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### The Study of the Relation Between Brunner's General Concept of Revelation and his Christology

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A STUDY OF THE RELATION BETWEEN BRUNNER'S  
GENERAL CONCEPT OF REVELATION AND HIS  
CHRISTOLOGY

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A thesis Presented to the Faculty  
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in partial fulfillment of the  
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by

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

In "The Church in the Purpose of God," a pamphlet written in preparation for the meeting of the World Conference on Faith and Order, to meet at Lund in the summer of 1952, Oliver Tomkins lists four "trans-confessional" trends in theology today:

1. The Church is accepting the methods of scientific scholarship and those of critical, literary, and historical study which have vindicated themselves in the intellectual field.
2. Many are recognizing the error in the liberal movement's betrayal of the Christian faith to the assumptions and conclusions of secular scientific humanism, and are attempting to develop a Biblical Theology that recognizes the unity in Biblical revelation and attempts to recover the distinctive outlook of the Bible.
3. Under the influence of Pascal and Kierkegaard, there is an existential movement in which there is an aversion to abstract systems, and a preference for paradox and dialectic.
4. There is a growing confessionalism, in which churches are becoming more aware of their many traditions, and are organizing themselves on a world-wide confessional basis.<sup>1</sup>

Eil Brunner, professor of Theology at Zurich, has in his doctrine of Revelation each of these four emphases.

The aim of the Swiss theologian is, first of all, to formulate a doctrine of revelation that recognizes the legitimate claims of science and culture. He attempts to formulate the Biblical doctrine of revelation under the assumption that the Biblical world-view, cosmological and

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<sup>1</sup>Published by the World Council of Churches (New York, 1951).

historical, has gone for good. He takes it as a well-grounded hypothesis that the origins of humanity can be traced in a more or less continuous pedigree back into the animal sphere, and that most Old Testament pre-history is mythology. He accepts as valid the claim of higher critics that, from the standpoint of history, the fourth Gospel is much inferior to the synoptic tradition, and that even the synoptic tradition is very unreliable.<sup>2</sup>

Brunner opposes the subjectivization of the Christian faith that has brought on the disintegration of Protestantism, and, following Barth, demands a return from anthropocentric religion to the revelation of the living God. He finds the real frontal attack of the Church to be on man's self-sufficiency and his deification of his ego, and he demands that Christian theology remain in conflict with the autonomous will of man. For he finds in the kerygma of the Cross that which slays man's autonomous ego and makes man willing to call God Lord. In many respects he stands out formidably as defensor fidei.

Brunner's aim is to advance a Biblical, existential interpretation of the Christian faith. He advocates a doctrine of Revelation that includes the whole of divine activity for the salvation of the world. Claiming to set the genuinely Biblical understanding of revelation free from additions and accretions hallowed by tradition, Brunner advocates the idea of Biblical Revelation as "truth as encounter," bringing about a person to person relationship. He insists that the knowledge of faith

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<sup>2</sup>Paul Brunner, The Word and the World (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1931), pp. 98 f.

is fundamentally different from rational knowledge, since it is truth that "comes into being" when God meets man.

Central in the problems which Brunner faces is that of relating his doctrine of "truth as encounter" to his Christology. Brunner's rejection of the orthodox understanding of faith leads him to a right understanding of Gospels as written by faith for faith. At the same time it leads him into some rather arbitrary thought on "incognito principles," according to which he is forced to reject the Parthogenesis and to reconstruct the Gospels. Meanwhile, in a polemical and apologetic treatise on the atonement, Brunner misses the central New Testament axis, and almost completely forgets the Sacrament.

In this thesis I shall attempt to show points of correlation between Brunner's general doctrine of Revelation and his Christology, with the critical implications of the first upon the second. The second chapter will be a review of the central emphases in Brunner's doctrine of Revelation. The third chapter will be a review of Brunner's Christology in relation to the central points in chapter two. The fourth chapter will contain a brief discussion of the points of relationship between chapters two and three, which will touch upon certain points of his strength and weakness.

## CHAPTER II

### ANALYSIS OF BRUNNER'S DOCTRINE OF REVELATION

#### Why God Reveals Himself

According to Brunner the first question with which the doctrine of Revelation must deal is "Why does God reveal Himself?" The answer that he gives is "God wills to impart Himself because He is Holiness and Love."<sup>1</sup>

Brunner states that from the standpoint of revelation the first thing to be said about God must deal with His sovereignty or holiness. He notes further that originally the word "holy" had no ethical connotation, but rather signified that in God there is that which distinguishes Him from everything else, the transcendence of God in His very nature, as the "Wholly Other." The word "holy" connoted the idea that the Creator has no trace of "the world" or the creature in Himself, and, conversely, the creature has no trace of "non-creatureliness," or divinity.<sup>2</sup>

There is in God's holiness that which may be termed His expansive and inclusive movement. As the God of revelation He is the God who cares absolutely whether falsehood or His Truth prevails in the world of men. He is not a static being, but reveals Himself that His name

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<sup>1</sup> Emil Brunner, The Christian Doctrine of God (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1947), p. 199. Hereafter referred to as LG.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 157 ff.

might be known and that He might be glorified. He wills that all creation should be filled with His glory, and thus should have a share in the quality which is His alone. This holiness of God is the basis of His self-communication.<sup>3</sup>

While historically and actually the holiness of God is perceived first, it is completed only in the knowledge of His love. Love is not a quality or attribute of God, but actually the very nature of God. The story of revelation in Jesus Christ, the Crucified, defines realiter the meaning of the new conception: Love, which is Agape. The Agape of God creates value rather than seeking it. It is unfathomable, unmotivated, and incomprehensible.

Only where Holiness is the presupposition of God's giving Himself freely, where the Holiness of God and the judgment upon men, which is its result, are taken seriously, can we begin to see the unfathomable nature of the forgiving love of God, and thus understand His love as Agape. In the paradox of holiness and love God reveals Himself to

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<sup>3</sup> Emil Brunner, The Mediator (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1947), p. 409. Brunner emphasizes the point that the Bible is the book in which the glory of God is the first concern, and the salvation of men comes second. This emphasis, he contends, is the only safeguard against Ritschlian pragmatism, which places man's self-end in the first rank and God simply as the one who guarantees this end.



us.<sup>4</sup> God's will to Lordship points to His will to self-communication, His love in which His holiness is fulfilled; and His love points back to Lordship as its presupposition. Brunner regards the acceptance of this dualism as essential to the understanding of the revelation of God.

