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A STUDY OF EPISTEMOLOGY
IN THE THOUGHTS OF PAUL TILLYCH,
MARTIN BUBER, VALENTIN TILLYCH, AND JACQUES LECHE

Short Title: A STUDY OF THEOLOGICAL EPISTEMOLOGY

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty
of Theological Seminary, St. Louis,
Missouri, in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Sacred Theology

by
John Louis DeWitt

1963

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J. A. Hill

A STUDY OF EPISTEMOLOGY
IN THE THEOLOGIES OF EMIL BRUNNER,
MARTIN HEINECKEN, TAITO KANTONEN, AND JOSEPH SITTLER

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

by

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May 1963

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. THE THEOLOGICAL EPISTEMOLOGY OF EMIL BRUNNER	1
Introduction	1
The Historical Perspective	2
Greek versus Biblical Concepts of Knowledge	17
The Subject-Object Split and Beyond	24
Personhood as the Key	37
God as Revealer	41
The Relation of Reason to Faith and Theology	74
II. BRUNNER, KANTIANISM AND CHRISTIANITY	82
Martin Heidegger	88
Lotte Lotzner	97
Joseph Dietrich	100
III. CONCLUSION	110
BIBLIOGRAPHY	124

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. THE THEOLOGICAL EPISTEMOLOGY OF EMIL BRUNNER	1
Introduction	1
The Historical Perspective	4
Greek versus Biblical Concepts of Knowledge	15
The Subject-Object Split and Beyond	26
Personalism as the Key	33
God as Revealer	41
The Relation of Reason to Faith and Theology	54
II. HEINECKEN, KANTONEN AND SITTLER COMPARED WITH BRUNNER	68
Martin Heinecken	68
Taito Kantonen	93
Joseph Sittler	106
III. CONCLUSION	116
BIBLIOGRAPHY	124

CHAPTER I

THE THEOLOGICAL EPISTEMOLOGY OF EMIL BRUNNER

Introduction

Ever since the reading of Emil Brunner's The Divine-Human Encounter this writer has felt the compulsion to delve more deeply into Brunner's position on the nature and perception of religious truth.¹ This little book, a revised presentation of the 1937 Olaus Petri Foundation lectures, is certainly one of the reasons that a man like David Cairns could say that as a theologian Brunner has had a far more pervasive influence than Barth.² Excerpts from this book, labeled by Dale Moody, "a turning point in the interpretation of truth,"³ and by Paul Tillich, "perhaps his most suggestive book,"⁴ occur in a wide gamut of current theo-

¹It might be well to state at the outset that "religious truth" in this study is understood as synonymous with Biblical or Christian truth. There is no attempt to denote the truth(s) of some vague religiosity by the use of this term.

²"The Theology of Emil Brunner," Scottish Journal of Theology, I (1948), 307.

³"An Introduction to Emil Brunner," The Review and Expositor, XLIV (July, 1947), 326.

⁴"Some Questions on Brunner's Epistemology," in The Theology of Emil Brunner, edited by Charles W. Kegley (New York: Macmillan Co., 1962), p. 99.

logical writing. The problem of theological epistemology,⁵ however, penetrates most of Brunner's major writings. Paul Jewett says, "In the final analysis, the basic question is the epistemological one [for Brunner]. How do we know?"⁶ P. G. Schrotenboer concludes that Brunner's theology is "largely a theological epistemology."⁷ Because of Brunner's vibrant interest in this subject, his lucid method of presentation (in contrast to certain other contemporary European theologians), and his often original and engaging thought in the area of theological epistemology, this writer has chosen his writings for the major field of investigation for this study.

A concurrent interest in the thought of contemporary Lutheran theologians in America has motivated the second, subsidiary field of investigation for this study. Three current American Lutheran theologians, Martin Heineken, Taito Kantonen and Joseph Sittler, were chosen largely on the basis of their contributions and influence in Lutheran theological circles in America today. Furthermore, each of

⁵The term, "theological epistemology," is used in this study to refer to the primary God-man knowledge relationship, and not to the discipline of epistemology within the science of theology.

⁶Emil Brunner's Concept of Revelation (London: James Clarke and Co., 1954), p. 139.

⁷A New Apologetics: An Analysis and Appraisal of the Eristic Theology of Emil Brunner (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1955), p. 45.

them is interested, to varying degrees, in the epistemological problem and its concomitant, the nature of religious truth. Heinecken, especially, makes frequent reference to these issues. These men, together with Brunner, all ask the same question: What is religious or Biblical truth, and how can it be known by the individual? Can religious truth be "known" by ordinary rational measures, or is a unique epistemology operative when the subject matter is Biblical truth? This study will attempt to present the answer Brunner gives to this question and compare with his position the viewpoints of Heinecken, Kantonen and Sittler.

A study of the various antitheses against which these men are plying their own theological epistemologies will shed light on the precise shape and direction they give to their thoughts in this area. Also, each man's position on revelation and on the relationship between reason and faith will, of necessity, be important corroborative areas of investigation.

The major source materials for this study will include thirteen of the principal works of Emil Brunner and, with several minor exceptions, all of the writings in book or journal form by Heinecken, Kantonen and Sittler. The study will be found heavily documented, with frequent direct citations from the primary sources. It is hoped that these quotations will be carefully perused. The aim of this study is to present Brunner's position compared with that of the three Lutherans; the quotations are an integral part of this

presentation and are being supplied for didactic as well as documental purposes.

Chapter I of the paper will deal with Brunner and Chapter II with Heineken, Kantonen and Sittler in comparison to Brunner. The concluding section will summarize Brunner's position, evaluate the comparison made between his position and that of the three Lutherans, and raise several questions for further investigation in this field.

The Historical Perspective

The historical and theological phenomenon which, to the greatest extent, gives rise to the particular theological epistemology of Emil Brunner is an early begotten and long lasting doctrinaire intellectualism within the Church and its theology. A relationship had become an idea. Faith in God had given place to acceptance of doctrine. The Word who possesses man had been supplanted by a word which man possesses. The fides qua creditur had been displaced by the fides quae creditur.

Brunner saves his heaviest arraignment in this respect for Orthodoxy, but he sees this misguided intellectualism as having made its entrance into theological circles as early as the second century.

From the middle of the second century the Church has instructed its believers that one "must believe" this and that doctrine in order to be a Christian--"whoever wishes to be saved must, above all things, embrace the Catholic faith." Once let dogma be the object of faith, and faith is then determined by means of the Object-Subject Antithesis, by means of the rational concept

of truth, and remains thus, even though the dogma is applied as revealed truth.⁸

Brunner sees the two chief issues in the early Church--the doctrines of the Trinity and of the two natures of Christ--as being a case in point. These issues and the formulations they engendered were not an unfolding of the apostolic confession of faith, according to Brunner, but instead, an ontological construction which directed faith in another direction than did the New Testament witness to Christ. Truth to be found in a relationship was being displaced by truth found in a positive dogma.

According to Brunner, the second century Church, in her new interest and involvement in doctrinal formulation, did something which has, since then, always been disastrous in her history:

she sought for certainties. She created for herself an instrument of differentiation, which she could use in a legalistic way; this instrument was the concept of the divinely inspired, and therefore "infallible" doctrine.⁹

In her creeds as well, the early Church gave a dangerous direction to the living truth of the Word of God.

⁸ The Divine-Human Encounter, translated by Amandus W. Loos (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1943), p. 153.

⁹ Revelation and Reason; The Christian Doctrine of Faith and Knowledge, translated by Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, c. 1946), p. 8.

As the Apostles' Creed by enumeration of a series of facts to be believed caused pistis to degenerate into faith in facts, so by its failure to mention the act of reconciliation it favoured the wrong development of dogma along speculative lines.¹⁰

The solidification of the early Church's oral tradition and rule of faith into the canonical Scriptures and the particular creeds would represent to Brunner a dangerous direction for religious truth. The truth becomes an object to be grasped and mastered, rather than a personal address to the individual. A living truth to be proclaimed becomes a fact to be believed.

Unfortunately, the Greek intellectualism which so early dominated the ecclesiastical view of revelation obscured this truth from the very outset. The Church regarded preaching from the point of view of doctrine, instead of vice versa. Hence the proclamation of the Gospel--as was the case also with the revelation--was regarded as the communication of doctrine, and thus as "applied doctrine," in which the personal address and the "Thou-form" were merely a matter of form.¹¹

This exchange of the formulated confession, the "something true," for the living Word of God is a "blight which lies over the entire history of the Church."¹² The Reformation period, limited to the sixteenth century, represented the one return within the history of the Church to the

¹⁰ Emil Brunner, The Christian Doctrine of the Church, Faith, and the Consummation. Vol. III of Dogmatics, translated by David Cairns in collaboration with T. H. L. Parker (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1962), p. 231.

¹¹ Brunner, Revelation and Reason, p. 149.

¹² Brunner, The Divine-Human Encounter, p. 119.

Biblical view of faith and truth.¹³ Brunner cannot speak highly enough of Luther, and throughout his writings he urges a return to a more "Lutheran" position in these matters. But the age of Orthodoxy consequently lost the ground gained by the Reformers and lapsed once more into a rigid system of guaranteed doctrines to be accepted. The period of Orthodoxy receives such a brunt of invective in the writings of Brunner that this period is treated separately and more fully elsewhere in this section.

As Brunner sees it, the next great historical perversion in the area of religious truth and epistemology presented itself in Rationalism and the Enlightenment. Whereas previously the Church had tried to solve the problem of the irrational character of faith by a "mistaken heteronomy," based, in the case of Roman Catholicism, on the guarantee for truth offered from the Vatican, or, in the case of Orthodoxy, on the guarantee of a doctrine of verbal inspiration, now Rationalism attempted the solution by a "mistaken autonomy," a false dependence on the efforts of the human reason.¹⁴ Rationalism denied that absolute divine truth could be found either in the Scriptures or the Church, saying that only the "eternal

¹³ Emil Brunner, The Philosophy of Religion from the Standpoint of Protestant Theology, translated by A. J. A. Farrer and Bertram Lee Woolf (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937), p. 22.

¹⁴ Brunner, Revelation and Reason, p. 166.

truths of reason" are valid.¹⁵ Here the content of religion can be ascertained independently of any historical phenomena. Revelation is simply the "last stage of an immanent recollection, an emergence into clear consciousness of what was always there."¹⁶ In agreement with Descartes' Cogito, ergo sum, the Rationalistic conception of truth was that of autonomous truth, "the identity of the Ego with itself, self-certainty in the sense of independence of everything which is not myself."¹⁷

Idealism, with its theory that truth was "mind, reason, spirit, subject,"¹⁸ attempted vainly to achieve a synthesis between Christianity and Rationalism and led instead, by way of reaction, into a naturalistic materialism.

In the earlier period of the Enlightenment the attempt was made to represent the Biblical revelation as that which is essentially rational; in the real period of rationalism, on the contrary, revelation no longer had any meaning; reason was all. Romantic Idealism made a great effort to deepen the concept of reason to such an extent that it might include within the historical revelation. But the realistic-naturalistic reaction against Idealism caused this supposed synthesis of Christianity and rational philosophy, great as it was an intellectual achievement, to break down; theology confronted-- nothing!¹⁹

¹⁵Brunner, Philosophy of Religion, p. 36.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 39.

¹⁷Emil Brunner, The Word and the World (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1931), p. 68.

¹⁸Emil Brunner, Christianity and Civilisation. First Part: Foundations (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948), p. 33.

¹⁹Brunner, Revelation and Reason, p. 11.

In this shift from an idealistic subjectivism to a barren materialism Brunner sees the main epistemological problem for today.

modern spiritual evolution has been taking unambiguously the line of a more or less materialistic objectivism. . . . In the sphere of material being the quantum is the only differentiating factor. Material being is merely quantitative being. An objectivist understanding of truth expresses itself, therefore, not merely in terms of practical materialism, but also in a general quantification of all life. . . .²⁰

According to Brunner, each of these systems--whether heteronomous Orthodoxy or autonomous Rationalism or subjectivistic Idealism or objectivistic Materialism--have as a common malady the subject-object antithesis. Either the emphasis is placed to a mistaken extreme degree on the object in the faith-knowledge relationship as in Orthodoxy or Materialism, or on the subject as in Rationalism and Idealism. Brunner says it was left for the newest form of philosophy, the existential, to question the validity of the antithesis itself.²¹ In 1947 he said:

Within the last generation we have seen springing up more or less spontaneously in different areas, and moving on parallel lines, a series of attempts to tackle the problem of truth in a new fashion, namely in such a way that the old opposition of objectivism and subjectivism no longer plays the dominating roles.²²

²⁰ Christianity and Civilisation. First Part, p. 31.

²¹ The Divine-Human Encounter, p. 82.

²² Christianity and Civilisation. First Part, p. 34.

Finding his basis in Martin Luther and in Soren Kierkegaard (whom Brunner calls "the greatest Christian thinker of modern times"²³), and profiting from the personalistic theologies of Ferdinand Ebner and Martin Buber,²⁴ Brunner spends a great deal of effort in many of his writings presenting his own version of theological epistemology. More will be said of this below. But first, Brunner's chief "whipping boy" and the subject of his most frequent disparagement, Orthodoxy, must be investigated.

Emil Brunner's position on theological epistemology can best be understood in the light of the antitheses which he opposes in this connection. The antithesis most often attacked is that of Protestant Orthodoxy with its narrow, impersonal objectivism and biblicism.

In the centuries immediately following the Reformation, the recovered Scriptural insights into the personalistic nature of faith and revelation all but vanished, says Brunner.

Whilst the Reformation in its centre was the rediscovery of the non-intellectualist conception of faith, this new discovery was lost all too soon in the fight against the Roman heresy. The Reformation Churches became orthodox.²⁵

²³Moody, op. cit., p. 313.

²⁴Paul King Jewett, "Ebnerian Personalism and its Influence upon Brunner's Theology," The Westminster Theological Review, XIV (May, 1952), 133-34.

²⁵Emil Brunner, Christianity and Civilisation. Second Part: Specific Problems (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949), p. 49.

As characteristics of the period of Orthodoxy Brunner would include an aprioristic and legalistic view as to the inspired and infallible nature of the Bible, an attempt at providing man-made securities for an otherwise faith-based relation to God, and a displacement of a living interest in the personal and ethical by an insistence on the precise and dogmatic.

Jewett notes that Brunner's all but universal procedure is "to trace the curse of Orthodoxy back to one fountainhead, a belief in the verbal inspiration of the Scripture. . . ." ²⁶ Apparently without valid internal or external warrant, the Orthodox fathers had foisted onto the Bible a false and misleading qualification, according to Brunner.

In orthodox Protestantism an (aprioristic) faith in the Bible corresponds to this faith in dogma. The Biblical concept of faith which the Reformers had rediscovered was replaced by an equally formal authority, namely the authority of the Holy Book whose divine inspiration has to be believed "from the first." ²⁷

In so doing, according to Brunner, Orthodoxy had made of the Bible's "living present voice of God" an "independent divine thing, which just as such, as a corpus mortuum, is stamped with divine authority." ²⁸ This imposition of an infallible standard onto Scripture has inevitably resulted in a double concept of faith: faith in the first place in the Bible's

²⁶ Emil Brunner's Concept of Revelation, p. 118.

²⁷ Brunner, The Christian Doctrine of the Church, p. 189.

²⁸ Word and the World, p. 92.

Christ, and secondly, faith in the Bible as the inerrant Word of God. Brunner calls the sola scriptura principle an indefensible supplement to the sola fide principle and a stipulation added by post-Reformation theology.²⁹ He says that this principle, together with an attempted equation of the Word of God with the word of the Bible, is a product of the views of late Judaism.³⁰ In thus regarding Scripture as true in itself and as revelation in itself, Orthodoxy has changed its meaning from "an address made by an act of God" to a universal truth having the force of law.³¹ Orthodoxy has changed a paradoxical and indirect unity between the word of the Spirit and the word of the Scriptures into a causal and direct one, an unspiritual one.³² Thus the material principle of Orthodoxy is ultimately a denial of its formal principle.

For Orthodox faith justification is something to believe, a truth pronounced by God Himself, a judicial sentence which at once absolves me and imparts to me the righteousness of Christ, a correct transaction before God's court of justice.³³

The attempt to convert the historical revelation into a timeless system of truth has resulted in a docetic approach

²⁹The Christian Doctrine of the Church, p. 238.

³⁰Revelation and Reason, p. 127.

³¹The Philosophy of Religion, p. 34.

³²Ibid., pp. 33-34.

³³Brunner, The Divine-Human Encounter, p. 155.

to Scripture,³⁴ an approach where men attempt to "have" the Word of God.³⁵

Brunner sees as one of the principal instigations toward this kind of an objectivistic, legalistic view of God's truth man's inherent struggle for indigenous securities and assurances. He writes:

In the controversy against the Catholic principle of tradition on the one side, and on the other the principle of the Spirit of the individualistic enthusiast together with the newly arising rationalistic principle, the temptation could not be withstood to create a system of assurance including the confessional dogma, the notion of verbal inspiration, and the Bible understood as a book of revealed doctrine.³⁶

At another place he says:

for the second time in her history the Church, in her anxiety to establish security, took a wrong turning. . . . they returned to the Catholic idea of revelation, according to which the revelation guaranteed the infallible doctrine contained in Scripture, and the Scripture guaranteed the divine revelation. . . .³⁷

In this respect Orthodoxy stood together with even the most extreme subjectivistic of all systems, mysticism.

". . . in both man wants to be the master of truth, he wants to possess it."³⁸ Brunner insists that religious truth cannot be "possessed" by man; man can never be its master. Man can never "get God in a box." Religious truth

³⁴Ibid., pp. 172, 174.

³⁵Ibid., p. 31.

³⁶Ibid., pp. 31-32.

³⁷Revelation and Reason, p. 10.

³⁸Brunner, Word and the World, p. 76.

can only be "known" in the existential Divine-human encounter. God is never to be subjected to a guaranteed system, but is always Subject.

Schrotenboer says that Brunner's chief complaint against Orthodoxy is that it is blind to the "dimensional distinction."³⁹ That is, it treats in the subject-object dimension what belongs in the personal dimension. Brunner himself writes:

The significant factor in Orthodoxy is that personal correspondence was crowded out by a conception of truth orientated about the Object-Subject antithesis. Orthodoxy thought of God as the teacher who delivered supernatural, revealed truth and proffered faith to man. In this way the Word of God was identified with doctrine, and faith was assent to this doctrine. Precisely that which is the concern of Biblical faith was consequently no longer understood: that is, overcoming the Object-Subject relation and having the real Person of God present in His Word. . . .⁴⁰

More will be said below regarding the subject-object antithesis and Brunner's suggested personalistic, relational answer to it. Suffice it to say here that Brunner sees Orthodoxy as having forfeited the entire personalistic emphasis of the Reformers for the sake of a more rationalistic, doctrinal approach.

