' philosophy, it was as a Christian thinker that Ebner discovered the theme of 'I-Thou' - no Greek, however great a genius, would have ever understood such a theme - it was as a Biblical thinker that Martin Buber recognized the significance of the contrasts between 'I' and 'It,' 'I' and 'Thou.'<sup>38</sup>

Finally, however, the choice is plain. Either the theologian must relinquish all investigation concerning the very essence of faith and his attempt to speak about it intelligibly because the Bible speaks only of fruits and results of faith, or he must cease to be a theologian. Only as a philosopher can he examine the epistemological foundations and the actual originations of faith, and he can't do that with any authority. About these mysterious, supernatural questions that the Bible does not answer, the humble and contrite Christian will not concern himself. He

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36. Cf. as an example, this statement of Emil Brunner's in The Divine-Human Encounter, p. 85: "Yet we are dealing only with an analogy seen in an exception to the usual occurrence . . . ."

37. We aren't discussing or questioning the Christianity of these men. We are only saying that their writings definitely portray them much more as philosophers than as theologians.

38. Emil Brunner, Man in Revolt, p. 546.

will be fully satisfied with Christ's injunction expressed time and again: "Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them."<sup>39</sup> Thus we conclude with Williams:

... the theologian (Brunner, of course) who has spent his life in an effort to free Christian theology from entanglement with mysticism and with philosophy has in his own theology developed a perspective which embodies a philosophical mysticism whose classic exponent is a philosopher who does not depend on the New Testament.<sup>40</sup>

For three parallel reasons then we must object to the Brunnerian doctrines on the relationship between revelation and reason and the idea of Christian philosophy that springs from this relationship. These reasons are again: First, he allows reason to sit in judgement over revelation and its Canonical authority. Second, his whole dialectical approach is philosophical. And third, his "divine-human encounter" principle for the "Biblical" understanding of truth and faith is philosophical and violates his own law of the "personal centre." These three reasons furthermore necessitate his break between revelation and reason already between faith and theology, and not between theology and philosophy where it properly belongs.

There are no more fitting words to conclude this investigation of "Emil Brunner and his Idea of Christian Philosophy" than the almost classic ones of John P. Clelland

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39. Matthew 7:20, cf. also: Matthew 7:16ff; 13:33 and John 15:4; 15:16.

40. Daniel D. Williams, loc. cit.

appearing in his review of Brunner's Revelation and Reason:

It is our conclusion that despite his desire to work outward from revelation to reason, Brunner has failed to do so because he himself is a rationalist. God Almighty has spoken in the Scriptures, and in refusing to listen to His voice Dr. Brunner has asserted the autonomy of his reason. His learning is massive, but oh, for the childlike faith of a Samuel to say, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth."<sup>41</sup>

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41. John P. Clelland, "Review of Emil Brunner's Revelation and Reason," in The Westminster Theological Journal, Vol. X, No. 1, (November, 1947), p. 61.

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