We cannot rightly understand the love of God-- that is to say, understand it as freely giving love--if we do not understand it as the love of Him who unconditionally wills to be Lord; nor can we rightly understand His Lordship in any ultimate sense if we do not understand it in relation to His loving Will. Both exist necessarily alongside each other, yet not foreign to one another but one in reference to the other.<sup>5</sup>

#### The Revelation in Creation

The original revelation in creation already possesses the "forth-going" character of God. In the revelation in creation God's transcendence is revealed, and a certain knowledge of his law is

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<sup>4</sup>Brunner not only demands that the Christian should not be offended by the paradox here, but asserts that Christian Theology must be understood as necessarily dialectical, since all speech about God is necessarily paradoxical. "It is only by means of the contradiction between two ideas, God and Man, grace and responsibility, holiness and love, that we can apprehend the contradictory truth that the eternal God enters time, or that sinful man is declared just. Dialectical Theology is the mode of thinking which defends this paradoxical character belonging to faith-knowledge from the paradoxical speculation of reason, and vindicates it against the other." Emil Brunner, The Word and the World (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1931), p. 6.

<sup>5</sup>Emil Brunner, The Divine-Human Encounter (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1943), p. 63. Hereafter referred to as DE.

given.<sup>6</sup> But this revelation in creation has no saving significance. For it is an integral part of the sin of man that suppresses even the knowledge of God which begins to dawn on him through this revelation. In the sinful human being this knowledge always becomes the source of the vanity of idolatry.<sup>7</sup>

The revelation in creation is important because only through it man becomes a responsible being, a being related to God, a being responsible for his sin. It is significant in its relation to the revelation of God in Christ. Only the man whose eyes have been opened to the particular historical Word of God is able to see what God shows in His Revelation in creation.

The same eternal Word of God manifests Himself in the works of creation and speaks to us in the Incarnation of the Son. But in the works of creation the revelation is impersonal and imperfect, while in

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⑥ Emil Brunner, Revelation and Reason (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1946), pp. 64 ff. Hereafter referred to as RR.

<sup>7</sup>On the basis of dialectical principles, Brunner insists that, since sin implies a contradiction, it presupposes an original revelation. (Ibid., p. 26) He claims to be in line with Reformation thought and Scripture on this point. (Romans 1:18; John 1:4, 9; Acts 14:17; 17:27) He states that Karl Barth's denial of the revelation in creation comes from his failure to make a sharp distinction between the principium cognoscendi and the principium essendi. "Because he keeps thinking that recognition of a revelation in creation must imply the recognition of a natural knowledge of God, and because he cannot abandon the axiom that there is one revelation, and only one, Barth turns the true statement, 'Only through the historical revelation of the Old and New Covenant is sinful man able to recognize the original revelation in creation, which is concealed from him by his sin,' into the erroneous statement, 'There is only one revelation, the historical one in Christ.'" (Ibid., p. 77)

the Incarnation the message is personal and perfect. In the revelation in the creation we know only the Deus absconditus, Him who gives and demands law, the wrathful One. In this sense God's work in creation may be said both to reveal and conceal Him.<sup>8</sup>

Just as man cannot arrive at a natural knowledge of God through the revelation in creation, he cannot come to this knowledge through any use of natural reason. Whether or not the proofs for the existence of God have any validity, the content of the knowledge secured by these proofs is something quite different from the knowledge of faith.<sup>9</sup> The God of proofs for the existence of God is not the living God, but an intellectual abstraction, an "Idea," an "Absolute," an entity which may be brought into agreement with the God of faith, but which is never the God of faith. Pantheism, Speculative Idealism, Deism, and all paths of rational theology never lead to the God who forgives sin and enables us to realize His Kingdom. For the same reason—also man cannot find the revelation of God in mysticism.

A thought-of God is never Lord. He does not stand above the world.<sup>10</sup> Before we can know God God must give us a revelation other than that in creation. Before we can know God He must interrupt the monologue of our thought on God, of our mystical feeling, and address us as "thou."

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<sup>8</sup>ibid., p. 170.

<sup>9</sup>ibid., p. 341.

<sup>10</sup>ibid., p. 25.

Revelation in the Christian sense always means something through an act of self-impartation from outside our range, in which God gives Himself. Before God speaks He is an absolute mystery.<sup>11</sup>

Thus with the revelation in creation, but without the personal Word of God, man remains in the state of rebellion against God. He lives in active rebellion, unbelief, ingratitude, and apostasy. As one who is deceived, he cannot perceive God's truth by his own efforts. As one in the state of sin and guilt, he cannot have communion with God.<sup>12</sup> His salvation must come from outside him.

#### Revelation as Event and Self-Disclosure

Brunner considers it of central importance that in our understanding of Revelation we recognize God as making Himself known, not in doctrine, but in historical action. The Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments must never be thought to constitute the Event of Revelation. They are human testimony to divine truth, and, as such, have only an indirect authority. The Scriptures are a literature and a history. They are important inasmuch as they bear testimony to the unique fact of Christ and the eternal purpose of God that transcends history. But they must never be confused with the Event of Divine self-communication itself.<sup>13</sup>

Historically the revelation begins with the Old Testament and the

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<sup>11</sup>ibid., p. 21.

<sup>12</sup>ib., pp. 219 ff.

<sup>13</sup>ib. Emil Brunner, The Mediator (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1947), p. 508. Hereafter referred to as M.

divine revelation to which it bears testimony.<sup>14</sup> The Old Testament revelation is different from that in the New Testament in that it is the preparatory, transient revelation, not the final one. This gives it its particular importance and its special limitations. The Old Testament message is not the same as that of the New Testament, in spite of the fact that God reveals Himself in both.<sup>15</sup>

The decisive category of all Old Testament Revelation is word and act. Both together constitute the historic revelation. This speaking and acting took place in a chain of events in which word and act were fused into an indissoluble unity. God speaks in the language of acts, which need the actual word of an interpreter, but which form its first part, its authority. And, conversely, the prophetic word creates history and works itself out in the event.

In the Old Testament the Word itself is event. It is not an idea accessible to human reason, but rather it is a miracle in itself. It is not something which is found, but something which is communicated. The Word is the teaching about God, the world, and man. It is the

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., pp. 81 ff.

<sup>15</sup>Brunner is emphatic on this point. According to Brunner, to make the Old Testament revelation and the New Testament revelation the same means to fall into the "old orthodox, intellectualistic, nonhistorical error, namely, that revelation is equated with doctrine, and that the doctrine can only be one, a mistake which has continually led to this over-simplification, and has blurred the distinctio temporum." Ibid., p. 83.

divine demand for repentance and obedience. In the early history of Israel even the Torah is interwoven with the divine working in history as a gracious revelation.<sup>16</sup> The Word is "saving" history. It is always self-presentation, a coming, and in this sense is always Messianic, even though it does not proclaim the Messiah. The explicit Messianic Prophecy grows naturally out of this word. It is concerned with the goal of the Rule of God, and of complete communion with God.