The ethics-minded Brunner furthermore observes a close relationship between extreme involvement with precision and flawlessness in doctrinal formulation and a neglect of the sanctified life and ethics. "How often does a perfectly

³⁹ Op. cit., p. 42

⁴⁰ The Divine-Human Encounter, pp. 102-03.

faultless orthodoxy go with a moral sterility," he warns.⁴¹

Interest in doctrine more and more arrogates to itself every other interest; the urge for an ever-nicer precision in the formulation of conceptions--the absence of which in the whole Bible is so characteristic--becomes dominant in Church life and leads to endless, even more subtle, doctrinal controversies. Christian love, practical discipleship atrophies. Once let faith and recognition of a system of revealed doctrines become identical, and Christian piety, described in the Bible as "faith which proves efficacious in love," is seen in contra-distinction to doctrine in the clearest and most definite way. Catechetical instruction becomes the preferred and practically the sole means of educating the younger generation to become Christians. The thoroughly trained theologian becomes the pattern around which the fellowship is supposed to orientate itself as regards the meaning of being a Christian.⁴²

These are the fruits of Protestant Orthodoxy according to Brunner, fruits which still hamper and even threaten the life of faith in the Church today. But these over-emphases on intellectualism and objectivism, these tendencies toward the concept rather than the act or the relation, are only part of a much broader problem--the radical difference between the Greek and the Biblical concepts of truth and knowledge.

Greek versus Biblical Concepts of Knowledge

It would not be inaccurate to say that Emil Brunner centers his theological epistemology in the antithesis found between Greek and Biblical concepts of knowledge. Greek thought and meaning is characterized by an immanent, rational,

⁴¹The Theology of Crisis (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1931), p. 69.

⁴²Brunner, The Divine-Human Encounter, p. 32.

abstract principle while Biblical is transcendent, revelatory and personalistic.⁴³ While Greek knowledge is designated by the general or universal, the timeless and the impersonal, Brunner says Christian knowledge is just the opposite: particularistic, historical and personal.⁴⁴ Greek philosophical thought is built up around the concept; Biblical around the story or the event. Brunner writes:

The Church has had to pay dearly for the fact that it substituted the Christian catechism for the Biblical history, and that it permitted the Greek concept of knowledge and of truth to take such a dominant place in its theology. The revelation of God must be told, not taught; the doctrine only has validity as a means of servicing the "telling" of the Good News. Where narrative is replaced by doctrine, Greek thought triumphs over the thought of the Bible.⁴⁵

To present this antithesis in as bold a relief as possible this section will be arranged in antithetical form: the Greek over against the Biblical. Whereas Greek thought is known by logic and consistency, by the system, Biblical thought is seen to be paradoxical and a-rational. The Greek tradition centers in the idea and abstraction, in reasoning, while the Biblical tradition has its basis in the concrete event, in the historical, in the encounter. Greek knowledge is substantialistic; it is interested in the "it," in the thing. Biblical knowledge is personalistic; it is interested in the "Thou," in the person. While Greek thought emphasizes

⁴³Brunner, Christianity and Civilisation. First Part, p. 65.

⁴⁴Word and the World, p. 18.

⁴⁵Revelation and Reason, p. 201. (The emphases in this quotation, as well as all other emphases in this study, are those of the author being quoted.)

continuity and immanence, Biblical knowledge manifests discontinuity and separation. In Greek thought man is the disposer, the autonomy and security seeker; in Biblical thought God is the Disposer, and in Him alone is security found.

Paradox is one of the distinguishing features of Biblical thought according to Brunner:

The Christian Church has known from the very first that what she believes is a stumbling-block and foolishness from the point of view of rational thought. The object of faith is something which is absurd to reason, i.e., paradox; the hall-mark of logical inconsistency clings to all genuine pronouncements of faith.⁴⁶

There can be no knowledge of God but paradoxical knowledge, says Brunner.⁴⁷ ". . . the assertions of faith are one and all paradoxes."⁴⁸ Jewett understands Brunner's use of the term "paradox" as having a largely symbolic meaning:

the paradoxical form of words whereby faith expresses itself constitutes a pointer (Hinweis). The paradoxes will, "by means of conceptual representation, point to something which lies outside the realm of the conceptual."⁴⁹

Related to the above thought, Brunner speaks of a "poetic" quality inherent in religious language and thought.⁵⁰ The paradox has a fluidity which, like poetry, suggests a variety of meanings, and a framework of multiple levels of truth.

⁴⁶The Philosophy of Religion, p. 55.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 95.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 96.

⁴⁹Emil Brunner's Concept of Revelation, p. 109.

⁵⁰The Christian Doctrine of God, Vol. I of Dogmatics, translated by Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1950), p. 62.

To Brunner, like Soren Kierkegaard, the paradox, with all its contrasts to the sharp and hard edges of academic theological definition and the neatly hewn and faultlessly fitted arguments of the theological system, is the language and the epistemological structure of faith-knowledge.

Brunner claims that the whole endeavor of the reason to unite everything in an all-inclusive system, even if this system is effected by means of antitheses which are tolerated for the sake of a synthesis, is futile.⁵¹

Revelation cannot be summed up in a system, not even in a dialectical one. A system always implies that the reason has forced ideas into a certain mould: it is the "imperialism" of an idea, even when this idea claims to be "Biblical."⁵²

Theological deliberation is not meant to be solidified and finalized by locking it once and for all into a compact, unified system. Theological thought has one purpose: to be referent to truth existing in another dimension.

The soundness of theological doctrine and ideas depends upon their direction, upon the single-mindedness with which they point to Him. There is no closed theological system. . . .⁵³

Theological formulation, therefore, is not to be an object of faith, but an index, a director toward an encounter with God, where faith first becomes possible.

⁵¹The Mediator; A Study of the Central Doctrine of the Christian Faith, translated by Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, c. 1947), p. 107.

⁵²The Christian Doctrine of God, p. 72.

⁵³Brunner, Revelation and Reason, p. 157.

Greek speculative thought seeks after the abstract, the static and the conceptual; Biblical thought is immersed in the historical and in the truth which happens.

An idea can be detached from its original source. It is timeless, universally and always true. Christian faith on the other hand is concerned with the truth which we perceive as true for us, not in itself, in virtue of the bare idea, but only because God actually utters it: we are concerned with revelation where everything depends on its having happened.⁵⁴

Brunner sees as a key to Scriptural truth the passage from the Gospel according to St. John, "But grace and truth came by Jesus Christ."⁵⁵ Truth came into being; it happened. God did it. This is diametrically opposed to the Greek notion that truth is that which is timeless, changeless, and subject to the eternal.⁵⁶

The truth of which the Bible speaks is always a happening, and indeed the happening of the meeting between God and man, an act of God which must be received by an act of man. The truth acting--this is the characteristic unphilosophical, non-Greek way in which the Bible speaks of truth.⁵⁷

The above quotation presents the very center of Brunner's position on the nature of religious truth: truth is found only in the concrete happening (the existential

⁵⁴ Brunner, The Philosophy of Religion, pp. 152-53.

⁵⁵ John 1:17.

⁵⁶ Brunner, The Divine-Human Encounter, p. 140.

⁵⁷ Ibid., pp. 201-02.

encounter⁵⁸); it is a personal meeting between the God who reveals Himself and man who responds with personal decision; it is characteristically non-Greek in essence.

Brunner further notes:

Biblical "truth" is as different from what otherwise is called truth as this personal encounter and the double-sided self-giving and its resulting fellowship are different from the comprehension of facts by means of reasoning.⁵⁹

It is the difference between kennen and wissen: they are knowledge in two different dimensions. One is dynamic and actualistic; the verb is its chief word. The other is substantialistic and impersonal; it centers around the noun. One is built upon a relation between subject and subject; the other is based on the subject-object split. One is achieved only in personal decision; the other is attained via the intellectualistic nod. Brunner calls it "the prejudice of modern man" that he so naively presupposes that there is only one kind of truth, that is, the objective, impersonal truth which can be proved. This presupposition excludes from him all truth which "cannot and ought not to be proved, because it has to be appropriated in personal

⁵⁸The term "existential" is used throughout in this study simply to denote the intense inner awareness of a man existing coram Deo. There is no attempt to denote any of the precise philosophical or literary forms which the existentialist approach has engendered within the past years.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 75.

decision."⁶⁰

While more will be said below concerning Brunner's personalism, it should be noted here that he considers every moving away from the personal "I-Thou" dimension to the impersonal "I-It" dimension as a move away from God's truth to the truth of the world. "Abstraction is secularization," says Brunner.⁶¹

The distinction between world-knowledge and God-knowledge--leaving to scientific investigation the world of facts and reserving for divine revelation the disclosure of the mystery of God's being, will and purpose--is not the only revolution which the Christian faith produces within the concept of truth. There is a second, just as important. What kind of truth is it, then, which is revealed to faith? It is not truth in the sense of knowing something, but in the sense of a divine-human, personal encounter. God does not reveal this and that; He does not reveal a number of truths. He reveals Himself by communicating Himself.⁶²

Theology's main concern, then, as over against science and philosophy, is for a truth which is not an "It," a state of affairs or a situation. It seeks a truth which cannot be known in cool detachment, but only in "the obedience and confidence of faith."⁶³

The Christian Faith itself is wholly directed towards Truth; but who would care to maintain that the true knowledge of faith is scientific knowledge! Science leads to truth of a quite different kind; the truth

⁶⁰Word and the World, p. 62.

⁶¹Revelation and Reason, p. 411.

⁶²Brunner, Christianity and Civilisation. First Part, p. 37.

⁶³Brunner, The Christian Doctrine of God, p. 63.

of faith is of a wholly different order. . . . The truth of faith, in the sense in which the Bible uses the term, is "truth as encounter," truth in the dimension of the person, "Thou-I," but not in the "thing"-dimension. The truth which faith perceives and grasps is a personal self-disclosure, the truth of revelation, not the truth which can be discovered by research and the use of the intellect.⁶⁴

The difference between Biblical and worldly knowledge, Brunner would say, is the difference between knowing a person and knowing a fact. One involves sharing, communion, decision; the other stops with intellectual acquaintance and acceptance. They are in contradistinct realms.

Greek thought presents a continuum between the human and the divine. Although the one is far above the other, still the analogia entis holds true. The Greek and the modern mind are united in this respect, says Brunner: the Greek mind makes nature the Absolute, and the modern mind makes the mind of man, history, and the dynamic element the Absolute. Both of them assume, however, a natural means of rapprochement between man and the Absolute.⁶⁵ "The rational man assumes a closed universe, as it were, an unbroken continuum of truth. . . ."⁶⁶ Man by his rational faculties can achieve divine knowledge. There is a bridge, and that bridge is the reason, the intellect. The real is as man can conceive of it; there is natural, however difficult to

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 61.

⁶⁵Brunner, Mediator, p. 116.

⁶⁶Brunner, The Theology of Crisis, p. 15.

achieve, access to the divine. Man can ultimately base his confidence in himself.

Another way to express this Greek idea of continuity in theology is to speak of an "immanence theology." Here man finds God in the depth of nature and of his own soul. Here there is an unbroken unity between God and the natural existence of man.⁶⁷

religion of immediacy, be it of the mystical or the rationalistic or the idealistic type, means that the necessary presuppositions enabling us to establish the right relation to God, or to remove the obstacle between our present and the normal condition, lie in ourselves.⁶⁸

Brunner claims that the farther this "process of refraction of immediacy" goes, the more impersonal and secular knowledge and truth become.⁶⁹ The more continuity and directness are emphasized the more coldly objective and remote does knowledge become. "An impersonal God and an impersonal man are the necessary and inevitable consequences of a religion of immanence."⁷⁰ There is no encounter. There is no communication with an Other.

But this autonomous self-confidence based on the conviction that man is continuous with God and that God can be known directly and immediately is shattered, says Brunner,

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 29.

⁶⁸Emil Brunner, The Scandal of Christianity (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1951), p. 22.

⁶⁹The Christian Doctrine of God, p. 62.

⁷⁰Brunner, The Theology of Crisis, p. 31.

following an insight of Kierkegaard, by the claim of revelation. "Thus the stumbling-block of revelation is this: it denies that divine truth is a continuation of human thought. . . ." ⁷¹ God and God alone causes Himself to be known. There is no valid knowledge of Him apart from His revelation. The God of immediacy is never the true God-over-me. "A thought-of God is never Lord." ⁷² More will be said below concerning a natural knowledge of God; here it is enough to say that Christianity is based, according to Brunner, on a clear discontinuity and separation between God and the intellect of man.

The Greek tradition cannot tolerate a religion that denies man security within himself. It cannot allow a religion which throws man totally upon God for his existence. In fact, Brunner would say that "all religion" is a "last and highest attempt of man to find his own security." ⁷³

Always and everywhere the same tendency to seek security rises out of man's sinful, anxious nature and therefore expresses itself wherever men have the Church. ⁷⁴

Brunner sees man's struggles for security, whether they be by way of theological systems or guaranteed dogmatic formulations or an infallible book, as man's basic sin: man wants

⁷¹Mediator, p. 108.

⁷²Word and the World, p. 25.

⁷³The Christian Doctrine of the Church, p. 206.

⁷⁴The Divine-Human Encounter, p. 26.

to be autonomous. He wants to have his own assurances, and these within his own management. And man's basic fault is also the basic fault of the Church, says Brunner:

It [the Church] would like to hold some assurances in its hand--who could not understand that! It would like to have in its power of disposal that in which lies its stability and its very life. It would like to be certain of God in a more direct way than is guaranteed through the promise as given to faith and in prayer.⁷⁵

Brunner sees it as a "tendency of man's spirit and will" to get truth into his power, to try to manipulate it like an object at his disposal. This same tendency drives man to try to make the Word of God a disposable object, to seize the authority of the free divine Word and make it available in an ecclesiastical system of authority.⁷⁶

Knowing, thinking, possessing something is thus, first of all, something over which I have disposal. . . . But if the Word of God meets me in faith, this is all reversed. Then I do not have something like property which is at my disposal, but I myself become property; then I myself become disposable.⁷⁷

Whereas natural acquisition of knowledge makes man master over that which he knows and superior to each object of his knowledge, in revelation the opposite is the case. "God, through His revelation, becomes Lord over me; He makes me His property."⁷⁸

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 25.

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 24.

⁷⁷Ibid., pp. 87-88.

⁷⁸Revelation and Reason, p. 26.

The empirical, disposable type of knowledge furthermore leaves the knower untouched morally; it only adds to his sinful autonomy.

When I perceive "something," this "something" is then within me; it becomes, so to say, my possession. I embrace it. In knowing it, I dispose of it. That which is perceived, that which is known, is at my disposal. The other side of this process is that I myself am not actually affected by it. My knowledge certainly enriches me; it may also have influence in my decisions, on my way of thinking; but it never penetrates to the core of my person--it does not transform "myself." I am, after all, the one embracing; I am the possessor.⁷⁹

This, then, is the sharp antithesis which Brunner sees between the Greek intellectualist tendency of natural man and the Biblical obedience-in-trust stance of the man of faith. The antithesis is sharp and it is clear. It is the decisive element whereby the Christian faith is distinguished from all other religions and philosophical systems.

The Subject-Object Split and Beyond

The "Object-Subject Antithesis" is Brunner's most often used designation for that kind of epistemology which is in direct contrast to the Biblical. The antithesis between object and subject, between the objective truth and the subjective acceptance of truth, is the basis for an epistemology which has dominated all Western philosophy since its beginning.

⁷⁹The Divine-Human Encounter, p. 87.

Being and thinking, truth and knowledge--this is the problem around which philosophical thought has turned at least since the Sophists and Socrates-- a problem that emerges again in Kant's question about the relation between the "thing-in-itself" and experience.⁸⁰

The subjective knower coolly and with disinterest "handles" a set of facts. The "I" passes objective judgment on the "it." The truth is this and that, a something to be observed, a quantity to be counted, a datum to be disposed of. Modern man, according to Brunner, is "possessed by the idea of object-truth, thing credulous man, who cannot but think in terms of quantity, whose eyes are blind to all that belongs to the sphere of quality."⁸¹

In this "new knowledge," an integral part of Western thought, but brought to the fore even in theology by modern philosophy, the rationalization of science, and modern economic and social life, what in the Bible is meant as expression of faith has come to be understood as the object of faith.

The Bible speaks about faith being the same as being in reality allied to Christ; the misunderstanding replaces the real alliance by the alliance with Christ as object of faith, as a truth to be believed.⁸²

This replacement of the personal understanding of faith by the intellectual is "probably the most fatal occurrence within the entire history of the Church," says Brunner.⁸³

⁸⁰Brunner, Ibid., pp. 81-82.

⁸¹Christianity and Civilisation. First Part, p. 37.

⁸²The Divine-Human Encounter, p. 154. ⁸³Ibid., p. 154.

A living relation to a Person has been displaced by an unconcerned acceptance or rejection of a fact. The subject stands removed from the object; the subject is in control; the subject is untouched in his inner being. This is the difference between the general, secular epistemology and the Biblical. In the one, religious truth is an object of man's knowledge; it is part of his rational world, of which he is the center.⁸⁴ In the other man is confronted by a Person, another Subject, a Thou; truth is experienced, and only in the personal relationship. According to Brunner, "The Biblical understanding of truth cannot be grasped through the Object-Subject antithesis: on the contrary it is falsified through it."⁸⁵ There lies an abyss between the personal subject-Subject relation of faith and the subject-object antithesis of Western thought. There is no continuity between these two epistemologies; they exist in different dimensions.

Brunner sees a hyper-concern for doctrine and theological instruction as one of the most evident symptoms of this subject-object antithesis within the Church.

the Word alone is efficacious, but doctrine is not--not even Biblical or catechetical doctrine. When we consider the Biblical understanding of proclamation, we observe that it means an event entirely personal, in the nature of a personal meeting, which is far different from the catechetical homiletical traffic

⁸³Ibid., p. 154.

⁸⁴Revelation and Reason, p. 366.

⁸⁵The Divine-Human Encounter, p. 21.

in dogma which is determined by the Greek concept of truth.⁸⁶

Although Brunner himself has written a three-volume dogmatics, he says this about doctrine:

In doctrine man speaks no longer in the "Thou"-form to God--as in the original confession of faith--but he now speaks about God as "He." Doctrine is no longer a spontaneous, personal response, in the form of prayer, to the Word of God, but already, even in its simplest form, it is reflective speech about God. The process of leaving the sphere of personal encounter in order to enter into the impersonal sphere of reflection is the presupposition of all doctrine. God is now no longer the One who speaks, but the One who is spoken about.⁸⁷

Brunner considers the true and primary purpose of doctrine to be the expression or confession of faith, not the object of faith.⁸⁸ Doctrine is to contain a "minimum of reflection,"⁸⁹ and is to serve the positive purpose of apologetics. It is to be the "situation" in and through which the personal encounter with God can take place.

Doctrine standing by itself, separated from the Word of God as the event of encounter, is seen by Brunner as the essence of legalism.

Whatever the content of this doctrine may be--it may be even the doctrine of atonement through Jesus Christ and of justifying faith--so long as it is not God Himself who speaks with man and while speaking meets him in fellowship, so long as doctrine confronts him as some-

⁸⁶Ibid., p. 176.

⁸⁷The Christian Doctrine of God, p. 38.

⁸⁸Revelation and Reason, p. 156.