The "name" of God is the hidden center of the revelation of the Old Testament. In His word God says what he is, but in His name He discloses His secret and makes Himself truly Lord. In the "name" is the union of holiness and self-affirmation, and of self-giving and mercy. Through the name He makes it possible for men to enter into communion with God. Hence it is by the unveiling of the mystery of His Person that He establishes His Covenant, the name being actually the fundamental fact of the whole history of revelation. In His name God is more than a summary of His attributes. He is Himself.

Of particular interest in this dialectic of mystery and revelation is the idea of the "face" of God.<sup>17</sup> The fact that God unveils or hides His face is more than a general disposition; it is an act. God's "countenance" means the God who graciously unveils Himself to men and gives them a share of His Divine light and glory. The meaning oscillates

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., pp. 96 ff.

<sup>17</sup>As an example of this, Brunner cites the passage in Exodus 33, where God says: "Thou shalt see My back, but My face shall not be seen." He notes also the duality in the revelation to Isaiah. Ibid., p. 91.

between reality and a mere manner of speech. It is the beginning of the concept that reaches full, concrete reality in the New Testament.

In the Old Testament Revelation the final unity is missing. Word and event are still separate. The word points to a Person, but He Himself is not present in the self-communication. There are shadowy pictures, but the face of God, the Divine "Thou", the Incarnate Word, is only promised. All of the signs of the Old Testament still point to the decisive revelation. The New Testament Revelation brings in Jesus as the final revelation. In Jesus there is that unity with Him who speaks in the original revelation. Fulfillment takes the place of promise. The word and act become one. The Kingdom is present. Christ is revealed as the Messianic King, the fulfiller and the end of the Israelitic priesthood and sacrificial system. The sacrifice of Christ takes place as the center of all revelation. The word, the act, the name, and the face of God become a realized unity. God is given a real, personal name.

The historic revelation of Christ is completed by the apostles. With messages that point like radii toward this center from different angles, they complete the testimony to Christ.<sup>18</sup> Witnesses of the resurrection, endowed with special authority by the Holy Spirit, they set forth the message of Christ for the later witness of the Church. The act of historic revelation is completed here, where it becomes the knowledge of faith, the confession of faith, and the witness that creates faith. Here Revelation becomes the word of God in the narrower sense.

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., pp. 121 ff.

### Revelation Carried Through the Church

From this point the Church, based upon the apostolic word, becomes the bridge that carries the revelation of Christ through the centuries.<sup>19</sup> The viva vox ecclesiae makes the Word a present event in every generation. The Church forms the canon of Scripture, preserves the word of God, i.e., Christ, and hands it on in the theological work of translation in each age.

The authoritative word of the Church, that which creates new life, is that of public preaching. This word is preached wherever Christ is proclaimed in harmony with Scriptures and in accord with the original commission. The Word of Christ is present wherever a convinced Christian in spoken testimony hands on the message which he has received.<sup>20</sup> Authoritative preaching has as much right to be called the word of God as the word of the Bible.

Brunner develops the viva vox ecclesiae in sharp antithesis to fundamentalism and what he regards as a non-historical emphasis on the

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., pp. 136 ff.

<sup>20</sup>Brunner notes here that the statement, "We have no Christ apart from the Bible," is true of the Church as a whole, but only indirectly true for the person who receives his faith from another. He comments on the anti-Donatist decision of the church, stating that it was ill-advised of Melancthon to introduce the principle into the Augsburg Confession, since the legal commission of the church can never impart the authority which the Holy Spirit alone can give.



Bible.<sup>21</sup> He charges that fundamentalism deifies the "letter" of the Bible, as if the Spirit of God were imprisoned within the covers of the written word, forgetting that, insofar as the Bible is only the means of the real word of God, Jesus Christ, fundamentally it stands upon the same level as the witness of the Church. He asserts that the non-historical, abstract character of this view indicates that it lacks a sense of community.

According to Brunner, this view, introduced by orthodoxy for security and polemic reasons, is wrong also in that the doctrine of verbal inspiration cannot be regarded as an adequate formulation of the authority of the Bible. He lists a number of reasons for this:

1. The doctrine of verbal inspiration is a product of late Judaism, not of Christianity.
2. As far as the Twelve Apostles are concerned, it may be that we have no authentic writings of theirs. The Church of Christ is not based upon the written word, but upon the oral word.
3. The Apostle Paul does not claim that his letters were written by verbal inspiration, but rather permits us to see the natural human way in which they were written.
4. Human research, such as Luke mentions, does not exclude inspiration, but it does exclude automatic dictation and verbal inspiration; with its claim to auricular divine infallibility.
5. The Gospel accounts have such inconsistency and error that at the present time only an ignorant or insincere person can produce a harmony of the Gospels.

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<sup>21</sup>That is, that understanding of the Bible according to which it is regarded as a divine oracle of doctrine, as the Indian regards the Vedas, and the Mohammedan regards the Koran. Brunner views higher criticism as the savior of the true Biblical faith in making this viewpoint untenable. Emil Brunner, The Word and the World (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1931), p. 109.

6. The Synoptic, Pauline, and Johannine doctrine differ considerably from one another, and no theological art reduces them to a common denominator.<sup>22</sup>

Brunner exalts the kerygma, the Living Word of the Church, in sharp antithesis to the ecclesiastical traditionalism of the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>23</sup> Here collectivism and institutionalism take the place of the individualism of those who make the Bible alone their norm. The pope is in effect ranked above the authority of Revelation. Faith is related to the church and her teaching, and to Jesus only insofar as the church points to Him as her source of authority. Salvation is in the church's power. An authoritarian principle of the obedience of faith springs from false human objectivism. A system of ecclesiastical assurances offers itself as a secure human possession, appealing to man's desire for a feeling of security, but subverting the meaning of true Biblical faith.

Brunner finds traditional orthodoxy guilty of the same false ecclesiasticism and false faith.<sup>24</sup> Emphasizing the viva vox as of central importance rather than the gramma, Brunner considers the doctrine of the divine infallibility of Scripture texts a parallel to the infallibility of the pope. He finds the church guilty of equating a specific ecclesiastical doctrinal system with the Word of God. He marks it as wrong

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<sup>22</sup>RR, pp. 129 f. Brunner makes the point clear that the total apostolic witness has a fulness and completeness precisely in that variety by which it transcends all theological systems.