⁸⁹The Christian Doctrine of God, p. 39.

thing taught by the Church or Bible "which one must believe if he wants to be a Christian," his relation to it remains legal and bears all the marks of Legalism. Even Jesus and the grace of God is then law--gamma, the letter.⁹⁰

Church dogmatism is thus the natural man's legalistic and ego-directed attempt to avoid the risk of the authentic obedience-in-trust relation to God. Where faith or truth is understood as an acceptance of doctrines instead of a Divine-human encounter, says Brunner, self-centered legalism is the controlling factor.⁹¹

There have always been two tendencies competing with one another throughout the entire history of the Church: subjectivism and objectivism.⁹² Subjectivism, that urge for freedom and spontaneity, that will to attain the highest possible level of self-realization,⁹³ showed itself already in the primitive Church, and then throughout the entire course of church history, particularly since the sixteenth century. The negation of objective doctrine and form; the emphasis on conscious states or experience; the ultimate criterion for the true and the right seen in individual feeling and apprehension--all of these subjective tendencies threatened to undermine the Church at its very foundations, says Brunner. To defend itself against this subjectivity, and in reaction to it, the early Church and the Church of

⁹⁰The Divine-Human Encounter, p. 118.

⁹¹Christianity and Civilisation. First Part, pp. 42-43.

⁹²The Divine-Human Encounter, p. 21. ⁹³Ibid., p. 26.

post-Reformation times built up a system of assurances made up of objective doctrines. The timeless, the external, the detached, the impersonal, the abstract: these were and are characteristics of this objectivism in the Church. Of the two, Brunner sees objectivism as the greater hazard:

Objectivism has always been the real ecclesiastical danger within the Church--through all centuries and even now. From within the Church its danger is much more difficult to recognize, and the struggle against it was always the most dangerous. For the opponent will feel himself attacked in his most sacred precinct and will consider himself called to be guardian on the battlefield of the holy treasure entrusted by God to the Church.⁹⁴

True religious knowledge and truth is to be found in neither subjectivism or objectivism, says Brunner. Both of them present only half-truths. Furthermore, a higher synthesis of these two poles will not arrive at truth either:

There is no right middle way between Objectivism and Subjectivism: there is no correct mean between two errors. In this instance too the truth is more paradoxical and harder to find.⁹⁵

Both subjectivism and objectivism are based on the Greek tradition: the subject-object split. The truth, however, is not to be found in either subject alone or object alone according to Brunner.

since neither the subject nor the object is the ultimate truth, it is inevitable that man's mind shifts from one pole to the other in an incessant

⁹³Ibid., p. 26.

⁹⁴Ibid., pp. 170-71.

⁹⁵Ibid., p. 40.

pendulum movement. It cannot rest quietly with either of the alternatives, since neither of them carries real conviction. This veering from objectivism into subjectivism and back is unavoidable, because in the long run neither of these two answers to the question of truth is credible.⁹⁶

Ultimate truth is thus not found in the "either/or of objectivism and subjectivism."⁹⁷ Whether the knowing subject posits itself as the truth, or whether it posits as truth its known object--in neither case will truth be revealed. "Thus truth is not to be found either in the object or in the subject, but beyond both. Truth, then, is God Himself in His self-communication to man."⁹⁸ The subject-object split, the antithesis between knowledge of "something truthful" and the truth itself, must give way to truth found in a "purely personal meeting between the accosting God and the answering man."⁹⁹ Religious truth is personal. Knowledge of religious truth is not found in a one-sided subjectivism or objectivism; it is found in relation with the personal God who discloses Himself to the total person of man. According to Schrotenboer, the best word to describe the gulf which exists between subject-object "it" truth and personal "Thou" truth is the term "incommensurability."¹⁰⁰ These two types of truth are as different as "the truth which I possess" and "the Truth

⁹⁶ Christianity and Civilisation. First Part, p. 39.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 38.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 35.

⁹⁹ The Divine-Human Encounter, p. 89.

¹⁰⁰ Op. cit., p. 43.

which possesses me."¹⁰¹ Within the field of human thought in general, Brunner says, "The discovery of the 'I-Thou' truth in philosophy by Ebner and Buber is indeed, as Heim has put it, a 'Copernican turning-point' in the history of thought."¹⁰² "In the beginning is relation" is the byword of Martin Buber.¹⁰³ "Truth as encounter" is Brunner's version of the same thought.¹⁰⁴ Not that knowing which gives man "something," which enriches his intellect or adds to his knowledge, but which leaves him basically unaltered, but that knowing which changes man in the very core of his person,¹⁰⁵ which transforms rather than educates, which creates fellowship between God and man--this is the Biblical concept of truth.

Personalism as the Key

The theology of Emil Brunner might appropriately be called a personalistic theology.¹⁰⁶ In order to appreciate the implications of this statement, a brief look at personal-

¹⁰¹Brunner, Christianity and Civilisation. First Part, p. 40.

¹⁰²The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption, translated by Olive Wyon. Vol. II of Dogmatics (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1952), p. v.

¹⁰³Martin Buber, I and Thou, translated by Ronald Gregor Smith (Second edition; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), p. 18.

¹⁰⁴The Divine-Human Encounter, p. 7.

¹⁰⁵Brunner, Ibid., p. 88.

¹⁰⁶Schrotenboer, op. cit., p. 203.

ism as a philosophic theory will be helpful.

In philosophy the idea of personality as the foundation of knowledge is developed by such men as Berkeley, Leibniz, Kant, Hegel and Lotze.¹⁰⁷ In America Bowne, McConnell, Knudsen and Brightman are leaders in the personalistic movement.¹⁰⁸ These men are all agreed that the "immediateness of self-consciousness" is the starting point of philosophy.¹⁰⁹ Bowne says, "We are in a personal world from the start, and all our objects are connected with this world in one indivisible system."¹¹⁰ Personality is seen by these men as "the active ground of the world, and as containing in the mystery of its own unique being the key to all the antinomies of metaphysics."¹¹¹ The conscious personality is both the "supreme value and the supreme reality in the universe."¹¹²

This highly idealistic "world of persons" is given being and meaning and held together by the "supreme person" at its head.

¹⁰⁷R. T. Flewelling, "Personalism," in Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, edited by James Hastings (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956), IX, 771.

¹⁰⁸Floyd Hiatt Ross, Personalism and the Problem of Evil (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940), p. 1.

¹⁰⁹Flewelling, op. cit., p. 771.

¹¹⁰Borden Parker Bowne, Personalism (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1908), p. 25.

¹¹¹Flewelling, op. cit., p. 772.

¹¹²Edgar Sheffield Brightman, Nature and Values (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1945), p. 113.

Metaphysically it [personalism] is idealistic in the sense that it claims the so-called physical world is a form of spirit having no independent reality, the direct utterance of God throughout, "the ceaseless product of the divine energizing," "a mode of the divine activity . . . without any proper thinghood," things and events being simply "forms of activity" of the supreme person.¹¹³

This "supreme personality" is seen to exist "in and through the concrete continuous exercise of his personality, thinking, willing and sustaining all things."¹¹⁴ The world of space objects which man calls nature has no substantial existence in itself, but is merely "the flowing expression and means of communication" of the supreme person and his responsive personal beings.¹¹⁵ In the mysteries of the vol-untaristic, activistic, causational personality lies the key to the nature of being, knowledge and truth.

The tendency in secular personalism is to think of reality in concrete and personal terms rather than in abstract and impersonal terms. "To the personalist knowledge exists only in the concrete."¹¹⁶ The practical reason takes precedence over the theoretical: "Not to form abstract theories but to formulate and understand this personal life of ours is the first and last duty of philosophy."¹¹⁷ To the personalist knowledge is gained through experience and through what

¹¹³Ross, op. cit., p. 1. ¹¹⁴Flewelling, op. cit., p. 771.

¹¹⁵Bowne, op. cit., p. 278.

¹¹⁶Flewelling, op. cit., p. 772.

¹¹⁷Bowne, op. cit., p. 318.

can be inferred from experience: ". . . experience is first and basal in all living and thinking, and all theorizing must go out from experience as its basis, and must return to it for verification."¹¹⁸

The personalistic metaphysics is relational; it is based on participation and interaction between purposeful, active individuals.¹¹⁹

Being is implied in the capacity for intelligent causal action, or in the capacity for being acted upon. All that exists is the result or manifestation of a supreme, active, purposive intelligence which creates and sustains the world of lesser intelligences and things.¹²⁰

The personalist thinks in terms of cause rather than substance. "We owe our being to the divine energy rather than to our possession of a portion of the divine substance."¹²¹

It is difficult to determine exactly what influence this secular personalism has had on Emil Brunner. That he agrees with many of its tenets is obvious. Brunner does acknowledge the influence of such personalistic philosophers as Martin Buber and Ferdinand Ebner on his theology.¹²² He is undoubtedly not thinking of these two men, but of the modern socio-psychological school when he says:

¹¹⁸Ibid., p. 303.

¹¹⁹Ross, op. cit., p. 5.

¹²⁰Flewelling, op. cit., p. 772.

¹²¹Albert Cornelius Knudson, "A Personalistic Approach to Theology," in Contemporary American Theology, edited by Vergilius Ferm (New York: Round Table Press, Inc., 1932), I, 238.

¹²²The Christian Doctrine of the Church, p. 159.

No doubt the idea of personality and personal life plays a large part in the thought of modern thinkers, but an analysis of this conception of personality would show that modern man, when he speaks of person and the personal, has in mind something which ultimately is quite impersonal, namely, a function within society and culture.¹²³

Brunner, like the secular personalists, looks to personality as the key to the enigmas of being and truth. He places much theological stock in, for example, the relation between man and wife, as an informative analogy for the relation between God and man and the Word of God and faith.¹²⁴ The knowledge of faith is directly related to a man's knowledge of his wife. It is an experiential, relational, participative communion rather than an intellectual affirmation of certain data.

Brunner views reality as divided into the impersonal and personal, with a graded scale of being encompassing both dimensions. Brunner would say, according to Schrotenboer, that the whole complex of reality in all its parts partakes of both elements, the personal and the impersonal: "Neither the absolutely personal nor the fully impersonal exists anywhere or at any time."¹²⁵ Along with Heim, then, Brunner would say that even inanimate nature is "personal" to a certain extent. Only the Triune God, says Brunner, is genuinely personal, for "He is within Himself self-related, willing,

¹²³Scandal, pp. 73-74.

¹²⁴The Divine-Human Encounter, pp. 90, 162.

¹²⁵Op. cit., p. 195.

knowing, loving Himself."¹²⁶

The most accurate and illuminating way for man to view God, Brunner argues is as person:

He [God] is the Other One, the mysterious and unknowable One, who has his own proper name and whom we do not know because he is person. Personality is a secret; a mystery is hidden in it. Knowledge of a person is possible only through revelation, and he reveals himself through his word.¹²⁷

God is seen to be personal, then, in His revelation to man in Jesus Christ. ". . . the 'Word' of God, the decisive self-communication of God, is a Person, a human being, the man in whom God Himself meets us."¹²⁸

The self-revelation of God is no object, but wholly the doing and self-giving of a subject--or, better expressed, a Person. A Person who is revealing Himself, a Person who demands and offers Lordship and fellowship with Himself. . . .¹²⁹

More will be said below with regard to God as Revealer; here it is enough to say that Brunner uses the personalistic category to present not only the nature of God's revelation but also the mysteries of the very Godhead itself.

Brunner makes use of the personalistic categories because he sees a definite relation of similarity between God's being as person and the being of man as person, a relation which, he

¹²⁶Man in Revolt; A Christian Anthropology, translated by Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1947), p. 219.

¹²⁷The Theology of Crisis, p. 32.

¹²⁸The Christian Doctrine of God, p. 15.

¹²⁹The Divine-Human Encounter, p. 75.

says, "makes the use of such human, parabolic language legitimate."¹³⁰ Brunner operates with an activistic rather than with a substantial concept of person, according to Schrottenboer: "A person [to Brunner] does not refer to an ontological substance, but is an existential designation."¹³¹

Brunner would consider it fallacious to view man in an objective, substantial manner. Man is more than mere empirical matter; he is spirit.

Man can be person because and in so far as he has spirit. Personal being is "founded" in the spirit; the spirit is, so to speak, the substratum, the element of personal being.¹³²

This "other dimension" of the spirit is the realm of the personal. Nothing can be known of this "spiritual," personal world except one personal spirit disclose itself to another.

We can ourselves find the clue to things; they are objects, which confront us not in their own self-activity--making themselves known--but as entities which, by processes of research and thought, we can learn to understand. But persons are not enigmas of this kind; a person is a mystery which can be disclosed only through self-manifestation. In this self-disclosure alone do we meet this person as person; previously he or she is an "object," a "something."¹³³

Man cannot himself think of a person; a person cannot be a mere object of his thought. "A person is that unique being which discloses itself and therefore enters into my thought-world, so to say, as a stranger, affirming itself as an I in

¹³⁰The Christian Doctrine of Creation, p. 24.

¹³¹Op. cit., p. 30.

¹³²Brunner, Man in Revolt, p. 237.

its own right."¹³⁴ There is no continuity or immediacy of thought here. Knowledge of God who is personal comes only when He speaks to man.

Personality is built upon relatedness. "To be person is to be in relation to someone," says Brunner.¹³⁵ What personality is in the strict sense can be understood only in confrontation with the personal God. Because God "calls me into communion with him, I become in the true sense of the word a person."¹³⁶ At least among Christians, there is no such entity as a purely isolated person. ". . . the spirit is . . . above all, and first of all, relatedness to God, as He reveals Himself in His Word."¹³⁷

Another term which Brunner uses to describe this relatedness is "personal correspondence." ". . . all truth is understood as the truth of a relationship, namely, the relation of personal correspondence between the Word of God and human obedience-in-trust."¹³⁸ This personal correspondence, just the opposite of the subject-object antithesis, is a matter of relationship in face-to-face encounter between two subjects, a divine "Thou" and a human "I." This rela-

¹³³Brunner, Revelation and Reason, p. 24.

¹³⁴Brunner, Scandal, p. 41.

¹³⁵Man in Revolt, p. 221.

¹³⁶Scandal, p. 75.

¹³⁷Man in Revolt, p. 239.

¹³⁸The Divine-Human Encounter, p. 201.

tionship is logically unsatisfying, incongruous, and annoying to the desire for intellectual investigation,¹³⁹ but within it, and within it alone, is real religious truth assimilated by man. When man is accosted face-to-face by God who demands a decisive answer to His revelation; when man accepts and fulfills his God-given gift of responsibility as a personal being; when man answers God with obedience-in-trust--then man truly becomes a person, a proper pole in the personal correspondence between God and man.

For decision is the essence of personality. Only when man comes to a crisis and is compelled to choose between life and death does he become a personality. At the very moment when God challenges him to make his decision man is given personality.¹⁴⁰

In this relationship, then, of decisive responsibility over against the revelation of God man discovers who he is and what truth is and who God is. Emil Brunner's theological epistemology is built upon this personalistic premise.

God as Revealer

Jewett remarks, ". . . there can be no adequate understanding of what Brunner thinks about Christianity as a whole, apart from an understanding of his concept of revelation in particular."¹⁴¹ Brunner himself says:

¹³⁹Ibid., p. 124. ¹⁴⁰The Theology of Crisis, pp. 30-31.

¹⁴¹Emil Brunner's Concept of Revelation, p. 1.

Here [in The Divine-Human Encounter] I placed the biblical understanding of truth over and against the Greek understanding which is the foundation of our Western philosophy and science. Since then, all my work in dogmatics has been done in the light of this aspect: the God who communicates himself. As a result of this, the old concept of revelation was freed from its intellectual misunderstanding and the basic connection between knowledge and communion came to have its rightful place. In this I see my most important contribution to the theological concept of knowledge.¹⁴²

It would be impossible to understand Brunner's theological epistemology without investigating his doctrine of revelation, and for this reason: for Brunner, true knowledge of things religious is only attained in communion with the God who discloses Himself. God does not stand at the end of a long line of deductions or abstract speculation. Man does not know God unless and until He addresses him personally. "Through God alone can God be known."¹⁴³

Due to the fact that many studies have already been made specifically on Brunner's concept of revelation,¹⁴⁴ and also, because an adequate treatment of this matter would entail more than a full-length thesis itself, the writer has chosen to state Brunner's doctrine of revelation in somewhat cursory form. Much has already been said above with regard to Brunner's views on revelation; here only the high points of his position will be presented.

¹⁴²The Theology of Emil Brunner, edited by Charles W. Kegley, p. 12.

¹⁴³Brunner, Mediator, p. 21.

¹⁴⁴See, for example, Paul Jewett's excellent analysis, Emil Brunner's Concept of Revelation, which is quoted above.

A. God Himself is the absolute Subject of revelation. God is primary, creative and without presuppositions.¹⁴⁵ Even as He reveals Himself to man, His Word "never becomes our word, the word of our soul, but remains the Word of God."¹⁴⁶ Brunner says that God as Subject interrupts the "monologue of our thought of God, of our mystical feeling for God"¹⁴⁷ and remains the Subject of the communication throughout. God never becomes an object of thought, but is always the Subject who shares Himself with subjects.

But if it is true, as faith knows it to be true, that God's word is the truth, it means that truth--absolute, ultimate, final truth--is not "something" that I can know as an object opposite men, neither is it reason or spirit, my knowing mind, but it is the divine Thou who, in His own initiative, discloses Himself to me. True, God is over against me, yet He is no object, but spirit. True, He is spirit, but not my spirit; He is the absolute subject, which I am not.¹⁴⁸

Even in His revelation and because of it,¹⁴⁹ God as absolute Subject remains unknowable and mysterious to man. "The better we know God, the more we know and feel that His Mystery is unfathomable."¹⁵⁰ Outside of His self-communication God as Person and Subject remains an absolute mystery;¹⁵¹ within the context of His self-disclosure in Jesus Christ

¹⁴⁵Brunner, The Divine-Human Encounter, p. 49.

¹⁴⁶Brunner, Word and the World, p. 80. ¹⁴⁷Ibid., p. 23.

¹⁴⁸Brunner, Christianity and Civilisation. First Part, p. 39.

¹⁴⁹Brunner, The Christian Doctrine of God, p. 118.

¹⁵⁰Ibid., p. 117. ¹⁵¹Brunner, Word and the World, p. 24.

this mystery is by no means resolved, but rather thereby first comes into its own as mystery.¹⁵² Here at least man catches a glimpse of the full mystery of the nature and purpose of God. All the while, however, God is absolute Subject of the epistemological relationship.

B. God discloses Himself through a personal address to the respondent. As in an encounter between two human beings person-to-person, God makes Himself accessible to the believer. He communicates Himself, not a "something," to faith. As a result, the believer no longer has an object to be pondered and discussed as in purely rational effort, but a "Person who Himself speaks and discloses Himself."¹⁵³ To the question of what God reveals to man, Brunner answers, "Not merely does He reveal His will-to-union with us, His creatures; He reveals Himself, His very essence as Love, as self communicating Life."¹⁵⁴

That Brunner's Christology is closely intertwined with his concept of revelation is at once apparent. In His revelation, God gives man Himself, and He gives man Himself in the person of Jesus Christ. "Revelation here means the Word of God as a human person."¹⁵⁵ In Jesus Christ God's revelation becomes personal and it becomes direct.

¹⁵²Schrotenboer, op. cit., p. 36.

¹⁵³Brunner, The Divine-Human Encounter, p. 85.

¹⁵⁴Christianity and Civilisation. First Part, p. 38.

¹⁵⁵Brunner, Word and the World, p. 21.

Since God's revelation is a disclosure, not of "something," but of Himself, it comes to man in the form of a direct encounter, a personal address.

No longer is it a question of the insertion of something into the knowledge I possess, the expansion of the intellectual riches at my disposal; but it is answering personally when addressed. . . .¹⁵⁶

It is one Person lovingly communicating His heart to another person.

C. Only through His revelation can God be known.

The absolutely Mysterious is not only partially hidden from the natural knowledge of man; it is wholly inaccessible to man's natural faculties for research and discovery.¹⁵⁷

The God who is conceived by thought is an "intellectual idol," says Brunner.¹⁵⁸

[God in His revelation] bursts through and destroys all the fundamental categories of thought: the absolutely antithetical character of the basic logical principles of contradiction and identity.¹⁵⁹

This viewpoint that a knowledge of God exists only in so far as there is a self-disclosure or revelation has profound implications for Brunner's epistemological position. The knowledge of God and of His "things" is given to man. The self-centered circle of man's unbroken continuity is broken down. "The truth comes in its own way and in its own power, to you.

¹⁵⁶Brunner, The Divine-Human Encounter, p. 89.

¹⁵⁷Brunner, Revelation and Reason, p. 23.

¹⁵⁸The Christian Doctrine of God, p. 136.

¹⁵⁹Revelation and Reason, pp. 46-47.

¹⁶⁰The Christian Doctrine of God, p. 125.

You do not possess it, it is not in you, it is given to you."¹⁶⁰
 "God is known only where He Himself makes His Name known,"
 says Brunner.¹⁶¹ Not through thought, nor conclusions drawn
 from the structure of the universe, nor meditation on the
 nature of the Spirit;¹⁶² but only as He speaks to a man
 personally and reveals His Self can God be known and
 experienced. This knowledge through revelation is always
 a gift of the Self-giving God, and it is always unexpected.¹⁶³
 Man cannot know the things of God by his own efforts.

D. The revelation of God is historical revelation.

In the "higher" relation to God of speculation and
 mysticism, in the "religion of educated people,"
 revelation means rather the emergence of the eternal
 basis of all phenomena into consciousness, the per-
 ception of something which was always true, the growing
 consciousness of a Divine Presence, which might have
 been perceived before, since it was there all the
 time.¹⁶⁴

In Christianity--and here lies the stumbling-block, says
 Brunner--revelation is "connected with a fact that took
 place once and for all. . . ." ¹⁶⁵ Natural man wants a
 religion of immediacy, of timelessness, on universality.
 Natural man is scandalized by this insistence on the
 historical, the given. ". . . to Reason there is no greater

¹⁶¹ Ibid., p. 120.

¹⁶² Revelation and Reason, p. 44.

¹⁶³ Ibid., p. 29.

¹⁶⁴ Brunner, Mediator, p. 22.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 42.

absurdity than to assert that for us the divine truth is an isolated fact, that it is disclosed to us in one single event."¹⁶⁶ But, as Brunner writes, "Christianity is either faith in the revelation of God in Jesus Christ or it is nothing."¹⁶⁷ With the unrepeatable, given, once-for-all, historical person of Jesus Christ "all theological statements about the divine revelation must begin. . . ."¹⁶⁸

The historical revelation is the ground of knowledge for God's personal Being and God's personal Being is the actual ground (Realgrund) of His revelation.¹⁶⁹

In the incarnate Christ man knows God.

The exact connotation of the term "historical" as used by Brunner has been the subject of debate. At one place he can say:

When we reflect on the rise of faith, it becomes clear to us that a real event which transforms existence can occur only on the plane of real events, that is, of historical events. For apart from real history, from the events that impinge on my existence, there is no reality that in the strict sense transforms existence.¹⁷⁰

But at another place, in almost Bultmannian tones, Brunner writes:

Hence by revelation we mean that historical event which is at the same time the end of history, that is, an event which, if it really did take place, by

¹⁶⁶Ibid., pp. 106-07.

¹⁶⁷The Theology of Crisis, p. 2.

¹⁶⁸The Christian Doctrine of Creation, p. 52.

¹⁶⁹Revelation and Reason, p. 409.

¹⁷⁰The Christian Doctrine of the Church, p. 143.

its very force shattered the framework of history; in other words, that in fulfilling the purpose of history it ends it.¹⁷¹

Some light can perhaps be shed on this problematic area of Brunner's approach to the historicity of Biblical events by looking at his dialectical answer to the question of such historicity:

Yes, for it is in history that this revealed secret encounters me as truth. No, for it is the eternal God who now speaks to me in this historical revelation. Thereby the historical event ceases to be historical and becomes living presence. It is by present inspiration that past incarnation becomes truth to me. It is by this historical revelation of the incarnate word that this present inspiration can take place.¹⁷²

In so far as God's personal confrontation with man in Jesus Christ occurs now in this existential moment, it is trans-historical, and the question of historicity does not apply. But this present encounter is based upon and finds its content in a historical once-for-all event which actually took place in Palestine almost two-thousand years ago.

Brunner says that it is God's Holy Spirit who "bears witness to, and makes effectual, the historical Christ as a living personal presence."¹⁷³ To escape the dangers of both objectivistic¹⁷⁴ and subjectivistic¹⁷⁵ views of revelation, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit must be set forth, says

¹⁷¹Mediator, p. 27.

¹⁷²Christianity and Civilisation. First Part, p. 40.

¹⁷³The Christian Doctrine of the Church, p. 12.

¹⁷⁴Word and the World, pp. 60-61.

¹⁷⁵The Philosophy of Religion, p. 113.

Brunner. "Scripture is only revelation when conjoined with God's spirit in the present."¹⁷⁶ The operation of the Holy Spirit in making historical events existential is the key to solving the historical problem stated above. God's self-communication and man's resultant obedience-in-trust come together in the work of the Spirit.

E. The Bible is the indispensable means of revelation. Jewett says, "It is an open secret by this time that in matters of Biblical criticism Brunner aligns himself with a rather liberal school of thought."¹⁷⁷ Brunner admits, ". . . I myself am an adherent of a rather radical school of Biblical criticism. . . ."¹⁷⁸ He can make such a statement as, "Faith in the infallible Bible is no longer possible for modern man. . . .";¹⁷⁹ he can carry on a vociferous polemic against verbal inspiration; and yet he does not lapse into a completely liberal position. Jewett catches the dialectic note of Brunner's doctrine of the Bible as he says:

rather than getting above the alternative of theopneusty on the one hand and the abandonment of Scripture authority on the other, the pendulum of his thought simply swings between the two, now touching upon the one, now the other; now making assertions

¹⁷⁶The Philosophy of Religion, p. 151.

¹⁷⁷Emil Brunner's Concept of Revelation, p. 117.

¹⁷⁸The Theology of Crisis, p. 41.

¹⁷⁹The Christian Doctrine of the Church, p. 189.

which involve the identification of the Word of God and the words of men, now relativizing the function of Scripture as a vehicle of revelation to the point of losing its normative character altogether.¹⁸⁰

It is, of course, understandable that Brunner, with his existentialist and personalistic intentions, would differ from the position of Protestant Orthodoxy on Scripture. He sees Orthodoxy's insistence on the verbal inspiration and infallibility of the Bible as aprioristic and the height of objectivism. He labels these doctrines as evidences of natural man's inherent drive for assurances and security.

Brunner makes such statements as the following about the centrality of the Scriptures for the Christian faith:

Christian faith is Bible faith. When a Christian speaks without qualification of God's revelation, what he means is Holy Scripture.¹⁸¹

.....

When the Christian speaks of the Word of God he means in the first place the Word of Holy Scripture.¹⁸²

.....

The nature of faith is not to be understood by starting from the creed of the Church, but by starting with the Biblical witness.¹⁸³

[The main thesis of Christianity runs thus:] the knowledge of God is to be drawn from Scripture.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸⁰Emil Brunner's Concept of Revelation, p. 158.

¹⁸¹The Philosophy of Religion, p. 150.

¹⁸²Word and the World, p. 82.

¹⁸³The Christian Doctrine of the Church, p. x.

¹⁸⁴The Philosophy of Religion, p. 150.

.....
 The Bible is the pre-condition of all faith, that which alone makes it possible. And the whole Bible at that.¹⁸⁵

.....
 Christian faith is faith in the Bible in the sense that the Bible alone is the place in which God speaks to us, judges us as through His Word, acquits us from condemnation, and imparts Himself to us as the self-bestowing love in which He creates us anew.¹⁸⁶

Brunner's concern, however, is that the Word of God not be identified with the words of the Scriptures.¹⁸⁷ This would be the legalistic error that impairs the actual face-to-face encounter of Subject with subject in the present moment. This would lead, not to communion, but to solitary, smug intellectualism.

Brunner repeats over and over again the motto, "Christus rex et dominus scripturae." For its purpose of "cradling Christ" the Bible is absolute authority: ". . . the Scriptures are the absolute authority, in so far as in them the revelation, Jesus Christ Himself, is supreme."¹⁸⁸ Christian faith is not founded on the letters of the Bible, but on "our relation to the content of that which is proclaimed

¹⁸⁵The Christian Doctrine of the Church, p. 249.

¹⁸⁶Ibid., p. 241.

¹⁸⁷The Theology of Crisis, p. 19.

¹⁸⁸The Christian Doctrine of God, p. 49.

in the Scriptures, or rather to the Person Himself, God manifest in the flesh, who speaks to me, personally, in the Scriptures."¹⁸⁹ Each clause of the above quotation is absolutely fundamental to Brunner's approach to the Bible and revelation.

F. Revelation is completed in faith's response. Jewett defines Brunner's position here: "Revelation is . . . incomplete apart from its subjective side. Revelation is address and response, personal correspondence."¹⁹⁰ Brunner says, "In faith itself God's self-communication finds its completion."¹⁹¹ God communicates Himself in love; when this love is known in responding love, communication has been consummated. God's revelation does not reach its goal apart from the "knowledge and act, knowing and happening"¹⁹² of faith. Reception of God's self-disclosure only occurs in faith, that is, in the "personal decision which in responsibility answers God's challenge."¹⁹³ Revelation is thus a two-sided act; to abortively attempt its enclosure in a book is to miss God's Word entirely. According to Brunner, there is no revelation in the strict sense apart from faith's

¹⁸⁹ Revelation and Reason, p. 169.

¹⁹⁰ Emil Brunner's Concept of Revelation, p. 135.

¹⁹¹ The Christian Doctrine of the Church, p. 171.

¹⁹² The Divine-Human Encounter, p. 64.

¹⁹³ Word and the World, p. 28.

response.

The aim of the divine revelation is at least twofold: communion with God and the brother, and self-realization.

Since God makes Himself known to me, I am no longer solitary; the knowledge of God creates community, and indeed community is precisely the aim of the divine revelation.¹⁹⁴

Not only does the divine knowledge given to faith in revelation supply the answer to the question of truth, but it creates fellowship between God and man as well. Revelation, says Brunner, is "never the mere communication of knowledge, but it is a life-giving and a life-renewing communion."¹⁹⁵

The man who, by revelation and faith, takes part in the divine truth, at the same time takes part in the divine love, and is therefore taken into communion. To be in truth is to be in the Love of God, and to be in the Love of God is to become a loving person, to be in communion with God and men.¹⁹⁶

Men come to know and love each other as a result of God's self-disclosure of love; they also first come to know themselves thereby. "Man can only understand himself when he knows God in His Word."¹⁹⁷ The gift of true personality comes only through the Word of God. "Personal being in the full sense, in the nonlegalistic sense, hence the genuine sense, is no 'neat' entity which is an isolated phenomenon,

¹⁹⁴Revelation and Reason, p. 27.

¹⁹⁵The Christian Doctrine of God, p. 20.

¹⁹⁶Christianity and Civilisation. First Part, p. 38.

¹⁹⁷Brunner, Man in Revolt, p. 65.

but it is only in actu Dei. . . ."198 Apart from revelation and faith man's self-estimate is bound to be inaccurate.

The judgement we form of ourselves is either realistic and cynical, or idealistic and illusionary. Apart from faith, even in the most serious exercise of our moral consciousness, we see ourselves in the artificial illumination of autonomy as free beings who can do the good because we ought.199

Only in the light of God's revelation, therefore, can man identify himself and find his place in the world.

In summary, it might be said that if Brunner were asked the question, "How does man know the things of God?" or, "How does man get to know his brother?," the concept of God's self-disclosure in His historic and existential revelation would be absolutely crucial to his answer. Man "knows" the things of God, not as he knows a fact, but in communion with God, in person-to-person encounter with Him, an encounter instigated and brought about solely by the God who reveals Himself.

The Relation of Reason to Faith and Theology

Jewett says correctly, "Brunner is far too astute a thinker to commit himself to an uncritical and naive irrationalism."²⁰⁰ Brunner would never say that man's rational faculties play no part in faith or theology; he says repeat-

¹⁹⁸ Brunner, Revelation and Reason, p. 410.

¹⁹⁹ Brunner, The Philosophy of Religion, p. 77.

²⁰⁰ Emil Brunner's Concept of Revelation, p. 86.

edly that reason is indispensable to both faith and theologizing. However, he becomes quite specific in defining the proper sphere and limits of man's intellect. "The legitimate sphere of reason is: the things of the world."²⁰¹

The intellect is the power of perceiving the finite, especially the world of things and the like, and, with the aid of this knowledge the power to live and act in this finite world in a practical way.²⁰²

In close agreement with Luther's distinction between "things below" and "things above," Brunner says simply, "Reason is not given us to know God, but to know the world."²⁰³ Reason is indeed given to man by God; but this does not mean that God allows Himself to be known by reason. Brunner makes this interesting observation about the "givenness" of all human knowledge:

God is the ground of all knowledge of truth. All truth that we perceive and discover we perceive and discover by virtue of the light that comes from God. Even the perception of the simplest mathematical truth is possible only through a ray from the light of God. God is the principle of all truth. But from this we have no right to infer that in all knowledge God may be known. Knowledge that comes from God is different from the knowledge of God.²⁰⁴

Brunner, furthermore, contends that reason is capable

²⁰¹ The Christian Doctrine of Creation, p. 26.

²⁰² Man in Revolt, pp. 250-51.

²⁰³ Word and the World, p. 33.

²⁰⁴ Revelation and Reason, p. 318.

of marking out its own boundaries of competency.²⁰⁵ The reason can delimit itself to the things of this world, but so often, due to man's sinful state, it fails to do so. Thus this matter of drawing the line of competency becomes the great problem for man and for faith.

The question for Christian theology is not whether the reason has any rights, whether the reason has any authority to judge what is true and what is false . . . but where the line must be drawn which delimits the sphere in which reason has complete control. It is not the validity of the criteria of reason as such against which faith has to fight, but the fact that they are turned into absolutes, making absolute claims. The problem is one of defining the sphere of reason.²⁰⁶

Brunner says that it is not the reason itself which is in opposition to faith, but the "self-sufficient reason."²⁰⁷ Faith does not imply a suicidal sacrifice of the intellect-- "Jesus Christ is not the enemy of reason"²⁰⁸--but it does require the limitation and control of reason. It is this limitation and this control which natural man cannot endure.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁵The Philosophy of Religion, p. 73. (This writer feels that this claim is perhaps one of the weakest points in Brunner's presentation, a point that contradicts another emphasis of Brunner himself: natural man's inherent striving after autonomy. Natural man's reason does not know its bounds and cannot draw the line where its natural, this-worldly competence ceases. Cf. Smalcald Articles, Part III:I:3; Epitome I:9.)

²⁰⁶Revelation and Reason, p. 380.

²⁰⁷Man in Revolt, p. 244.

²⁰⁸Revelation and Reason, p. 16.

²⁰⁹Mediator, p. 43.

"The reason considers itself entitled to dominate everything: to set up, and to dispose of, the criteria of all truth."²¹⁰ Once again, man's basic drive for autonomy is seen at the base of his epistemological problem.

Although God's revelation does not in any way contradict what can be known of man in and through reason and experience,²¹¹ nevertheless the reason is utterly incapable of breaking through "that ring of immanence of the self-world"²¹² into a true knowledge of God and His Word.

Here all the methods of appropriation and verification which are usually so useful--the methods by which we are able to prove the actuality of something which is said to have happened, as well as all our methods of clarification through analogy, argument, and proof--break down completely. For the Cross and its meaning--as is explicitly stated--is unique, never to be repeated, and therefore far above all human analogies; it can never be understood along the lines of intellectual argument.²¹³

Knowledge of the world as established by God in its given order is different from the knowledge of the Creator Himself, says Brunner.²¹⁴ Even though man, for example, the mystic, might suppose he is independently breaking through into the mysteries of the transcendent by the powers of his reason, there is no hope that this can actually be the case.

²¹⁰ Revelation and Reason, p. 212.

²¹¹ Brunner, Man in Revolt, p. 61.

²¹² Brunner, Revelation and Reason, p. 369.

²¹³ Ibid., p. 166.

²¹⁴ Ibid., p. 381.

Ruthlessly the reason spans the circle of immanence around me, even if the idea of transcendence belongs to this immanence. All the transcendence that I think out for myself is only transcendence within immanence; all that I describe as thou within this my world of immanence is only "thou-within-the-world-of-the-self." This world of immanence, in spite of all the variety that takes place within it, is at bottom a static system. No real communication takes place.²¹⁵

What then of a natural knowledge of God, that point at which Brunner so notably differs with Karl Barth? Brunner says,

Even the man to whom God has not made His Name known is not without a certain knowledge of God; for a knowledge of the Creator forms part of the creaturely existence of man.²¹⁶

At another place Brunner writes, "Apart from any special revelation, and indeed from a kind of inner necessity, the human spirit formulates the Idea of God, or something similar. . . ."²¹⁷ However, this knowledge is only a "confused and uncertain knowledge of God, a kind of twilight knowledge."²¹⁸ It does not create communion with the living God,²¹⁹ but ultimately must be called "an abstraction."²²⁰ When Dale Moody makes the following judgment, this writer holds that he is over-simplifying the matter:

²¹⁵Ibid., p. 367.

²¹⁶The Christian Doctrine of God, p. 121.

²¹⁷Man in Revolt, p. 241.

²¹⁸Mediator, p. 151.

²¹⁹The Christian Doctrine of God, p. 121.

²²⁰Revelation and Reason, p. 315.

But Brunner is not willing to limit our knowledge of God to special revelation. Where Barth rejects the idea of the image as a formal potentiality for God Brunner retains it; where Barth speaks of a special revelation alone, Brunner affirms a general revelation in nature and man. . . .²²¹

Brunner does speak of an "imago verbi" existing within man's rational capacities in the same way as the "imago Dei" exists in his person,²²² but he is quick to declare its imperfection and incompleteness. He does admit that the pagan can have knowledge of God,²²³ but he carefully states that this knowledge is only an abstraction, a misconceived idea. There can be no valid knowledge of God and certainly no personal relationship with Him by man's rational efforts. As Brunner says:

through the revelation reason is placed in the wrong, namely, in all her attempts to comprehend and grasp the Divine which necessarily spring from reason.²²⁴

Brunner speaks often of the relationship between reason or knowledge and faith. He says that knowledge of an objective kind is antecedent to the personal act of faith:

It is true, of course, that the personal act of trust, obedience and love is preceded by certain elements of objective knowledge--as also they precede the act of

²²¹ Op. cit., p. 321.