<sup>23</sup>RR, pp. 23 ff.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., pp. 171 ff.

in holding to a type of Docetism,<sup>25</sup> turning the historic revelation into a timeless system of truth.

The evil in both systems, according to Brunner, is that truth as "idea" is substituted for truth as "encounter," and God's Word is equated with doctrine. The Church must not make such a concession to Greek philosophy as to permit the history of God's dealings with men to be turned into a concept of eternal truths. The Word is efficacious, but doctrine is not. God's Word is not a system of truth, but a personal address.<sup>26</sup> The proclamation is not catechetical instruction or dogmatics. The message that seeks to initiate faith is vastly different from doctrinal presentation. Proclamation is an event of a personal character that moves out of faith into faith. Only he can speak this word who has been gripped by it and transformed by it.

Theology and doctrine have their place in the Church.<sup>27</sup> As an organ for examination and clarification, theological reflection upon the doctrinal content of Holy Scriptures is an ecclesiastical necessity. The Church should have a confession, to be used as a "password," a "banner," or a "signpost." Insofar as the confession has a proper stability in form and elasticity in interpretation, it is indeed not without purpose. But "pure doctrine" must never take the place of the kerygma. For the Word of

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<sup>25</sup>The allusion here is to the teaching of the Docetists that as the human nature of Christ was only appearance, so the human nature of the writers of Scripture was also only appearance.

<sup>26</sup>RR, p. 174.

<sup>27</sup>RR, p. 154.

God is never, as doctrine, an impersonal-objective word.

This is the corruption of faith by Orthodoxy. Faith has become a doctrine, a matter for the intellect, the play of thought, scholasticism.... The disaster is due to the fact that dogma, the mere intellectual expression of the divine truth in Christ, has itself been deified.<sup>28</sup>

Brunner marks the third deviation from the right path as mysticism, the tendency to ignore the mediacy of historic revelation. This subjectivism, springing from man's urge for freedom and spontaneity, is closely connected to the very essence of sin.<sup>29</sup> In its sole emphasis upon the Christ that is born in the heart, on the "inner light," and on the total independence of the individual in religion, it shares with rationalism the denial of the Christian faith.<sup>30</sup> For in opposition to mysticism the Christian faith is a historic faith, and so it must be understood.

The Swiss theologian finds the solution to this fatal antithesis, objectivism and subjectivism, in the dialectic of the Reformation. Here the epistemological concept was always two logical contradictories; the Word of God in the Bible and the Witness of the Holy Spirit, both of these understood as a unity. The Biblical truth is taken here as the Word of the living, present Spirit of God, through which Jesus takes possession of our hearts. There is a paradoxical unity of Word and Spirit, of historical revelation and God's contemporary presence.

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 595.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., pp. 26 f.

<sup>30</sup>Brunner notes that the subjective interpretation of the faith of the Church by Schleiermacher, when closely examined, tends to empty it of content completely. In the subjective dissolution of the Christian doctrine that followed him the concern was less and less with God's revelation in His Word and more and more with religion. (Ibid., pp. 34 ff.)

Brunner calls this the secret of the Reformation that renews Biblical faith, just as he finds the clue to the fundamentalist's and individualist's viewpoints in that each springs from a wrong emphasis against a false antithesis.

The message of the Church, as it has been stated before, is the kerygma, the proclamation, the spoken word of man. The Church also carries the Revelation of Christ through the verbum visibile in the Sacrament, in which Christ gives Himself in symbolic action through the channels of sense.<sup>31</sup> A third way of the revelation of Christ is the spontaneous expression of His mighty presence. Just as the Holy Spirit is not only Teacher, but also Doer, so divine revelation in the Church takes place where Christ through the Holy Spirit so fills and moves men and women that their "being" and "doing" become signs. Thus in a sense a simple service of love bears the stamp of revelation. The Dynamis and the Logos belong together.<sup>32</sup> In these three ways the Church confronts the world with the Revelation that has been entrusted to it and completes its witness.

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<sup>31</sup>ibid., pp. 162 f. Brunner gives a total of one paragraph to the discussion of the Sacrament, in which he attempts to clear all controversy with the remark that the presence is "in the remembrance."

<sup>32</sup>Brunner lists it as a weakness of the Church that in the struggle for purity of doctrine it sometimes forgot that the utmost purity of doctrine is of no use unless it is accompanied by the power of deeds and purity of will. He cites I Corinthians 4:20. (Ibid., p. 162.)

### Truth as Encounter

According to Brunner, an essential part of the doctrine of Revelation has still been left out at this point. As it has been suggested in connection with the Reformation dialectic of Word and Spirit, the doctrine of Revelation includes the reception of Revelation, faith.<sup>33</sup> On the basis of Colossians 1:20, Galatians 1:15, and John 14:21, Brunner insists that there is no distinction between the subjective and objective in Revelation.

It is possible to assert absolutely that the spirituality of the Christian faith is evident in the fact that in it the solar tension between the subject and object is complete; faith is at the same time the most objective thing there is, verbum externum, historic fact, and also the most subjective thing there can be: God's Spirit in us; the verbum internum and the Word as God's own voice speaking in the heart.<sup>34</sup>

Revelation actually consists in the meeting of two subjects. It is not a fact, but a fact plus illumination, that disclosure that makes the fact known.

Thus in the doctrine of Revelation a third element takes its place beside Scripture and the Church--the witness of the Holy Spirit.<sup>35</sup> Since the Christian faith is not faith in the closed Bible or in an authorita-

<sup>33</sup>Brunner uses the analogy of light to illustrate this. "The fact of illumination is an integral part of the process of revelation; without this an event is no more revelation than light is light without the seeing, illuminated eye. Revelation is a transitive event which proceeds from God and ends in man, a light ray between two poles." (*Ibid.*, pp. 32 f.)

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 283.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 164 f.

rian preconception, and since the message of the Cross can never be understood through historical argument, this faith must be given by God. The ground of authority is Jesus Christ as He speaks from the pages of Scripture through the Holy Spirit, or the testimonium spiritus sancti interni. It is the Holy Spirit that changes the Revelation of God from a perfectum to a perfectum praesens.<sup>36</sup> The Holy Spirit enables the witness of the Apostle to dawn on man as the Word of Divine Truth. An act of revelation takes place in which the Holy Spirit enables man to call Jesus Christ Lord. There is an illumination in the heart and mind. A new knowledge is given to man different from rational knowledge but not inferior.