²²² Revelation and Reason, p. 119.

²²³ Mediator, p. 121.

²²⁴ Ibid., p. 43.

faith--but they are not the personal act itself.²²⁵

At another place, however, Brunner says that although faith is accomplished in a process of thought, it does not spring from thought, but rather from metanoia, from rethinking and redirection.²²⁶ What he must mean by these two views is that while faith is never without content, still it never springs from man's unilateral "decision" to believe. Only God's Word creates faith.

The truth, conceived in an abstract way, separated from the Person of God who speaks, is not the ultimate, but the necessary pen-ultimate, which, however, is based upon and proceeds from the ultimate. Our nous therefore is the vessel but not the source of the Word of God. Where it receives the Word of God it is called: faith.²²⁷

Schrotenboer speaks correctly when he says that to answer the question whether faith is knowledge or not to Brunner would not be simple.²²⁸ Faith is an act of knowledge, according to Brunner,²²⁹ but it is not knowledge of disposable objects but of disposing subjects. Brunner writes:

²²⁵ Revelation and Reason, p. 39. (Using Brunner's analogy of the "knowledge relationship" within wedlock, it might be said that this is the knowledge a man has of his wife prior to his selfless trust and faith in her.)

²²⁶ Ibid., pp. 216-17.

²²⁷ Man in Revolt, p. 245.

²²⁸ Op. cit., p. 51.

²²⁹ Revelation and Reason, p. 34.

To the question: "Is faith knowledge?" our first answer would have to be "No: it is not the same thing as everything else that we mean by knowledge." It arises only where all knowledge is at an end, both objective knowledge, "explanation," and also the subjective knowledge that we call understanding.

.....

And yet faith is knowledge, true self-knowledge, which comes into existence only when what I already know about myself--that I am responsible, that I am guilty--is taken up into this knowledge, confirmed and radicalized by it.²³⁰

Faith is itself a thinking process;²³¹ it is accomplished in ideas;²³² but this thinking and these ideas are of a different kind than regular, objective thought. These are thoughts and ideas controlled by God; they are thoughts and ideas that arise only within the personal relationship. They are thoughts of personal correspondence, intimate communicative thoughts instilled by the operation of God's Spirit.

faith does not become knowledge, after a process of rational activity; it is, itself, knowledge. I myself know, in my faith, that Jesus Christ is my Lord. . . . It is not a knowledge that I have gained by my own efforts, but it is that which I now have, which is neither capable of proof nor, indeed requires proof. It is knowledge in the dimension of personal encounter: God Himself discloses Himself to me. It is revelation.²³³

The knowledge of faith is thus knowledge in a dimension other than the dimension of common subject-object knowledge:

²³⁰The Christian Doctrine of the Church, pp. 260-61.

²³¹The Christian Doctrine of God, p. 73.

²³²Ibid., p. 73.

²³³Revelation and Reason, pp. 178-79.

it is personal knowledge. It is the difference between knowing that a person is standing there and knowing that a person loves the knower.

[Faith] is thus more like the acceptance of a communication than an act of knowing, for in it another communicates to me the mystery that only He knows--namely that He loves me--while we, when we speak of knowing, do not think of this word as having any relation to love. What we call knowledge and what we understand by fellowship or love lie on two quite different planes.²³⁴

Objective knowledge rests on logic, on the certainty of sense-perception, on the laws of identity and coherence and non-contradiction; faith-knowledge rests upon God and His shared love. Faith-knowledge, therefore, cannot be proven; it has nothing to do with rational certainty.

"Faith is personal certainty."²³⁵ Jewett is correct when he says:

The Brunnerian concept of Paradox, which rests upon the dimensional difference between the Word of God and the word of man, [is] so crucial to an understanding of his solution of the problem of reason and faith.²³⁶

According to Brunner, faith not only rejects reason but also fulfills it. Reason not only leads away from faith, but also leads toward it.²³⁷ While faith is "poles apart" from what

²³⁴Brunner, The Christian Doctrine of the Church, p. 259.

²³⁵Brunner, Word and the World, p. 75.

²³⁶Emil Brunner's Concept of Revelation, p. 96.

²³⁷Schrotenboer, op. cit., p. 58.

is usually meant by objective knowledge,²³⁸ yet it cannot exist without this knowledge.²³⁹ The rational element is neither the source nor the content of faith, and yet it is incorporated within faith.²⁴⁰ Another way of saying this is to say that even personal correspondence with a "Thou" is commingled with objective knowledge, however imperfect, of that "Thou."

Brunner says again and again that faith does not put the reason out of action or annihilate it, but that it is through faith that the Word of God takes reason into its service.²⁴¹ As Jewett explains Brunner's thought, ". . .the path of reason is curved by the gravitational centre of faith."²⁴² Man essentially has been created not for thought, but for loving, says Brunner.²⁴³ Faith sets the reason free to be an instrument and participant in love, in fellowship with God and man.

The unredeemed man has two centers, one of reason and the other of love. . . . faith consists precisely in the fact that the heart and the reason again become one, that the reason becomes warmed, and the heart becomes rational.²⁴⁴

²³⁸Brunner, The Christian Doctrine of the Church, p. 259.

²³⁹Brunner, Revelation and Reason, p. 420.

²⁴⁰Schrotenboer, op. cit., p. 52.

²⁴¹Revelation and Reason, p. 429.

²⁴²Emil Brunner's Concept of Revelation, p. 105.

²⁴³Revelation and Reason, p. 428 ²⁴⁴Ibid.

An abrupt antithesis between revelation and reason is foreign to the outlook of both the Bible²⁴⁵ and the early theologians of the Church,²⁴⁶ says Brunner. One does well to remember that Brunner sets up the problem in terms of "revelation and reason" and not "revelation or reason."

Hence the question can never be whether, but to what extent and in what sense, reason and revelation, faith and rational thinking can be combined with one another.²⁴⁷

It is precisely at this point, at this proposed inner penetration of the dimensions of reason and faith, that certain of Brunner's critics attack him.²⁴⁸ Critical reason cannot attain to the knowledge of revelation--it only leads up to it--and yet there can be no revelation apart from reason. The problem that Brunner encounters with this "dimensional" differentiation between faith and reason can be made more clear if one sees just how he views the various dimensions of reality. The picture is one of concentric circles around a given center. The center is the dimension of the person, with the circles of scientific theology and then the formal sciences proceeding outward from it. There is a penetration of the lower, non-personal dimension by the higher, personal

²⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 309.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 310.

²⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 311.

²⁴⁸ Jewett, Emil Brunner's Concept of Revelation, p. 99.

one, from the center out. The competency of reason in the subject matter with which it is concerned is proportional to its proximity to the personal center: the farther from the center, the greater the competency. The relation between faith and reason is thus proportional and not precise. The personal and the rational interpenetrate all areas of human activity, but proportionately.²⁴⁹ It is this proportionate interpenetration scheme which gives many critics, many of whom are perhaps looking for a sharply defined scheme presenting the areas of competency of both faith and reason, a difficult time with Brunner's position.

Another helpful picture Brunner presents is that of tangential and centripetal forces representing reason and faith respectively:

The purely rational element of thought, logic, has the tendency to go straight forward from each given point; but faith continually prevents this straight-forward movement by its pull towards the [evangelical] Centre. So instead of a movement in a straight line there arises a circular movement around the Centre-- and that is a picture of real theological thinking. Theological thinking is a rational movement of thought, whose rational tendency at every point is being deflected, checked, or disturbed by faith. Where the rational element is not effective there is no movement of thought, no theology; where the rational element alone is at work, there arises a rational speculative theology, which leads away from the truth of revelation. Only where faith and rationality are rightly interlocked can we have true theology, good dogmatics.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁹Brunner, Revelation and Reason, p. 383.

²⁵⁰The Christian Doctrine of God, p. 76.

Brunner insists that man can never separate the abstract framework of reason and doctrine from the personal Presence contained in them.

We know that we can never have the one without the other, and we know at the same time that the whole point is to have the personal contained within the abstract framework. . . . doctrine is indissolubly connected with the reality it represents.²⁵¹

Whenever God speaks to us He "says something," says Brunner, and therefore "a certain amount of doctrine must be present before living faith can come into being."²⁵² The exact relation between the doctrine and the revelation is "incommensurable."²⁵³ The difference between them is abysmal, and yet the connection between them is essential.

It is, after all, the purely human faculty of thought which qualifies the theologian for his work.²⁵⁴ Reflection, concepts, thought-forms, logical processes of proof--these are all the proper activities of the theologian as well as the philosopher. Theological knowledge is in that second circle, once removed from the personal center, and this distinction must be carefully maintained.

The difference between the knowledge of faith and theological knowledge, which is so difficult to

²⁵¹The Divine-Human Encounter, p. 111.

²⁵²Ibid., p. 120.

²⁵³Ibid.

²⁵⁴Brunner, The Christian Doctrine of God, p. 75.

define, and yet so necessary, is not one of subject or of content, but one of the form or dimension of existence. Theological or dogmatic knowledge is, it is true, the knowledge of faith in accordance with its origin, but not with its form. One who thinks in terms of theology must, so long as he does this, pass from the attitude of the worshipper to that of the thinker who is concerned with his subject. Greater clearness and precision of theological concepts can only be gained at the cost of directness of faith, and that readiness for action which it contains.²⁵⁵

In face of doctrinal errors or heresies, in face of the questions which necessarily arise in the believer's mind, in face of the difficulties which accompany the original Biblical doctrine,²⁵⁶ and especially in face of the need of every Christian man to know the meaning of "the Father in Heaven, the forgiveness of sins, Atonement through the Son of God, and the Work of the Holy Spirit,"²⁵⁷ the Church must ever be vitally concerned with doctrinal clarity and accuracy, says Brunner. However, this more impersonal, objective concern for sound doctrine "must always come second"²⁵⁸ (and between this "second" and "first" mission of the Church yawns a dimensional divide) to the personal address of God's Word, Jesus Christ who is the Truth, to the heart of every man.

²⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 41.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 40.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 10.

²⁵⁸ Revelation and Reason, p. 153.

CHAPTER II

HEINECKEN, KANTONEN AND SITTLER COMPARED WITH BRUNNER

Martin Heinecken

It has been shown that the theological epistemology of Emil Brunner clusters around six major foci:

- a. The particular bent of his position is evoked largely in antithesis to objective intellectualism within the Church, and especially within Protestant Orthodoxy.
- b. Biblical knowledge and truth is set over against Greek knowledge and truth.
- c. The subject-object split of philosophical, analytic epistemology gives way to a Subject-subject relational framework of knowledge in Biblical epistemology.
- d. Theological personalism is the key to Brunner's epistemology.
- e. God, in His self-disclosure, is the absolute Subject of religious knowledge.
- f. While reason is essential for both faith and theology, it always serves a secondary function and is never to be mistaken for the primary personalistic means of "knowing" God.

In this second part of the study, the viewpoints on this subject of Martin Heinecken, Taito Kantonen and Joseph Sittler will be presented. The same six divisions or categories used in Chapter I will serve as the basic framework for this chapter. Thus Martin Heinecken's thoughts on the historical perspective of this problem, the difference between the Greek and Biblical traditions in the area of epistemology, the place of the subjective and objective in theological epistemology, and so

on through the six divisions, will be presented. Heinecken will then be followed by a similar study of Kantonen, and Kantonen by Sittler.

None of these three American Lutheran theologians admit to an excessive dependence upon Brunner for their thought in the area of the nature and perception of religious truth. Each of them refers to Brunner a number of times by way of quotation or allusion,¹ but most cases of similarities in position cannot be explained as prima-facie dependence of the Lutherans upon Brunner. It is, of course, possible that all four men are deriving their homogeneous portions from a common source. Both Brunner² and Heinecken³ are heavily indebted to Soren Kierkegaard and to existentialist thought; it is probable that Kantonen and Sittler profit from Kierkegaard also, even if not in such an outspoken manner. It might be added that Kierkegaard's famed battle against sterile

¹Martin J. Heinecken, The Moment Before God (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1956), p. 111.

Martin J. Heinecken, "Currents in American Theology," Lutheran World, III (March, 1957), 368.

T. A. Kantonen, The Message of the Church to the World of Today (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1941), p. 141.

T. A. Kantonen, A Theology for Christian Stewardship (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1956), p. 73.

Joseph Sittler, The Doctrine of the Word (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1948), pp. 26, 36, 54, 61.

²Dale Moody, "An Introduction to Emil Brunner," The Review and Expositor, XLIV (July, 1947), 313.

³"Currents," op. cit., p. 362.

intellectualism in the Church coincides quite nicely with the major emphasis of each of these four men. But this study does not have as its intention the tracing of dependencies in the thought of these four theologians; it only seeks to present and compare their respective positions within the framework of the six categories listed above.

The historical perspective

Although Martin Heineken does not investigate the history of philosophy as thoroughly as does Brunner to pinpoint the foundations of a subject-object antithesis type of epistemology within theology, he does repeatedly refer to Protestant Orthodoxy in much the same vein as Brunner. He, too, sets up the period of seventeenth century Orthodoxy as the major antithesis to his own position. Heineken says that Orthodoxy's concern for maintaining doctrinal purity was correct, but that its method of doing so was misguided and ill-founded. He writes:

[Luther] returned to a biblical orientation completely foreign to the scholastic orientation, and yet it was precisely to that orientation that seventeenth-century orthodoxists returned and while they wrestled nobly to do justice to the dynamic of the gospel, they nevertheless straitjacketed and imprisoned it. With ever finer and finer rational distinctions they tried their best to do justice to the mysteries of the faith and to safeguard them against heresy. But because the basic orientation of the philosophy with which they operated was wrong, it resulted in any number of the most fearful distortions.⁴

⁴Christ Frees and Unites (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957), p. 68.

Heinecken says the philosophical orientation upon which Orthodoxy was structured was that of scholasticism. In such doctrines as the communicatio idiomatum and the kenosis, says Heinecken, this scholastic bent is especially prevalent.⁵ Also in the doctrine of God, the scholastic-Aristotelian framework is obvious.

So, for example, the doctrine of God followed the pattern of the definition of other terms, classifying God in the class of personal beings and then distinguishing him from other members of this class by various attributes, such as absoluteness, aseity, holiness, and so forth, arriving at these attributes via eminentiae, via negationis and via causalitatis. This is boxing God up very neatly and, even if the anthropomorphisms are recognized as inadequate, the whole procedure cannot do justice to the living God, who in the Bible is not ever defined in this way, but only described in his actions in the most lordly, quite arbitrary, irrational, offensive, contradictory fashion. Once having boxed up God in the definition, it is the very devil to liberate him again.⁶

This attempted "boxing up" of God in the definition, the idea or the theological system is the very antithesis to true knowledge of God, Heinecken would argue. It is just this attempt at explaining religious truth in a nice, coherent compendium of doctrines with which Luther had broken.

Not only did Orthodoxy revert to a previous scholastic doctrinal framework, but American Lutheran theology, in its close adherence to Orthodoxy and its methods, unwittingly promulgated the same perversion.

⁵Ibid., p. 70.

⁶Ibid., pp. 68-69.

American Lutheran theology . . . generally adhered to the seventeenth century orthodoxy with remarkable consistency. Practically all the textbooks on which Lutherans until very recently were trained follow the same pattern--a repristination of seventeenth century Lutheran orthodoxy as compiled in Schmid's Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church (Hollaz, Quenstedt, Chemnitz, Gerhard, etc.). . . . This theology had the great merit of being a bulwark against the confusion of philosophical speculation, but as recent research has shown, it clearly marks a departure from the theology of Luther and a relapse into the Aristotelian categories with which Luther had broken.⁷

Heinecken, like Brunner, sees in this type of theological endeavor the whole trend toward self-security. "In the objective sacraments and in a plain coherent system of doctrine based on an infallible Bible there is a refuge from the anxiety of the human situation."⁸ But this refuge within man-made systems and assurances is a false refuge, says Heinecken, and one that can only lead away from Him who is the true Refuge. ". . . the living God is not apprehended in this way. When you grasp the idea, you clasp an idol to your bosom."⁹

Heinecken holds that existentialist categories and thought-forms hold the key to theological truth and that they can render the Church of this day a "much better service" than the scholastic-orthodox thought patterns of the seventeenth

⁷ Heinecken, "Currents," op. cit., pp. 361-62.

⁸ Ibid., p. 363.

⁹ Moment, p. 234.

century.¹⁰ Heinecken is tacitly agreeing with the movement he is describing as he says:

Common also to this whole group [neo-orthodoxy] is the emphasis upon event, encounter, crisis, paradox, and a differentiation of the Hebrew-Christian thought-forms from Greek and other alternatives. Revelation is personal encounter and not the making known of true propositions. Crisis replaces progress and evolutionary development. The human situation in existence is analyzed with the help of Kierkegaard and existentialist theology.¹¹

Heinecken uses the categories of existentialist theology listed above almost without exception in his own presentation. It is his involvement in existentialist thought primarily which moves him to see in Protestant Orthodoxy a tangential emphasis in the field of Biblical truth and epistemology.

Greek versus Biblical concepts of knowledge

Heinecken goes to some pains to distinguish between a static, objective Greek approach to truth and theology and a dynamic, existential, Biblical approach. The existentialist themes, in particular, show through in his position. With regard to the personal versus the abstract levels of truth, he says, ". . . the particular must always take preference over the universal,"¹² and ". . . this business of abstracting

¹⁰Christ Frees and Unites, p. 72.

¹¹"Currents," op. cit., p. 366.

¹²God in the Space Age (Philadelphia: The John C. Winston Company, 1959), p. 70.

from the particular also involves a great loss."¹³ The here and now, the individual, the concrete, as contrasted with the general and abstract is the important factor within the epistemological God-man relationship.

In this relationship the "moment" is the decisive factor and not a timeless, unalterable, static body of truths.

Here in this moment when God encounters man, not in an instant of recollection, but in the begetting of the truth in him, there is compressed all eternity. . . . This moment is the fullness of time. It is quite different from that other ever-present possibility of realizing the eternal truth of the reason in which no encounter with the living God is involved, but only the awareness of certain "ideas."¹⁴

Because of this present, existential nature of the God-man relationship, Heineken holds that there can be no fixation of theology in a system adequate for all times. Theology, in order to express the truth of the gospel, must remain in constant flux. An absolute, once-for-all solidification of doctrine attempting to set forth the truth of God and man in their relationship is "a monstrosity,"¹⁵ and ultimately a rejection of the sola fide principle.

Such unity of faith is, however, not achieved once and for all by agreement upon one doctrinal system fixated for all times in precisely those terms. This would be confusing the word of man and the word

¹³ Ibid., p. 30.

¹⁴ Heineken, Moment, p. 104.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 8.

of God, a man-made theology with the actual divine self-impartation. This would make man the master, who has God boxed up in these formulations and would be a denial of justification by faith.¹⁶

Further to demonstrate the difference between Greek "I-It" and Biblical "I-Thou" truth Heinecken on several occasions uses the analogy of "wrist-watch time" (Greek) over against "alarm-clock time" (Biblical).¹⁷ One type of truth emphasizes the timeless, the regulated, the systematic; the other stresses the punctiliar, the awakening, the present call to action. The one type of truth can be anticipated and controlled by man; the other catches man unexpectedly and demands a response.

Along with Brunner, Heinecken complains that objective thought in the Greek tradition tends to build up an autonomy and a smug self-sufficiency within the knower.¹⁸ But not so with the Word of God. Here man is never in control; he never has a manipulable object at his disposal; there is no guaranteed authority either of infallible hierarchy or book--man lives by faith, and faith is always a risk.¹⁹ The same

¹⁶Heinecken, Christ Frees and Unites, p. 49.

¹⁷Heinecken, Space Age, p. 66. See also: Martin J. Heinecken, Beginning and End of the World (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960), p. 26.

¹⁸Moment, p. 226.

¹⁹Martin J. Heinecken, "The Tension between Love and Truth," The Lutheran Quarterly, XI (August, 1959), 206.

situation pertains in life in general, says Heinecken:

In logic there are nothing but static relationships which eternally are what they are and cannot possibly change. . . . But in life, which is always in flux, always in process of becoming, there can be neither logical necessity nor absolute consistency nor absolute certainty.²⁰

In the one type of relationship, man lives by guarantees which he himself can manipulate; in the other he lives by faith. In the one his knowledge of God is direct and determinate; in the other it is always in spe.

Heinecken makes frequent use of the term "paradox" to denote the sign of Biblical truth as opposed to the non-contradictory nature of Greek truth. The religious paradox is seen as "the absolute barrier which blocks the way to a mere intellect appropriation of a God-idea and forces man to be confronted with the living God in the 'hiddenness' of his revelation."²¹ Heinecken says that whenever a Christian talks about the God-relationship he is confronted with something which he cannot understand and which is a mystery to him, and thus he necessarily finds himself involved in paradoxical language.²² With somewhat Bultmannian overtones Heinecken explains just what he means by labeling the Christian

²⁰ Moment, p. 64.

²¹ Ibid., p. 22.

²² Ibid., p. 73.

faith "paradoxical":

So it is misleading to say that a certain "fact" is paradoxical. The fact is "incomparable" and it is the language used in attempted description and attempted communication of this fact which is paradoxical.²³

This is far different from the Greek intellectualist notion that doctrines and systems can adequately enclose the mysteries of God. Heineken concludes that the paradox is one of the very basic categories of systematic theology which must be preserved for twentieth century theology.²⁴ "There is something about the Christian proclamation which makes a mere intellectual acceptance impossible."²⁵ The paradox is in the proclamation, however, and not in the fact itself. The fact, for example, of the resurrection, is what it is and like no other fact; it baffles description. Thus it cannot be communicated directly or logically or objectively by language; it can merely be pointed at. The fact must be assimilated via an experiential involvement prompted and maintained only by the Lord Himself.

Heineken maintains that the gospel is in "a class by itself."²⁶ The distinction between the truth and knowledge

²³ Ibid., p. 57.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 382.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 6.

²⁶ "The Pre-theological Curriculum," The Lutheran Quarterly, II (November, 1950), 428.

of the gospel and the truth and knowledge of, for example, mathematics, is qualitative and not quantitative. And, as Heinecken says, ". . . you can never through quantitative changes leap over into a new quality."²⁷ Christianity and Christian epistemology are "not merely a matter of the way in which we ordinarily communicate ideas because we share the referents of the world involved. . . . No knowledge is imparted in the simple way. . . ." ²⁸ In the following statement Heinecken further explains the qualitative difference between the two kinds of knowledge:

To possess the truth of God is something other than a formal correspondence between words or thoughts in the head and something objective and outside of the mind to which these ideas correspond or with which they are identical. This is not what the Bible means by knowing God. God is not a reality corresponding to my idea of him in my mind, any more than my wife or any person is. We just have to rid ourselves of such Platonic notions. To know God is to be known of him, and this is a matter of right relationship, as has so often been pointed out after the analogy of the sexual relation. The God of the Bible does not correspond to any single idea in man's mind. He is not the archetype of an idea. He is the living God who confronts man, stands over against him, addresses him, face to face, eye to eye, even though this is in a medium or mask.²⁹

Truth and the knowledge of the truth to Heinecken, as well as to Brunner, is a relational process; it is found in the encounter and not at the end of a syllogism.

²⁷ Moment, p. 182.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 6.

²⁹ "Tension," op. cit., pp. 201-02.

The subject-object split and beyond

Brunner has been shown to overcome the subject-object antithesis with his "personal correspondence" formulation. Heinecken acknowledges perfect agreement with him on this point.³⁰ Heinecken says:

He [man] cannot grasp God as the object of his thought-- he can only encounter him person to person. God always remains the subject who continues to address man, to hold him responsible, to keep him in front of himself. Man can never reverse this relationship and make God the object.³¹

God is always the Subject, and, according to Heinecken, He is only known in subjectivity. "Though objectively present God is discerned only in inwardness."³² Heinecken makes stronger statements than Brunner regarding truth as subjectivity. He writes:

The reassuring presence of the atoning and victorious Lord is discernible only inwardly by the one who is not just a spectator but a participator. Hence truth is subjectivity.³³

And furthermore, Heinecken writes:

It is God himself who is encountered only subjectively and never objectively. All the resultant affirmations

³⁰ "Bultmann's Theology and the Message of the Preacher," The Lutheran Quarterly, VI (1954), 294.

³¹ Moment, p. 72.

³² Ibid., p. 85.

³³ Ibid., p. 270.

of faith are made only by the one who has experienced this encounter for himself.³⁴

Properly understood, Heinecken and Brunner are agreed here. They both say that God is known only through personal involvement. Both say that God is indeed objectively present in His revelation, but that this revelation can only be appropriated by a decisive, inner correspondence. It is not an instance of a subject grasping an object but of a Subject coming face-to-face with a subject.

Personalism as the key

Once again, Heinecken is in close agreement with Brunner in finding the person-to-person relationship the most apt analogy in describing the God-man relationship. Heinecken writes:

Moreover, in the exigencies of life, the supposed certainty of knowledge forsakes man, thus indicating that in the God-relation a different kind of knowledge is required in the very nature of the personal relationship. Here "knowledge" is a relation of "personal correspondence," a "knowledge" in the intimate sense of participating in the other as in the intimacy of the sexual union. It is a relationship of actual obedience-in-trust, a relationship of having the other impart, not ideas or gifts only, but actually himself.³⁵

In this dimension of personal relationships, Heinecken warns that the statistical, quantitative categories of the objec-

³⁴ Ibid., p. 226.

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 142-43.

tive, natural sciences simply do not apply. This is also true, to a certain extent, of theology as a scientific endeavor: the personalistic categories often do not apply.

A method of prediction and control simply destroys the personal relation. It turns the I-Thou relation into an I-It relation. It turns the relation where two personal beings confront each other in personal address into a relation where the one uses a thing merely for his purposes, manipulating it and pushing it around. Another person dare never be used in this way.³⁶

In a similar vein, Heinecken says elsewhere that the moment one reduces the living person confronting one (whether man or God) to a definition or an abstract thought, one loses him.³⁷ "An individual person cannot be thought but only encountered. Neither can God be thought but only encountered."³⁸ The letter smothers the spirit.

The fact that God reveals Himself in a personal manner necessarily sets certain limits on man's penetration into God's mysteries. Just as with another person,³⁹ man can know only as much as God discloses, and this, not in an objective, tabulatable set of data, but only in a living obedience which often must "trust that revelation in contradiction to the evidence."⁴⁰

³⁶Heinecken, Space Age, p. 67.

³⁷Christ Frees and Unites, p. 69.

³⁸Moment, p. 147.

³⁹Heinecken, Space Age, pp. 107-08.

⁴⁰Heinecken, Moment, p. 111.

It is idolatry to find a certainty other than that of the personal relation of trust in the living God who confronts one and calls one to decision. When this confrontation ceases one communes in the chambers of one's own mind with a logical essence instead of with that living God who cannot be so reduced.⁴¹

Heinecken, along with Brunner, but not as extensively as Brunner, points out that the decisive factor in God's personal revelation and man's personal response is the Person, Jesus Christ. The person of Jesus Himself is essentially what makes the God-man relationship personal. "The Church proclaims the personal Truth, with whom we must enter into a personal relation of trust, confidence, and obedience."⁴² This fact that God revealed Himself in a person is only half of both Brunner's and Heinecken's development of the personalistic theme, however. As far as epistemology is concerned, the analogy which they both draw between the knowledge one person has of another (particularly in the marriage relationship) and the knowledge one has of God and of religious truth is the point of chief importance. Their entire theological epistemology is based on this analogy: man's knowledge of God is like man's intimate knowledge of another person, with all the implications and limitations this involves.

God as Revealer

Heinecken, like Brunner, not only sees the doctrine of

⁴¹Ibid., pp. 57-58. ⁴²"Tension," op. cit., p. 205.

revelation as being closely intertwined within the area of epistemology, but he also comes to much the same conclusions in his elaborations of the doctrine of revelation as does Brunner. Several distinctly Lutheran aspects come through: an emphasis on the sacraments as a means of revelation, and the reference to "masks" as the framework of actual revelation. But for the most part there is close coincidence of thought.

Heinecken insists that God remains the Subject throughout the revelatory process. "God is absolutely other from the existing individual but he has revealed himself and therefore I 'know' him in this revelation. But he still remains the subject."⁴³ Heinecken says that "no one--no witness, no human teacher--can directly communicate the God-relationship," but that this is solely God's prerogative.⁴⁴

God reveals himself. It is God who is the initiator of the revelation. This is not an act of human discovery as when man discerns an indubitable truth with the power of his reason. Nor is it a human hypothesis set up by man in an effort to account for certain experienced phenomena. It is rather God on his own initiative encountering man in his existence at a time and place.⁴⁵

God is always at the beginning as well as at the end of revelation. He discloses Himself.

Heinecken also speaks of the otherness of God even in

⁴³Moment, p. 80.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 258.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 102.

the midst of His revelation. As he says, "God has a secret which he does not share with us."⁴⁶ The difference between God and men is not only one of degree, but of kind as well. "The unseen and unseeable God is, quite simply, in a dimension different from that of space. . . ." ⁴⁷ When man is confronted by God, says Heineken, he is confronted "not only by a power and a knowledge and a goodness which are quantitatively beyond him. There is a qualitative difference."⁴⁸ All metaphysical speculation, all attempts to reduce God to a simple idea, all deductive assertions as to God's nature in itself are blocked by an absolute barrier.

God in and for himself is still "unknown" as the absolutely, qualitatively different about whom nothing can be said, except by way of pointing out the difference and the mystery. . . . As for asserting his metaphysical essence and attributes, this is a presumptuous and vain endeavor.⁴⁹

Heineken makes an important distinction between the ontological and spiritual aspects of this problem when he says:

So the absolute qualitative otherness of God, it is said, is not a metaphysical otherness at all. It is not a matter of some chasm between man and the God in whose image he is after all made and whom, in some sense, he must resemble. The difference, it is said, lies in the realm of the "religious" and not that of metaphysical speculation.⁵⁰

⁴⁶Beginning and End of the World, p. 45.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 25.

⁴⁸Moment, p. 69.

⁴⁹Ibid., pp. 109-10.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 117.

The above statement would seem to deny the validity of any kind of analogia entis. The question might be raised, however, as to what this position, if consistently held, would imply if applied to Heinecken's own personalistic analogy. Due to God's complete otherness, perhaps even this analogy cannot be pressed as far as both Heinecken and Brunner press it. What Heinecken is trying to say here, however, is that even the category of "completely other" can be construed as a metaphysical category. He wants to take God's transcendence out of the area of ontology and put it back into the area of the existential. God is completely, inestimably above a specific man as he confronts that man and demands an answer.

Thus, even in His revelation, God remains hidden and mysterious. Even in His revelation He is known in a different way than the truths of reason or even other historical persons are known. "Faith is never turned to sight," says Heinecken.⁵¹ God always wears a mask in His revelation and confronts man in such a way that He is never directly discernible.⁵² Heinecken repeats over and over again: God can be known only with the eyes of faith. ". . . God never did, does not now, and never will appear to man directly for all to see. . . . It is only to the eyes of faith that the

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 112.

⁵² Ibid., p. 68.

living God is discernible."⁵³ Thus revelation and faith are always corollaries; there cannot be one without the other. It must be made clear at this point that faith, as Heinecken is using it here, is no mere acceptance of statements or assent to doctrines. "The revelatory events I must apprehend with my whole being, with the risk of my life and the transformation of my existence."⁵⁴ This is the involvement which faith entails.

God is known through the act of inner transformation of one's being, says Heinecken.⁵⁵ Thus sanctification is not considered as a result of the self-disclosure of God; it is in the very act of renewal that God's self-communication is truly realized. Repentance and renewal are thus prerequisites for true knowledge of God. "The disciple . . . must in this moment of encounter be born a new creature."⁵⁶ Speaking of the Pentecost gift of the Spirit, Heinecken says:

Not long years of study, not painstaking intellectual effort, but inner humility, openness, receptivity, the recognition of a common human need were the conditions of understanding this new language which the Holy Spirit taught.⁵⁷

A summary statement might be this one of Heinecken's: "God

⁵³Space Age, p. 101.

⁵⁴Moment, p. 138.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 68.

⁵⁶Ibid., pp. 104-05.

⁵⁷Basic Christian Teachings (Philadelphia: The Muhlenberg Press, 1949), p. 107.

is not meant to be understood, but to be obeyed."⁵⁸

Heinecken speaks of the actual historical character of God's revelation. "God reveals himself through actions and not through the abstract thoughts of philosophers."⁵⁹ This historical element is indeed part of the hiddenness of the revelation. This is the very offense to man's reason.

It [for example, the incarnation] is the revelatory or salvatory event in which, quite paradoxically and in a hidden, non-discernible way as far as the senses or the insights of reason are concerned, the unseen God enters into space and time and effects man's redemption by imparting himself. Such salvatory events are inseparable from historical events. They are "hidden" in them.⁶⁰

This, of course, is good Lutheran sacramental theology. Neither to be identified with the medium (except, of course, in the case of Christ) nor removed from the medium, God reveals Himself and comes through the historical, present, concrete medium. As Heinecken states it, "This God of love can be encountered at any time and at any place where the gospel is proclaimed and the sacraments are administered."⁶¹

Ultimately Heinecken, like Brunner, explains Biblical epistemology by referring to the work of the Holy Spirit.

". . . any critic of the epistemology of the Christian

⁵⁸Moment, p. 128.

⁵⁹Basic Teachings, p. 29.

⁶⁰"Bultmann's Theology," op. cit., p. 290.

⁶¹Moment, p. 116.

religion ought to be silenced by the fact of Pentecost," he says.⁶² To the basic question "How does one know God?," Heinecken gives his answer and the answer of the Christian tradition as he says:

that God is "known" only through the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the Son and whose coming is a part of the revelation of God in Christ, so that there is no revelation except as the sending of the Spirit is included as a part of the revelatory event.⁶³

The knowledge which the Spirit gives will be received in a different manner than the knowledge that "two times two is four or that Caesar crossed the Rubicon," says Heinecken. But those who have celebrated Pentecost will know, and they will know they know.⁶⁴

God reveals Himself as a personal being, says Heinecken, "a center of will and responsibility."⁶⁵ He reveals His heart, His true disposition, "which is love," to men.⁶⁶ Man is by nature "aware" of the "Other," but about His nature and disposition he knows nothing.

His [man's] predicament is not his wrestling with the question as to whether or not there is "a god," but rather to know the name, the true nature of

⁶²Ibid., p. 79.

⁶³Ibid., pp. 77-78.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 80.

⁶⁵Basic Teachings, p. 25.

⁶⁶Heinecken, Moment, p. 116.

that "unknown one," with whom he finds himself wrestling. . . .⁶⁷

Heinecken admits to a general revelation, a universal divine confrontation of man in his existence giving rise to an undefined "existential awareness of the 'other,'"⁶⁸ but he says also that the gods of natural man "are one and all idols, who must be supplanted by the true God, made 'known' only in Jesus Christ."⁶⁹ The god arrived at by man's reasoning is never "the Creator upon whose will of love all that is depends absolutely" and "the One to whom he [man] owes all."⁷⁰

God is not there at the fringes of man's knowledge simply to explain what still remains inexplicable and mysterious, but the living God confronts man at all times. . . .⁷¹

Heinecken is too much of an existentialist to deny any degree of awareness of the transcendent within man's natural inner experience. By an awareness of one's own limitations, by a sensitivity to the absolute claim laid upon man, by the feelings of insecurity and the threat of meaninglessness,⁷² man "knows" of the "Other," but Heinecken would say, with

⁶⁷M. J. Heinecken, "Man Today and the Message of Justification," Lutheran World, IX (July, 1962), 197.

⁶⁸Moment, p. 123.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 77.

⁷⁰Ibid., pp. 126-27.

⁷¹Space Age, p. 73.

⁷²Ibid., pp. 108-10.

Brunner, that this knowledge is confused and idolatrous.

The relation of reason to faith and theology

This statement by Heineken could just as well have been made by Brunner:

While the formulation and acceptance of doctrine is not to be equated with the personal faith-relationship, it is most certainly inseparable from it. . . . While the biblical record is not just a compendium of doctrines or truths but the witness to certain events, it is as such a witness replete with the doctrines which the transformed believers affirmed and which distinguished them from their pagan neighbors.⁷³

Just as God's revelation in His actions is always "inseparable from interpretive words,"⁷⁴ so man's affirmation of faith must be "in the form of sentences."⁷⁵ In speaking of the necessity for anthropomorphisms in the Bible, Heineken says that in order that man might know the living God, He had to reveal Himself "within the realm of what man can conceive."⁷⁶ He had to submit Himself also to man's rational faculties, or no communication would take place. ". . . because men believe in God they also believe certain things," says Heineken.⁷⁷ He insists, however, that these "things" about God are not to be confused with God Himself. "There

⁷³Christ Frees and Unites, pp. 47-48.

⁷⁴"Tension," op. cit., p. 202.

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 203.

⁷⁶Space Age, p. 87.

⁷⁷Basic Teachings, p. 18.

is a distinction between 'believing in' and 'believing that.' Only 'believing in' is faith. 'Believing that' accompanies the 'believing in.'⁷⁸ The assentia is a necessary but explicitly secondary corollary to the fiducia. One can have a "belief that" without a "belief in," but not vice versa. Heinecken does say that a specified list of doctrine is not necessary for faith:

The acceptance of a doctrine of the atonement can save no one. Only actually being drawn into the right God-relationship matters, and that can happen even without the acceptance of some doctrine.⁷⁹

Although it is not clear what the "some" of the above statement includes, it can be said that Heinecken would not agree to the possibility of faith with no objective knowledge whatsoever.