The truth that man receives in faith is literally "truth as encounter," truth that may be said to come into existence for man only through this experience of faith. It is not verifiable or universal truth. It cannot be historically or scientifically proved or disproved. When God meets man, truth comes into being. It is truth as a happening, as the happening of the meeting between God and man, an act of God which must be received by an act of man. Man is placed at the point of decision. He can surrender or he can close his eyes in order to preserve

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<sup>36</sup> Emil Brunner, The Word and the World (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1931), p. 89.

his independence.<sup>37</sup>

### Revelation as Existential Truth

The truth that man is given through the Holy Spirit is not the truth of world facts, cosmological or historical. What man receives here is rather truth that effects a change in him. In a living encounter with God man's sinful, self-willed independence breaks down, and he opens his heart to the love of God. As the knowledge is given, simultaneously repentance and faith are effected. Man's sinful heart is vanquished by the holiness and mercy of God in Jesus Christ.

Revelation is thus God's merciful love laying hold on us realiter in the person of Christ. It is that process by which man is apprehended by God through the Holy Spirit.<sup>38</sup> Authoritarian faith has nothing whatever to do with genuine Biblical faith. It is ethically and religiously sterile.

Only where we come into contact with the self-revelation of God, with Jesus Christ, thus where faith is a personal relation to God, is the personality of the believer changed. 'Faith' of this kind alone is the concern of the Bible.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>ib., p. 35.

<sup>38</sup>ib., p. 221.

<sup>39</sup>ib., p. 176.



## CHAPTER III

### BRUNNER'S CHRISTOLOGY

In the preceding chapter the following points in Brunner's Doctrine of Revelation were discussed:

1. While there is a revelation in creation, natural man cannot perceive the truth here, and this revelation seals man in his state of sin and guilt rather than free him from it.
2. Revelation is historical action, self-disclosure and event, rather than doctrine.
3. Christian truth, unlike rational or scientific knowledge, is truth that comes into being through the Holy Spirit.
4. The dualism of holiness and love in God is the presupposition of His Revelation, which determines its content.
5. The truth that man receives in Revelation is truth that changes him, existential truth, rather than mere knowledge of facts.

In this chapter I shall discuss Brunner's Christology as related to each of these basic emphases in his thought.

#### The Absolute Barrier Broken

In accord with his insistence that the Revelation in Creation is a truth that man because of his sinfulness cannot perceive, Brunner

emphasizes the absolute transcendence of God in the Doctrine of the Logos. The Logos is unique in that it comes from beyond the borderline that separates man and God. It represents the breaking through of another dimension in history. The absolute barrier placed between man and God by the creation is broken, and God's own secret is revealed, based upon the fact that He alone is God. It is the monogenon nion.<sup>1</sup>

In connection with his assertion that the Revelation in Creation seals man in his state of sin and guilt, Brunner notes that the presupposition of the Logos is a gulf between God and man. "Sin" emphasizes the fact that this gulf is not merely physical, but absolutely personal. It is because man is alienated from the personal principle of existence that the coming of God must be through the Word. The whole event of the Incarnation is a movement toward spanning this gulf.<sup>2</sup>

It is only through this Revelation in the Logos that we can know sin. Apart from the sacrifice of Christ we have no adequate ground of knowledge for the unconditional solidarity of guilt. Our very selfishness and the fact that we are enmeshed in evil make it impossible for us to know sin. We can know the meaning of the Fall only when we have returned to our origin. For only then are we in the truth. We might have some inkling of the solidarity of guilt apart from Christ, but, as history shows, we cannot grasp it aright.

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<sup>1</sup>Karl Brunner, The Mediator (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1947), pp. 238 ff. Hereafter referred to as M.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 294 f.

Whereas previously men lived simply within history, absolutely immersed in it, we have now, so to speak, raised our heads above the mist in which history is enveloped. We see the riddle of history, of historical existence, and we see the sin of history and of historical existence. We know Adam, the 'first Adam,' only because, and insofar as, we know the 'second Adam.'<sup>3</sup>

It is precisely at that point at which we stand before the Divine Logos that we learn the secret of our personality.

The secret of our personality is that we have been created by God in His image, in His Word, and we have fallen away from God. We cannot unmask ourselves because we are not sufficiently sure. But there is one point at which we are unmasked: before Christ.<sup>4</sup>

#### The Logos as Act

As the Word of God is always given in the form of event, the Logos is a temporal event. In antithesis to the Greek concept of truth, this truth is something that happens. In contrast with immemorial, timeless religion, it is based upon the reality and concreteness of the temporal event. The Divine Logos is not an impersonal principle, but God Himself. In Christ we are addressed by the real "Thou." This makes the Word timely and personal and therefore serious.

Brunner notes that the Christian religion is based, in the final analysis, not upon a series of events, but upon one single event, the Incarnation. This is the revelation once and for all, never to be repeated. The whole meaning of Christian revelation is tied up with this one unique event. In this Christian revelation differs absolutely from all religion

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 307.

(7)<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 319.

that is universal in character. For this event is not merely the starting place for faith, but it is the very foundation upon which it is built. To be determined by this event, this Word Incarnate, is faith.<sup>5</sup>

Jesus Christ Himself is the Word. God's gift to man is not really given in words, but in manifestation. Jesus Christ, God Himself in person, is the real gift. Words are not of ultimate consequence, not even divine words, but the Word which He Himself, Christ, is. As God wills to direct not only our thinking, but ourselves, so in His Word He wills to impart Himself.<sup>6</sup>

The real nature of revelation depends upon the person of Jesus. Christ is the "window" through which we see God. The duality of His being, the "Two Natures," means simply the Eternal Word has come. The humanity means that He has really come. It means the contingency, the uniqueness of Revelation. The Divinity of the Son means that the Presence of the eternal God is in Him.

In the Logos the person and message are one. In this respect Christ is unlike the prophets, and represents a new dimension in history. The Word that became flesh is the personal word of grace, bringing with it light and life, through which we become children of God. Christ is the

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 203.

<sup>6</sup>Paul Brunner, The Divine Imperative (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1947), pp. 109 f. Hereafter referred to as DI.

Gospel.<sup>7</sup> His coming is His work. His very existence is redeeming revelation, since His person and work are an indissoluble unity.

The Gospel actually consists in this very unity of word and fact, of truth and reality, of person and cause, of truth and reality, all of which are elements which outside this revelation are everywhere separate. Christ is the Truth; but this Truth must be understood as life, vigorous, vital, and effective. This Truth is not static; it is an event, a deed. Both of these statements are equally important: that He is the Truth, and the fact that He is the Truth is itself an act.<sup>8</sup> For truth is something that "happens," which God does. In Christ truth "comes into being."

Neither the person nor the work can be relegated to a subordinate position. The statement, "Hoc est Christum cognoscere, beneficia eius cognoscere," is right, as it is directed against metaphysical perversions of the doctrine of Christ. It is wrong if interpreted as subordinating the doctrine of the Person. For the real nature of Revelation depends upon the Person of Jesus. It is necessary, on the one hand, to know Jesus as God's act, as His through whom God comes. It is necessary, on the other hand, to see the life of Jesus as His own act, since He would not be a real person if His life were not His own act.

The Incarnation and the Cross must be understood as an indissoluble unity, the first fulfilled in the second, and the second beginning in the first. The same movement is involved in both, that of

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⑦ Ibid., p. 273.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 399.

spanning the gulf of separation. The nostra assumptio becomes clear only at the cross, we behold the real nostra death as the wages of sin, as the expression of divine wrath. The cross is the total expression of the life of Jesus. All that Christ said and did must be understood sub specie crucis.<sup>9</sup>

Jesus must always be thought of as a Word-Act of God rather than one who proclaimed general truths of religion. His message is inseparable from His Person, for it is simply His action determined by His consciousness of Divine Sonship. His message is a messianic act, an act of authority in the eschatological sense, and a self-authentication of this authority. It is meaningless apart from His Person.

Brunner is ultra-precise in making the point that Jesus' teaching of forgiveness, for example, cannot be thought of as a general truth. Forgiveness is not a general truth, but a "fact" and a "happening." It is not a logical necessity for God to forgive. Jesus could speak of forgiveness only as the Messiah sent by God, as the one through whom forgiveness takes place, and as an eschatological event.

The Jew knows that a general statement: 'God forgives because He is a kindly Father,' would be a blasphemy, a mockery of the holiness of God. Thus he sees clearly that forgiveness must be a definite act, and that it cannot simply be taken for granted as a natural result of some idea of the kindness of God.<sup>10</sup>

Just as law is concrete and personal only because it is revealed, so this forgiveness is real only as it comes through a real divine

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 492.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 537.

act.<sup>11</sup> As the gulf that separates man and God is real, so forgiveness demands the removal of this obstacle. The certainty of forgiveness can only legitimately refer to a divine act of revelation, an explicit communication of this divine secret, which takes into account the inviolability of the Law as well as the logical demands of the holiness of God.

Thus the perfect revelation of forgiveness can only be such as brings out with intense emphasis that it cannot and must not be taken for granted.<sup>12</sup>

In the same manner Brunner attacks all kinds of thinking that confuse special revelation with general revelation. Again and again he states that Christian revelation is unique, absolute, decisive fact.<sup>13</sup> He regards the "mythical" element as necessary to keep us from falling into the sphere of an idealistic philosophy of history. He emphatically rejects that type of thinking which regards the unique historical event as a non-essential psychological and educational aid to faith.

Christianity will have to lose its respect for abstract intellectualism and rise above its own scientific habit of mind. The concrete personal myth cannot be transposed into an abstract myth. For the childlike myth of the Bible is the truth that has been given us by God Himself.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Brunner makes the point that since the Law is given, it is personal and existential, while the Categorical Imperative, since it oscillates between a timeless idea, is never personal. (Ibid., p. 462.) "The Law is given; it does not float in the air like a general idea above reality; it enters history as a personal reality." (Ibid., p. 554.)

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 449.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 331.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., pp. 395 f.

Brunner notes that it is only here, where eternity intersects time and we are confronted by the absolutely unique, that we have the absolutely serious decision. History becomes the sphere of decision, for here God's Word is not an ideal, but a personal address.

The Christian 'myth,' that way of thinking in which the Divine, the Eternal, the Absolute, is placed before us not as a mere object of contemplation, but in which the Absolute comes to us with a demand for decision; hence it cannot be neutral; it is no mere abstract object of contemplation, but a Person.<sup>15</sup>

#### The Logos as Perceived Above the Historical Plane

In accord with the fundamental principle in the Theology of Crisis that Christian truth is neither subjective nor objective, but comes into being at that critical point at which God meets man, Brunner is most emphatic about making the Deity of Christ a secret of faith. He argues that, while direct communication means passive transference, indirect communication allows for our activity and leaves room for a decision of faith. He states that it is central in the understanding of Christian revelation that there must be the possibility of offense. He states further that Revelation, by its very nature, must be a veiling, since

Precisely that which constitutes the fact that God really addresses us, in order to reveal Himself to us, also means that He does not speak to us directly. It is this very nearness to God—this absolute nearness to God—which at

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 384.



the same time constitutes His distance from us.<sup>16</sup>

According to Brunner, the life of Jesus with His historical teaching is not the revelation, but only the "flesh" in which the "Word" is revealed. Belief or unbelief is determined by whether we know Christ "in the flesh" or "after the flesh." It is not the story of Jesus which is the object of faith, but the revelation of God in the Person and work of the Mediator. The Revelation, the work of Revelation, is the whole, which cannot be perceived in historical terms at all.

Faith in the deity of Christ is the very opposite of theory. It is given in "the absolutely decisive moment," and it involves complete surrender. It cannot be known except through a special dispensation. In fact, it cannot really be known; it can only be believed. It is either an object of faith or a rock of offense.<sup>17</sup>

The historical elements themselves constitute a sign, a vestigium divinitatis, but they do not constitute an event. While the accounts of the life of Christ have in them suggestions<sup>18</sup> of the transcendent event of His Incarnation, these cannot be said to constitute the event, just as ringlets upon a wetary surface do not constitute the throwing of a stone, but only suggest that a stone has been cast. No Messianic

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 334.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 220.

<sup>18</sup>Among these Brunner lists His Messianic consciousness, His selflessness combined with His royal sovereign will, His absolute self-possession and mastery, and the fire of the wrathful God in Him. (Ibid., pp. 366 ff.) He notes further that the historian is confronted with certain insoluble problems in connection with the Jesus of history that constitute a kind of vestigium for him. (Ibid., p. 360.)

saying, as such, provides us with the mystery of the Person of Christ.<sup>19</sup> The absolutely decisive element, the Word which the event contains, can be known only when the historical plane is transcended.

The mystery lies in this, that, while Christ assumed human nature,<sup>20</sup> He did not assume human personality. Defining personality as "the real self," Brunner marks this as the dividing point between Christ and ourselves. While the secret of our personality, that which we can know only by faith, is that we are created in the image of God and that we have fallen away from God and the Word, the secret of His personality is that He is the Divine Person. Since Jesus really assumed human nature, the totality of human existence, the Deity really remains a secret of faith.