Just what is the difference, then, which Heinecken sees between the knowledge of faith and analytic, objective knowledge? First of all, the former is found only within the existential relationship while the latter is achieved in a detached, verifiable manner.

By way of contrast with these [objective] propositions, the truth of which is determinable in spectator fashion either with apodictic certainty or with a degree of approximation only, there are "existential" propositions. These cannot be either affirmed or denied except by an "existing" individual who is involved in the entirety of his existence.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 87.

⁸⁰ Moment, p. 271.

One is built on the subject-object split; the other is based on a Subject-subject relationship.

Man cannot know him [God] in the sense in which we know other things, when the idea in our mind (subjective) corresponds to some external referent (objective). We can know him only by being in the right relationship of trust and obedience and love.⁸¹

For the certainty of faith's knowledge there can never be substituted "some kind of external guarantee."⁸² In fact, as Heineken says,

the only way I can discern that I am confronted with the absolute miracle is if it does indeed conclusively confound my understanding no matter how often I may say that the total view is in harmony with what some call "the depth of reason."⁸³

Even though a certain belief is contradictory for thought and, humanly speaking, quite impossible, yet the man of faith, on the basis of the personal confrontation with God, believes and asserts that it "is."⁸⁴

Objective propositions and knowledge present the alternatives of faith or doubt, says Heineken, while faith-directed, existential knowledge confronts a man with the decision of faith or offense. ". . . in the former case the affirmation or denial makes no difference in the way I live; in the latter

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 72.

⁸² Ibid., p. 239.

⁸³ Ibid., pp. 346-47.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 51.

a risk is involved."⁸⁵ In this faith-offense ultimatum presented by religious truth, one can sum up Heinecken's views with regard to the nature and perception of religious truth:

Those who are confronted with this presence of God in Jesus as the Christ do not face the alternative of belief or unbelief--as they would in relation to an ordinary historical event of which they are mere spectators and which is established for them merely on the basis of probability and the accumulation of the weight of evidence. Rather they face the alternative of either "faith" or "offense"--surrendering in trust to the One who makes the absolute claim upon their lives, or "being offended" by the preposterousness of the claim. They cease from being mere spectators, because the demands of this One call for a decision either of giving up one's autonomy and self-will in "faith" or retaining them in "offense."⁸⁶

This option between autonomy on the one hand or surrendering in obedience to the divine claim laid upon one's life on the other is precisely the option which Brunner sees confronting man. Except for minor variations, therefore, it can be concluded, on the basis of the evidence presented in this section, that Heinecken and Brunner are in substantial agreement on the question of the nature and perception of religious truth.

Taito Kantonen

Neither Taito Kantonen nor Joseph Sittler have as much to say in their published materials as does Martin Heinecken

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 272.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 55.

on the subject of this study. For this reason the treatment of both these men will be of a more cursory fashion than with Brunner and Heinecken. It will be shown, however, that both the men, and Kantonen in particular, agree to a great extent with Brunner on the question of religious truth and its perception.

The historical perspective

Kantonen's viewpoints on religious epistemology, like Brunner's and Heinecken's, can best be understood in the light of the antithesis which he is opposing: the objective rationalism of Protestant Orthodoxy.

Luther, Kantonen argues, had opened up the dimension of the personal correspondence in the God-man relationship:

He [Luther] stood "coram Deo," in the presence of God never merely speculating or talking about Him but responding to Him with his whole being as person to person. Nor did he petrify God's Word into a system of abstract concepts. The Word was God himself speaking to him personally and reaching beyond his intellect into the innermost depths of his conscience.⁸⁷

But Orthodoxy, operating with the "static rationalism" of traditional Protestant scholasticism,⁸⁸ soon removed this living God-man relationship from the realm of personal experience into the realm of conceptual analysis.⁸⁹

⁸⁷Taito Almar Kantonen, Resurgence of the Gospel (Philadelphia: The Muhlenberg Press, 1948), p. 36.

⁸⁸Ibid., p. 137.

⁸⁹Ibid., p. 58.

It was the misfortune of the Reformation that its great living truths received their systematic formulation in an age when the basic thought-forms were supplied by a decadent Aristotelian Scholasticism. Consequently the new wine of the rediscovered Gospel was poured into the old wineskins of static intellectualism.⁹⁰

It might be made clear at this point that this writer is passing no judgment as to the strict accuracy of the above statement. Neither Brunner, Heineken nor Kantonen go to any great length to supply primary evidence for their claims of Orthodoxy's so-called distortions of the epistemological relationship. It is more or less assumed that in Orthodoxy a rather sterile intellectualism did replace the more vibrant, existential approach of Luther. At any rate, it is this objectivism, this emphasis upon the precisely defined and the rational, which Kantonen suggests as one of the chief obstacles blocking the way to a valid theological epistemology.

Greek versus Biblical concepts of knowledge

"Truth is not decided by counting noses," says Kantonen.⁹¹ It cannot be "pinned up and exhibited like dead butterflies."⁹² It is dynamic, and its greatest foe is "static intellectualism."⁹³ Kantonen does not often refer to these objectivist

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 35.

⁹¹ Taito Almar Kantonen, Life after Death (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1962), p. 21.

⁹² T. A. Kantonen, The Theology of Evangelism (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1954), p. 20.

⁹³ Kantonen, Resurgence, p. 33.

tendencies as being specifically "Greek," but it is clear that the entire tradition of philosophical, speculative analysis and reflection is being suggested.

The difference between this tradition and the Christian or Biblical one is the difference between contemplation and narration.

Christianity is not just another theory of knowledge, another attempt to discover truth. It never stops with mystical feeling or philosophical reflection, in which a man indulges for his own satisfaction. It is essentially not contemplation at all, although contemplation may be used to clarify it, but narration, an account of what God has done and is doing and what happens to us when God does His work in us.⁹⁴

Kantonen is possibly more involved in the practical mission of the Church than either Brunner or Heineken. A number of the books he has written deal with practical subjects such as stewardship and evangelism. Consequently, he often carries the discussion of the difference between Greek and Biblical thought into the applied situation within the life of the Church. He says, "Vital theology, then, like vital preaching, is never a mere juxtaposition of propositions, no matter how important or true."⁹⁵ With reference to preaching once more, he writes:

When the Gospel is preached in its original purity and vigor as the wisdom of God and the power of God, not as a philosophy of some sort, it continues to bristle with paradoxes.⁹⁶

Or, regarding educational principles in the Church's mission,

⁹⁴Kantonen, Theology of Evangelism, p. 10.

⁹⁵Resurgence, p. 100.

⁹⁶The Message of the Church to the World of Today (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1941), p. 61.

Kantonen observes:

Religious life will continue to be at a low ebb in our congregations so long as we operate simply on the assumption that vital religion can be taught without stressing that it has to be caught. It is a fallacious idea, drawn from Greek philosophy, not from the Christian Gospel, that correct knowledge will automatically result in right action.⁹⁷

Paradox, dynamic vitality, involvement--these characteristics of Biblical thought are thus contrasted with the emphasis upon propositions, rationality and systematic catechization in the more objective Greek tradition. Unlike the abstract speculative nature of Greek thought, Biblical thought is concrete and personal, says Kantonen. "This fact [the incarnation] give the Christian kerygma at the same time a living personal concreteness which distinguishes it from every form of speculation. . . ." ⁹⁸ The Church's message does not consist of abstract principles, but of the specific and concrete mighty acts of God in history and experience.⁹⁹ "The burden of the apostolic witness was not 'God wrote a book' but 'God sent forth his Son.'" ¹⁰⁰ Kantonen, then, along with Brunner and Heineken, but not in as detailed a manner, would claim a radical difference between the knowledge and import

⁹⁷Resurgence, pp. 218-19.

⁹⁸T. A. Kantonen, "Christ--the Hope of Those Who are Outside the Church," Lutheran World, I (Summer, 1954), 114.

⁹⁹Kantonen, Message, p. 30.

¹⁰⁰Kantonen, Resurgence, p. 107.

of philosophical, purely rational activity and the knowledge and import of the Biblical tradition. Once more, the difference might be aptly summarized as that existing between kennen and wissen as epistemological relationships.

The subject-object split and beyond

It need only be noted here that Kantonen does not use the "subject-object" category to develop his position.

Personalism as the key

Kantonen, like Brunner and Heineken, finds in the personality construction the key to Biblical truth and its perception.

the central doctrine of Christianity is personality-construction. That doctrine--and it is inseparably connected with the person of Jesus--is the doctrine of the Kingdom of God. . . . When we try to express the Kingdom in terms of anything static, we get into paradoxes; the solution of these paradoxes lies in the living, growing, dynamic reality known as personality.¹⁰¹

Whether the personality-structure "solves" the paradoxes of Biblical truth or whether it rather displays them for what they really are--unfathomable mysteries in another dimension from that of the fact and the thing--is a question Kantonen would probably answer in favor of the latter alternative. But it is evident that he, too, sees a direct analogy between personality and Biblical truth. The

¹⁰¹Kantonen, Message, pp. 112-13.

knowledge of God and His ways is much the same as knowledge of another person. "It is a matter of the will," says Kantonen, "that is, of the whole personality."¹⁰²

Once again, with Kantonen, as with Brunner and Heineken, the personality-structure is not arbitrarily picked out as the most apt analogy of knowledge of the Divine. The most convincing reason for its use is the person of Christ. "Unlike any religion or philosophy, Christianity is inseparably bound up with the person of its Founder."¹⁰³ The living Christ is the basic determinant of the personal nature of Biblical truth. "It [faith] is a person-to-person relation with Christ, which dissolves into nothingness unless it is vitalized by recurrent encounters with its living object."¹⁰⁴

Kantonen most often sets forth this personalistic scheme of Biblical truth in direct contrast and, this writer holds, in reaction to a more intellectualistic, objectivistic structure. Some examples are listed:

The God of the Bible does not concern himself with imparting to men a body of facts, and principles for interpreting them, but with establishing personal fellowship with men.¹⁰⁵

.....

¹⁰²Theology of Evangelism, p. 8.

¹⁰³Message, p. 52.

¹⁰⁴Resurgence, p. 81.

¹⁰⁵Theology of Evangelism, p. 18.

The God who became man is not concerned with truths or principles but with persons. . . . His appeal therefore does not take the form "Believe my teachings," "Follow my precepts," but "Believe in me," "Follow me," "I am the truth."¹⁰⁶

.....

In the person-to-person encounter of faith the believer takes hold of the Lord himself, not just something said or written about Him.¹⁰⁷

.....

In the Christian message it is not an institution or a book or a body of doctrine that asks for our trust and obedience but a person who says, "I am the truth. . . ." ¹⁰⁸

.....

[Jesus] came not to win assent to a set of propositions but to seek and to save men.¹⁰⁹

The note of reaction is clear; Kantonen is not only presenting theological personalism as the key to understanding the Christian faith, but is, in so doing, opposing a concurrent theological thought-system which he feels is misleading and ultimately false.

Kantonen claims that an appreciation of this personality construction is first truly realized in a vital awareness of sin. "A man becomes aware of God as a person only when he

¹⁰⁶"Christ--the Hope," op. cit., p. 114.

¹⁰⁷Resurgence, pp. 109-10.

¹⁰⁸A Theology for Christian Stewardship (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1956), pp. 12-13.

¹⁰⁹Theology of Evangelism, p. 19.

has become aware that his will has crossed God's will."¹¹⁰
 Only when man's secret sins have been exposed and his vain pretensions shattered, can a personal relationship with God become possible, says Kantonen.¹¹¹ This possibility of relationship becomes a reality in the forgiveness of sins. "A vital personal relationship between man and God thus comes into existence, but its sole ground and constant pivot is the forgiveness of sins."¹¹² Kantonen thus bases his personalistic viewpoint on the thoroughly Lutheran sub-structure of sin and grace.

God as Revealer

"Christian truth, the truth of the gospel, is, first of all, revealed truth. It is based on divine self-disclosure."¹¹³ Kantonen, too, insists that man's knowledge of God finds its source and content in God's self-communication. God is Subject of the epistemological relationship. ". . . man cannot find God until God has found him."¹¹⁴ "God himself must precede our idea of God."¹¹⁵ When speaking of such

¹¹⁰Resurgence, p. 73.

¹¹¹Theology for Christian Stewardship, p. 29.

¹¹²Resurgence, p. 74.

¹¹³Kantonen, Theology of Evangelism, p. 7.

¹¹⁴Resurgence, p. 97.

¹¹⁵Theology of Evangelism, p. 7.

divine secrets as the nature of life after death, man's own surmises and arguments have no part, says Kantonen. "It [the answer to such a question] is drawn entirely from God's revelation of himself. . . ."116 Revelation is the basis of Biblical epistemology.

But this revelation is something much more than a body of correct propositions or flawless words, Kantonen insists.

The Word is not only the revealer of divine wisdom but also and primarily the vehicle of divine power, the power to give vital conviction, to break sinful habit, to redirect the will, to bridge the chasm between God and man.117

Kantonen emphasizes the "power" inherent in God's self-disclosure. God's revelation is so much more than truths to be accepted; it is acting, saving, power-transmitting truth.

But Christian truth is not only revealed truth, in which God himself assumes the initiative. It is also redemptive truth, which shows God to be in saving action. It is not a mere communication of ideas but a transmission of power. Revelation is inseparable from salvation.118

Only when the Word of God is received as a personal address to the individual does this power-instilling communication take place. As long as it is received as information about God or as codifiable material for doctrines it is powerless and incomplete. Kantonen gives a forceful picture of the

116 Life after Death, p. 2.

117 Resurgence, p. 143.

118 Theology of Evangelism, p. 8.

living Word and its transforming workings, as opposed to a lifeless word considered as objective fact, in the following quotation:

The Word is not a collection of ideas to be understood or a set of rules to be obeyed but the power of a new life to be received. Its primary appeal is neither to the intellect nor to the emotions but to the will and conscience, to man as man. It seeks to take hold of the total personality and to give not mere information about God but fellowship with God. It is not a general "to whom it may concern" but addresses itself, to use a good Quaker expression, "to our condition." It meets, not men's idle curiosity, but their anxiety, guilt, despair. It confronts men at the point of their deepest need. It both discloses and meets our need for a Savior. It brings to us not only new insight and wisdom on matters which constitute our ultimate concern but an entirely new structure of life, the rule of God, the sovereignty of Christ. It not only acquaints us with the sacred Scriptures but transforms us into living epistles of Christ.¹¹⁹

The antithesis against which Kantonen is reacting with this dynamic, personal approach to the Word is obvious: the biblicistic tendency to over-objectivize and depersonalize into cold abstractions the living voice of God.

the divine truth does not endure as a static quantum, possessed and hoarded and handed down from one generation to another, but as a series of personal encounters by which men of each successive generation face God himself, hear His voice and receive His life-changing power.¹²⁰

Kantonen explains that this always contemporaneous encounter is made effective only through the Spirit of God

¹¹⁹ Theology for Christian Stewardship, pp. 15-16.

¹²⁰ Kantonen, Resurgence, p. 126.

who alone makes known the true significance of the Word.¹²¹ Furthermore, Kantonen, together with Heineken, adds the Lutheran note that God can be known perhaps most explicitly in the sacraments.¹²²

The relation of reason to faith and theology

Kantonen calls "Lutheran"--and thus agrees with-- Brunner's position that man's spiritual nature, even in its sin-perverted state, still affords a point of contact with God."¹²³ Whether Kantonen would have Brunner include the reason in "man's spiritual nature" is uncertain. Kantonen does say this, however, about unregenerate reason: "Natural unregenerate reason not only fails to find God; it also fails to see in the Gospel anything but foolish nonsense."¹²⁴ At another place he expands upon this thought:

Human reason can give us an Aristotelian God who sits in solitary splendor contemplating his own perfection and refusing to contaminate himself with the imperfections of the world. It cannot give us a God who runs down the road to embrace one whose associations have been with harlots and swine.¹²⁵

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 124.

¹²² Ibid., p. 109.

¹²³ Ibid., p. 16.

¹²⁴ Ibid., pp. 106-07.

¹²⁵ Theology of Christian Stewardship, p. 39.

Rationalistic theology applies only "high and glorious" terms to God, says Kantonen, whereas faith's theology grasps God even in His masks of weakness, disgrace and suffering.¹²⁶ No mere theological analysis will enable man to appreciate the true meaning of, for example, justification by faith; it is only when one embarks "on the same venture of personal faith"¹²⁷ that it is truly realized and experienced.

Kantonen does not speak explicitly about the necessity of reason in either the faith-relationship or in the task of theology. His main interest seems to lie in demonstrating the inadequacy of the reason to independently achieve a vital relationship with God. Man, in his perennial state of unwillingness to "acknowledge his dependence, to accept his finiteness, to admit his insecurity,"¹²⁸ seeks a man-made way of salvation, to be brought about according to the self-sufficient dictates of reason. Kantonen calls this autonomous attempt of man naive and impossible.

If our difficulty were only a lack of knowledge or a weakness of the moral will, we would need only a teacher or an exemplar. But sin is such a radical dislocation of our basic relation to God that we need a Mediator and a Savior.¹²⁹

¹²⁶ Resurgence, p. 125.

¹²⁷ Ibid., p. 74.

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 27.

¹²⁹ Message, pp. 54-55.

The discussion of Kantonen closes at this point, with the acknowledgment that his treatment of the epistemological question is perhaps the most purely theological of the men studied so far, at least from the Lutheran standpoint. His constant attention to such strictly theological issues as sin and justification and his avoidance of such constructs as "subject" and "object" in connection with the question of the perception of Biblical truth set him somewhat apart from the other two. It has been sufficiently noted, however, that he is in substantial agreement with them in every important emphasis regarding the question of theological epistemology.

Joseph Sittler

Of the three Lutheran theologians being considered, Joseph Sittler stands out for a number of reasons. His thought is possibly the most original of the three and the most poignantly phrased. While Heineken concerns himself primarily with the existentialist approach and Kantonen with the purely Lutheran theological approach, Sittler's main interest lies in the area of ecumenics and a contemporary restatement of the Christian faith. Sittler has the least to say on the subject of this study. It can be seen, however, that what he does say agrees quite closely with the thought of the other three men above. This section will attempt to point out these areas of basic agreement.

The historical perspective

Sittler, like the others, sees the period of Orthodoxy as the stultification of the dynamic, relational theology of the Reformers. Orthodoxy's central tragedy, according to Sittler, was that it "stultified the Reformer's doctrine of the Word in definitions aimed at intellectual acceptance. . . ." ¹³⁰ Understanding revelation in a "propositional, documentary, static, and thoroughly intellectualized manner," ¹³¹ Orthodoxy attempted, as had medieval theology before it, ¹³² to give man religious certainty. But in its search for certainty and safeguards, it somehow lost track of the core of what it was trying to protect.

Seeking to enclose the living, orthodoxy stifled. Seeking to cherish by logically necessary formulations, it squeezed out of the doctrine the decision of faith. Seeking to tighten theologically, it reduced religiously. Seeking to protect a heritage by enclosing it in a box--it mummified. ¹³³

Whenever the living, personal truth is thus conceived of in terms of right teaching, an explosive reaction is bound to follow, argues Sittler. He points at Pietism as the

¹³⁰ The Doctrine of The Word (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1948), p. 44.