The life of Jesus is not a blend of natural and supernatural elements. So far as the historical and visible side is concerned it is quite natural and historical.<sup>21</sup>

Brunner takes sharp issue with those who advocate the Kenotic theory. He charges that the Kenosis doctrine wrongly stresses the question of the possibility and the laws which govern the functions of a divine-human person, instead of stressing the fact itself as it is

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<sup>19</sup>Brunner relates this with the claim of the Eschatological School that Jesus in His earthly ministry said nothing about His eternal being with the Father, and did not connect forgiveness with the problem of His death. (*Ibid.*, pp. 190 f.)

<sup>20</sup>Brunner finds an exegetical basis for his doctrine here by interpreting "born of a woman" as signifying that the life of Christ followed a human and natural course, and interpreting "born under the law" as signifying that Christ had all of the limitations of a human being and a historical personality. (Galatians 4:4) He notes the New Testament term "in the likeness of men" and "in the likeness of sinful flesh." (Philippians 2:7; Romans 8:3. He also cites Hebrews 2:17 and 4:15.) (*Ibid.*, pp. 360-364.)

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 317.

present in faith. While Brunner himself accepts and stresses the doctrine of the two natures, he emphatically rejects the communicatio idionatum as transforming the statement of faith concerning the unity of the divine with the human into a metaphysical theory.<sup>22</sup> He asserts that this view "materializes" the deity, destroys the incognito, and rules out faith.

The Scriptures do not assert that God became a man. There has never been any suggestion that a miracle of transformation took place. But what is said is this: 'the Word became flesh.' The divine personal authority, that in which God expresses Himself and Himself addresses us: all this, in a way beyond all understanding, is present in human personal life.<sup>23</sup>

For the same reason Brunner insists that the Gospels must be written by faith for faith. He regards it as a denial of the Biblical kerygmatic view of the aim of the Gospels that they are regarded as historical "reports," insisting that

The confusion of the Gospel of John with an historical description has done a great deal to obscure the true humanity of Jesus Christ by His true deity.<sup>24</sup>

Beneath this objection, of course, is Brunner's fear that the teaching of the deity as a secret of faith is undermined when the Fourth Gospel is regarded as historical description. At the same time he suggests

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<sup>22</sup>Brunner states: "I believe I am presenting the meaning of the Reformed doctrine: insofar as Jesus can be known historically, in so far as he belongs to the human sphere, He is man." (Ibid., p. 343, footnote.)

11 <sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 322.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 341.

that the Synoptics be cleared of "mythological catastrophic events."<sup>25</sup>

Brumer's real antithesis here is against historical positivism, which in his opinion has obscured the meaning of the Christian witness just as disastrously as non-historical idealism. He makes much of the point that the event of Revelation must always be thought of as a reality in a category by itself rather than subordinated to a universal order. Defining the "Jesus of history" as Jesus as known by scientific and historical criticism, he makes the a priori assumption that the Jesus of history is not the Christ of faith.

For the historical student, for the historian and biographer, He remains the Rabbi Jesus of Nazareth, or the religious genius. This is the Christ 'after the flesh,' and to know Christ in this way is to know Christ 'after the flesh,' even when such knowledge consists in the most profound and penetrating understanding of the personality of Jesus. But to know the 'Christ come in the flesh' is to 'know him according to the Spirit'; this is the knowledge of faith, the knowledge of the eternal Son of God as the 'Word made flesh.'<sup>26</sup>

In the same fashion the crucifixion is a supra-historical event. It is not a historical point in terms of history in its continuity and gradations, and cannot be subordinated to a universal order. It is a unique element in history, capable neither of extension nor repetition, since it involves the eternal which is above and beyond history.<sup>27</sup> It belongs to the same "dimension" to which the Creation, the Fall, and the

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<sup>12</sup><sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 424, footnote.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 346.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 507.

Resurrection belong.

It would be absurd to say: in the year 30 the Atonement of the world took place. But we can say: this event, which those who know history tell us probably took place about the year 30, is the same as that which we know through faith as the Divine Act of Atonement.<sup>28</sup>

It is by this incognito idea that Brunner explains the transition between the teaching of Jesus, which contains no Christology and the teaching of the church, which is Christological through and through. The point of transition is the Resurrection.<sup>29</sup> Beyond this point the Apostles are no longer interested in the historical photograph of Christ. They bear witness to the whole revelation, including the Word in the event. The Apostles, with the Prophets, give us the true Christ.<sup>30</sup>

The Resurrection, as the miracles performed by Christ,<sup>31</sup> is not to be thought of as a "proof" for the faith. Easter is not "an historical event" which can be reported. The event of Easter is addressed to faith, and thus allows for no objectivity. The Apostles never base the certainty of the Resurrection upon an empty grave, and all of the witnesses of the Resurrection were disciples or believers.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 504.

<sup>29</sup> That is, the whole conflict between the "religion about Jesus" school and the "religion of Jesus" school should be resolved here. Knowing the "Word" which the event contained, the Apostles simply proclaimed this. The New Testament student who regards Jesus simply as one who proclaimed general truths of religion is wilfully blind.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 431.

<sup>31</sup> Brunner states that in his earthly ministry Jesus proved His authority, and that the primitive Christian tradition was absolutely right in laying so much stress on the actual miracles of Jesus, although the church was not free from the thirst for the marvelous against which Jesus warned His disciples. (Ibid., p. 558.)

The Resurrection must not be made a proof for faith. It is certainly a 'proof' to the faith that already exists, but it is no proof for one who is not already convinced, and faith is not based upon it. For faith is based on nothing but the witness of Christ, whom faith knows to be the Word of God.<sup>32</sup>

#### The Dualism of Holiness and Love in the Cross

Bruner regards the Cross as that event in which God makes known His holiness and love simultaneously, in an absolute manner. He stresses the dualism of inflexible righteousness and transcendent love that is brought into focus here, and argues that this dualism cannot be resolved or changed into one synthetic conception without the loss of the seriousness of the Biblical knowledge of God. He develops his thought on the Atonement in antithesis to that modern thought in which God's holiness is swallowed up in His love, and the ideas of love and forgiveness are dealt with without the necessary correlative ideas of judgment and holiness.

The truth that God is free, personal will is not more important than the truth that God is unchangeable, inviolable will. The holy will of law is the aspect of Divine Majesty that is turned toward us and that separates God from us. It cannot be explained away, for, connected with the glory of God, it is the basis for the rule of law as a whole.

God cannot cease for a moment to maintain His purpose unconditionally; if he were to cease to will for one instant, the universe would collapse; unimaginable chaos would reign. The world is based upon the fact that this will, this holy, personal will, cannot be altered. The glory of God is the

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 579.

unconditioned, supreme and, because it underlies all purpose of every kind.<sup>33</sup>

Thus Brunner insists that, as truly as sin is real and cannot be explained away, God's anger is real and cannot be explained away.