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 48.

¹³² Ibid., p. 13.

¹³³ Ibid., p. 49.

"explosion" which followed Orthodoxy.

when the object of faith has been theologically transmuted into a static identification with a historical document, then faith, which is always dynamic, will inevitably shift its attention to an area in which a dynamic need can be met by a dynamic object. In this instance [Pietism], to the believing individual.¹³⁴

The dynamic of the authentic God-man relationship, once released, "cannot permit theology ever again to operate as if it had not been," says Sittler.¹³⁵ The Church always must and will be on guard against the objectivization of the address of the gospel.

Greek versus Biblical concepts of knowledge

"The gospel is not a holy box of divine propositions ranging from simple to complex; it is nothing less than the organic life of God confronting us now here, now there."¹³⁶ With this differentiation between the proposition and the living, confronting voice of God Sittler sets up the radical dichotomy of Greek versus Biblical thought. On the surface, Biblical truth may appear not dissimilar to philosophic truth;

¹³⁴Ibid., pp. 45-46. (It is this writer's conviction that this is the precise occasion of each of these four men's emphasis on the personal, the relational and the non-propositional; they, too, are reacting, in an almost inevitable direction, against an objectivism and intellectualism within the Church of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.)

¹³⁵"A Christology of Function," The Lutheran Quarterly, VI (1954), 124.

¹³⁶Joseph Sittler, The Ecology of Faith (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1961), p. 65.

but underneath, the two reveal a radically diverse framework of meaning. Objective truth can be spoken of in one-level, undialectical statements; Biblical truth is of necessity "multiple-level" in meaning and dialectical.

For the central revelation of God in an Incarnation of grace in a world of nature inwardly requires that all discourse inclusive of these two magnitudes is of necessity dialectical.¹³⁷

Sittler thus holds that every simple term of faith must be set forth in such a way that the multiple dimensions of its own content are exposed. This interpenetration of the Divine and the human, of sin and grace, of the old and the new within religious truth makes for a unique epistemology, an epistemology which seeks the true and expresses itself within the framework of the dialectical.

Sittler emphasizes the fact that the modern age calls for an epistemology and an apologetic far different from those of the classical period. He writes:

It may well be that we are entering upon a period in the church's life wherein men's minds must be shocked open to entertain the suspicion that there are realms of meaning, promise, and judgment which ensconce God's incarnated action for their vague disquietudes.¹³⁸

Speaking of God in terms of substance and ideal essence is impossible for contemporary man, says Sittler. "The problem of the knowledge of God must, with us, operate with the

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 47.

¹³⁸ "The Shape of the Church's Response in Worship," The Ecumenical Review, X (January, 1958), 146.

realities of energy, realizing will, purposive intention."¹³⁹

Today man speaks in terms of force and function and not in terms of objective substance.

formulations enunciated in one age are deepeningly unintelligible in another. The terms of discourse evoked by and addressed to one historical situation are no longer declarative of what they sought to say-- a grammar of substance is alien to a grammar of function--and are therefore, for the contemporary church, neither adequate confession nor meaningful piety.¹⁴⁰

Sittler sums up the contrast between classical Greek-informed concepts of truth and knowledge and the concepts operative among contemporary (and among the Biblical writers and the Reformers as well, he would say) men in this penetrating statement:

the classical Christology of the Greeks perpetuates formulations which operate with a way of speaking about God which is incongruent with our time and its ways of thinking.

Classical terms were expressive of bodies; ours must be expressive of functions. Nicaea operated with the discourse of statics; contemporary discourse is permeated through and through with a world view which is dynamic. For us, persons are not bodies, but units of force and will; all things are not bodies, but aims, means, and creations of these units. The classical relationship between bodies was positional; our understanding of relationship is functional.¹⁴¹

Sittler thus adds this important concept of "functionalism" to the list of differences between the Greek and the Biblical concepts of truth. The difference is once more seen to be

¹³⁹"A Christology," op. cit., p. 127.

¹⁴⁰Ibid., p. 131.

¹⁴¹Ibid., pp. 122-23.

one of kind and of dimension of meaning, rather than one of gradation within a singular framework of truth.

The subject-object split and beyond

The paucity of Sittler's remarks with regard to the inadequacy of the subject-object process in acquiring knowledge about God does not diminish the impact of his thought in this area. Subject-object epistemology must give way to faith's own way of knowing when it comes to Biblical truth.

This "common center" and "glowing core" of Luther's theology . . . is faith as an independent form of the apprehension, reception, and actualization of the life of God. Whenever theology is informed by faith as its constituent principle an unmistakable dynamism pervades its every part and method. This is so because when God is known by faith, that very way of knowing bestows an immediacy of relationship not communicable in subject-object ways of knowledge.¹⁴²

Sittler capsules what the other three men under discussion had been saying, as he says,

What is given in faith is not knowledge about God but God himself as life, grace, love, and forgiveness. The very totality-character of the act of faith transcends every epistemological analogy whereby a systemization of it may be attempted. Faith is an independent form of God-relationship, and its energies cannot be contained within categories which would deal with God as an object of knowledge. For it is the first thing I know about God when I know him in faith that I had not known him at all had he not in aggressive love known me into knowledge of himself.¹⁴³

¹⁴²Doctrine of the Word, pp. 5-6.

¹⁴³Ibid., p. 6.

This writer would be hard put to find a more apt summary of the entire epistemological thrust of the four men being considered than these two excerpts from Joseph Sittler.

Personalism as the key

Here also, what little Sittler has to say specifically about the personalistic nature of revelation and divine truth shows that he is in agreement with Brunner and his two fellow Lutherans.

Revelation is not a thing--but an action of God, an event involving two parties; it is a personal address. There is no such thing as revelation-in-itself, because revelation consists of the fact that something is revealed to me.¹⁴⁴

Sittler seems to favor the term "dynamic" over "personal" to convey his concept of a living, relational structure of Biblical truth and knowledge. He uses the term "personal" rarely, perhaps to avoid the pitfalls of secular personalism. It is admitted that the connotations of "dynamic" and "personal" are quite diverse. However, from such statements as above,¹⁴⁵ it is clear that his intention is not to contradict but to rephrase the personalistic constructs of the other three.

God as Revealer

¹⁴⁴Ibid., p. 33.

¹⁴⁵See also: Sittler's Doctrine of the Word, p. 48.

Revelation is seen as dynamic and existential divine self-disclosure by Sittler.

Lutheran theology, with its understanding of revelation as the Deus Loquens can never equate the revelation with a book, a palpable historical product. Revelation is, rather, the address of God to man, the incessant self-disclosure of God in his will and mercy, in his judgment and appeal. Revelation is not a thing; it is a continuing activity. It is not static but dynamic.¹⁴⁶

God can be known only because and in so far as he reveals Himself,¹⁴⁷ and, in order that he might truly be known by man, he must "present himself to man as a God for sinners."¹⁴⁸ God and His gospel are first realized in a genuine sense when man responds to God's call to undeserved fellowship.

Sittler, like both the other Lutherans, insists that God's self-disclosure is always veiled and open only to the response of faith.

For, while God wills to reveal himself, he always reveals himself in a veiled way, in such a relationship to the things of earth that man must ask after him in desperate earnestness. . . . It is ultimately of the mercy of God that he reveals himself to me in such a way that only in faith I may know him.¹⁴⁹

God reveals Himself in such veiled ways as, for example, the cross, argues Sittler, ". . . that through faith he may really reveal himself, and not merely some information about him-

¹⁴⁶Doctrine of the Word, p. 11.

¹⁴⁷Ibid., p. 17.

¹⁴⁸Ibid., p. 7.

¹⁴⁹Ibid., pp. 63-64.

self."¹⁵⁰ The masks of revelations, those indirect means which defy rational apprehension, are thus part and parcel of the God-man epistemological relationship. God comes, not in idea, but in cloaked fact. He can be known, not by ordinary rational endeavor, but only in the response of faith. Sittler adds this thought:

When God makes the requirement that who would know him must know him in faith, he but requires, in the area of religious knowledge, what is necessary in accordance with his nature as Agape. That is to say that the revelation of God, interpreted in terms of Eros, may be so received as to require no such radical faith. But God as Agape stands over against me in so sharp a discontinuity that a lesser personal coalescence of the whole being than faith as trust is improper to the nature of the revelation.¹⁵¹

God's revelation is unique and the reception of this revelation is unique because God as Agape is unique. Brunner might have phrased this same thought: God's revelation is personal and its reception is personal because God is personal.

The relation of reason to faith and theology

Sittler provides no excursus on this specific subject. He does say, however, that clarity of doctrine "without the love of the brother who is luminously before us precisely as the brother is the clarity of damnation."¹⁵² He would thus

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 66.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p. 64.

¹⁵² "Called to Unity," The Ecumenical Review, XIV (January, 1962), 185.

second Brunner's frequent observation that doctrine for doctrine's sake breeds lovelessness.¹⁵³ Doctrines are indeed necessary, says Sittler, to meet the exigent challenges of definite historical threats,¹⁵⁴ but the moment these doctrines become the object rather than the expression of faith, they have ceased to serve their function and have become a decided distortion of the dynamic, faith-engendered and sustained God-man relationship.

With these remarks Chapter II comes to a close. The evidence supplied in this section is sufficient to support a claim that Martin Heineken, Taito Kantonen and Joseph Sittler, although varying on several matters of emphasis and adding several specifically Lutheran notes to the discussion, substantially agree with the epistemological position of Emil Brunner presented in Chapter I.

¹⁵³ Emil Brunner, The Divine-Human Encounter, translated by Amandus W. Loos (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1943), p. 103.

¹⁵⁴ "Called to Unity," op. cit., p. 185.

CHAPTER III

CONCLUSION

The six foci around which Emil Brunner structures his theological epistemology have, by this time, been oft repeated.

A. His position can best be understood by investigating the historical perspective and noting that he is consciously and intentionally countering what he calls a false objectivism within Protestant Orthodoxy.

B. The fallacy of so much of the Orthodox approach is that it follows Greek rather than Biblical thought-patterns, says Brunner. The Greek tradition's approach to truth emphasizes the abstract, the timeless and universal, the objective, the fact and the systematizable; the Biblical approach, on the other hand, emphasizes the concrete, the historical and the existential, the personal, the act and the paradoxical. The key to the Greek pattern is rationality; the key to the Biblical is personal faith in response to a personal encounter.

C. Inherent in the Greek epistemology is the subject-object way of knowing. Brunner insists that this process is untrue to Biblical truth, and that only a Subject-subject pattern renders genuine knowledge of God and the God-man relationship.

D. The key to theological epistemology is the personalistic framework of knowing. A man knows God as he knows another person. All of the abiding mysteries of personality,

all the relatedness and intimacy of communion, all the non-objectifiable qualities existing within the close person-to-person relationship, all of the knowledge gained only through trust and sharing--these enigmatical elements which make up the epistemological relation between one person and another hold true in man's epistemological relationship with God who is personal and who became a Person in history for man.

E. God is evermore Subject of this personal epistemological relationship. By His historical and existential revelation and by it alone can man come to know God. The Bible is the means to this self-disclosure.

F. Human reason, while essential in both the activity of faith and in theologizing, remains ancillary and subservient to faith's own way of knowing. The knowledge of faith (kennen) and the knowledge of reason (wissen) operate in two different dimensions of truth. While there are necessarily objective elements to be known in the God-man epistemological relationship, yet these objective facts merely inform the really primary activity: the trusting and obedient response of faith to the address of the self-disclosing God.

While several differences in emphasis are noticeable and while the distinctively Lutheran approach shows up in diverse ways and places in their positions, yet it has been shown by considerable documentation that the three American Lutheran theologians, Martin Heineken, Taito Kantonen and Joseph Sittler, are in substantial agreement with Brunner in every one of the six categories listed above. There is little

obvious dependency upon Brunner,¹ but the similarities in viewpoint do exist, whether derived from Brunner, or from a possible common source such as Soren Kierkegaard or Martin Buber, or from independent or semi-independent study and discovery. These four men are opposing the same antitheses and are proposing much the same answer to the God-man epistemological question.

While the stated purpose of this study is to "present" Brunner's theological epistemology and that of the three Lutherans in comparison to it, and not to evaluate or criticize it, still it might be helpful to include at this point some of the more telling of the criticisms contemporary theologians are leveling against Brunner's position.

A. Schrader claims that Brunner is guilty of both "bad theology and bad metaphysics" in his insistence that God is pure subject.

But when Brunner claims that a subject can never be known as an object, he is, I think, guilty of a confusion. It does not follow from the fact that a subject cannot qua subject be known as object, that a subject cannot be known as an object. Only if a being were pure subject would this inference be justified. In the case of God, of course, this is precisely what Brunner and others have maintained. And Brunner makes a similar claim with respect to human subjects.
 . . . The fact is that I am both subject and object and the unity of the two. I can be known objectively

¹ There are a few direct references to his writings, however, and several sufficiently acknowledged appropriations of identical terminology. See Martin J. Heineken, The Moment Before God (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1956), p. 240.

even though my inwardness can be revealed only insofar as I choose to reveal it through communication. It would be, I think, just as wrong to be treated as a pure subject as a mere object.²

Brunner would probably answer this, as is shown in the section entitled "Relation of Reason to Faith and Theology,"³ that there are indeed objective, rational elements in man's knowledge of God. But to place the primary emphasis upon God as object in the epistemological relationship is to miss the really valid way of knowing Him.

B. With regard to Brunner's personalistic emphasis, Paul Jewett maintains that Brunner's claim to personal correspondence as the basic thought-form of the Bible "cannot be sustained."⁴ William Wolf, too, puts the question as to whether Brunner is not "subjecting the biblical material to a large amount of a priori personalistic metaphysic."⁵ Paul Tillich says that this personalistic category is not exclusive enough to really be contributing significant information about the Divine-human encounter. He writes:

²George A. Schrader, "Brunner's Conception of Philosophy," in The Theology of Emil Brunner, edited by Charles W. Kegley (New York: Macmillan Company, 1962), pp. 123-24.

³Supra, pp. 56ff.

⁴"Ebnerian Personalism and its Influence upon Brunner's Theology," The Westminster Theological Journal, XIV (May, 1952), 147.

⁵"An Outline of Brunner's Theology," Anglican Theological Review, XXX (April, 1948), 132.

Life in all its dimensions cannot be grasped without an encounter of the knowing and the known beyond the subject-object scheme. If this is the case, the question may arise whether the person-to-person encounter is the only valid analogy to the Divine-human encounter and whether, therefore, in the description of the way of knowing God, the personalistic categories should be used exclusively.⁶

Robert Bertram claims that if non-theological science would ever succeed in clearing up some of the difficulties of interpersonal knowledge, this would, according to Brunner's approach, endanger or at least lessen God's transcendence.

He [Brunner] has fixed upon the general epistemological distinction between personal and non-personal knowledge; and noting the technical difficulties which philosophy has had in accounting for the former, he concludes that this philosophically inexplicable knowledge of persons is peculiar to divine revelation and is the proper subject matter of Christian theology and ethics. And from this he has gone on to say, in effect, that the transcendent God is transcendent, at least partly, because He is a person. (This is certainly different from saying that God transcends our knowledge somewhat like persons do.)⁷

This writer would be interested in hearing Brunner's reply to this charge that he has started with a general personalistic epistemology and then foisted it upon Christian theology. Concerning the last two sentences of Bertram's charge, Brunner would no doubt say that he does both: he sees God as personal or as a Person (specifically in Jesus Christ) and he knows

⁶ "Some Questions on Brunner's Epistemology," in The Theology of Emil Brunner, edited by Charles W. Kegley (New York: Macmillan Company, 1962), p. 100.

⁷ "Brunner on Revelation," Concordia Theological Monthly, XXII (September, 1951), 639.

God in a way similar to the way he knows a person. Both sides are true to his position.

C. Schrottenboer's final evaluation of Brunner's position reads:

He [Brunner] does not stand apart from the stream of modern thought, calling it back to the fountain-head of truth, namely, the God of the Bible, but he is himself influenced strongly by the Zeitgeist. This is apparent from his uncritical acceptance of higher criticism, his irrationalistic devaluation of theory, and his construction of the truth of revelation as personal correspondence.⁸

Brunner admits to an acceptance of higher criticism,⁹ but perhaps not uncritically; he does devalue theory, but not irrationally;¹⁰ he does see Biblical truth as personal correspondence.¹¹ Does this necessarily determine that he is leading away from the "fountain-head of truth" or that he is in error holding these positions?

Jewett criticizes Brunner for inadequate Scriptural proof for his various viewpoints. For example, he complains that Brunner cites only two passages¹² to support his major

⁸ P. G. Schrottenboer, A New Apologetics: An Analysis and Appraisal of the Eristic Theology of Emil Brunner (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1955), p. 216.

⁹ Supra, p. 49.

¹⁰ Emil Brunner, Revelation and Reason; The Christian Doctrine of Faith and Knowledge, translated by Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, c. 1946), p. 418.

¹¹ Supra, p. 40.

¹² 1 Cor. 8:1-3 and Eph. 1:4.

thesis of personal correspondence as the fundamental category of Biblical truth.¹³ This writer would have to agree that Brunner's use of Scripture is sketchy, to say the least, in most of his writings. By what standards one is to judge adequate Scriptural substantiation for a certain viewpoint is another question, however.

D. Schrotenboer furthermore claims that Brunner places too much stock in human reason.

Brunner requires a subordination of reason, but no reformation of reason. According to his presentation, reason as the power of ideation spells autonomy for man. Such autonomy is not wrong in itself, but becomes sin only when it oversteps its bounds.¹⁴

Brunner only speaks of the reason as "autonomous" as it sets itself up as an absolute authority over against God, however.¹⁵ Autonomous reason is always sin to Brunner. Would not Lutherans agree with him that reason is indeed capable in the things below and that it errs only when it oversteps its earthly bounds and attempts to plumb the things above?

Some of the criticisms against Brunner's epistemology are justifiable; others are of questionable weight. This writer would add only two questions to the general discussion concerning Brunner's position:

Is he correct, partially correct or incorrect in his

¹³Jewett, "Ebnerian Personalism," op. cit., p. 134.

¹⁴Op. cit., p. 194.

¹⁵Brunner, Revelation and Reason, p. 208.

disparagement of the presuppositions, methods and conclusions of Orthodoxy? If his charges of a distorted theology coming from this period are valid, does the fault lie with Orthodoxy itself, or principally with those two centuries between the period of Orthodoxy and today? At any rate, if his accusations of a false and misleading objectivity and a static intellectualism leading toward an invalid theological epistemology within Orthodoxy are correct or partially correct, then it must be remembered, with all that this implies, that Lutheran Orthodoxy and its twentieth century descendants are included in this accusation.

What part, if any, of Brunner's theological epistemology can be accepted by the Lutheran theologian? Heineken, Kantonen and Sittler agree with most of his major emphases in this area. Is the proper stance over against Brunner's personalistic position a judicious and balanced incorporation of his perceptive contribution to the discussion of the nature and perception of Biblical truth into a theology already well-founded, by God's grace, in the objective truths of the Christian faith?

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