Only when man recognizes the reality of wrath does he take guilt seriously. Only then does he realize the personal character of God. The rejection of the wrath of God--as anthropopathic--is the beginning of the Pantheistic disintegration of the Christian idea of God.<sup>34</sup>

But this wrath is not the essential reality of God; for in Himself God is love. And this is the essential mystery of Divine love--its breaking through wrath. The revelation of the divine mystery of love in the reality of wrath is the propitiation.

Brunner considers it a basic presupposition to the understanding of the atonement that, where a "democratic" idea of God is entertained, there can be no intelligent understanding of the meaning of the Cross. Stating that we can understand the nostra assumpsit only in view of the inescapable punishment of guilt, Brunner presses the New Testament economical-legal image,<sup>35</sup> with the implication that sin implies a debt which man cannot pay. God here is bound by His own law, for, even in the sovereign transcending of the law--in forgiveness--He intensifies the validity of the law as absolute.

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 461.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 445.

<sup>35</sup>Brunner notes that forensic expressions play an important part in the language of Scripture, and that the whole idea of the Kingdom of God is a parable drawn from the law of the State. He states that Ritchl's dropping of the conception of divine righteousness as a "blend of the ethico-religious and the legal habit of thought" simply cannot be brought into harmony with the Bible. (Ibid., p. 466.)

Nothing is easier than to caricature the statements of the Bible and of Christianity about the penal sufferings of Christ in such a way that behind these 'theories' we seem to perceive some bloodthirsty Oriental monarch, or some primitive Eastern Divinity, with its whims or caprices... But the Sovereignty of God means the holiness of God, the fact that God is God... His holiness and love are equally infinite.<sup>36</sup>

The freely personal will of God is operative at the Cross; yet, because God is holy, something must actually take place in order that the past may be completely obliterated. Sin, in order to be known, must have its effect. Something must happen at the Cross which is the equivalent of a judgment of divine wrath.<sup>37</sup> Man must know that the forgiveness of sin cannot be achieved for nothing.

According to Brunner, it is only in the penal theory of the atonement that we can grasp fully the idea of the love of God.<sup>38</sup> Divine love

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 470. Brunner deploras the thinking of those who recognize only two alternatives—the pagan doctrine of the changing mind of God and the subjectivistic theory of the atonement, stating that the whole classical Christian doctrine, recognizing the wrath of God and the Divine love which blots this out, denies this alternative. (Ibid., p. 470, footnote.)

<sup>37</sup>Brunner, of course, recognizes the fact that while each theory of the atonement throws fresh light upon it, no single one is sufficiently by itself or in any way adequate, stating that the orthodox and their "liberal" critics have not understood this. (Ibid., p. 455, footnote.)

(13) <sup>38</sup>Brunner regards Anselm, because of his emphasis on this, as one who gave a "profound and masterly example of the ideas of the New Testament." (Ibid., p. 458.)



can only be known by resistance that it overcomes. The reality of the sacrifice reveals what it means to say that God is Love. Here we can see that forgiveness "cost" God something, that forgiveness is the very opposite of something that can be taken for granted.<sup>39</sup> It is the Cross, more than anything else, that differentiates Scriptural revelation from all other forms of religion, and from Idealism of every kind.

Only the God who loves us in spite of everything is the God of Love. Because Mysticism and Rationalism do not know this, they do not know the God of Love, although they may use this expression. That the Son of God comes through the fiery barrier of the divine wrath; this is the compassion of God, which the Gospel, and it alone, can make known to us.<sup>40</sup>

Brunner emphasizes the fact that the Cross is a real, vicarious action, in which God identifies Himself with the human race and gives Himself up wholly.<sup>41</sup> Christ acts in the realization of the solidarity of humanity. His identity with humanity rises to its greatest heights where he gives Himself to the real endurance of divine judgment and divine wrath. His death is a sacrifice offered by Himself, in the knowledge that His passion and His death are the Ultimate Act.<sup>42</sup> Here is the

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<sup>39</sup> Brunner states that this forgiveness is not as "cheap" as the mystical way, or the way of the Enlightenment by which "God forgives everyone who repents," but that it is also something which cannot be dismissed with a "wave of the hand." (Ibid., pp. 472 f.)

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 487.

<sup>41</sup> In this Brunner regards Anselm as wrong, that he conceives the Cross as an objective-impersonal substitutionary transaction, rather than a personal act.

(14) <sup>42</sup> Ibid., pp. 495 ff.

ultimate in Divine self-giving.<sup>43</sup>

On the actual sacrifice Brunner says little. The passion is vicarious through personal solidarity, the union which subsists between the one who suffers and the one for whom he suffers. Only man can suffer from his connection with God, and only on this account can the sacrifice have meaning. The "human," in the deepest sense of the word, constitutes the "material" for the sacrifice. But this can only be achieved by God Himself, and thus the person in human nature really suffers must be the Divine Person. It is wholly impossible to separate the human and divine vicarious elements from each other. This indissoluble unity in the double vicarious offering is the mystery of the revelation in Christ.<sup>44</sup>

Brunner summarizes the paradoxical dualism in the revelation of the Cross in the words:

It is precisely in His revelation that the God of the Bible is incomprehensible, because in His nearness He reveals His distance, in His mercy His holiness, in His grace His judgment, in His personalith His absoluteness; because in His revelation His glory and the salvation of man, His own will and His love for man, His majesty and His "homeliness" cannot be separated from one another. It is thus that He

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<sup>43</sup>Brunner regards it as central in the right understanding of the atonement that God gives but does not receive. He deplores the thinking of those who recognize only two alternatives—the pagan doctrine of the changing mind of God, and the subjectivistic theory of the atonement—stating that the whole classical Christian doctrine, recognizing the wrath of God and the divine love that blots this out, denies this alternative. (Ibid., p. 470, footnote.)

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 501.

is God, the One who comes, the One who comes to us in reality: who comes in the likeness of sinful flesh, the One who Himself pays the price, Himself bears the penalty, Himself overcomes all that separates us from Him--really overcomes it.<sup>45</sup>

#### The Knowledge of the Logos as Existential Truth

The message of the Cross is, first of all, a summons to die. While man tries to cast aside such humbling words as "guilt," "expiation," and "forgiveness," the Revelation of the Cross demands that he take upon himself as guilt that which he cannot repair. It brings the seriousness of guilt to a head, putting man under the ultimate negation of seeing himself "crucified with Christ," coming under divine judgment. In this sense Brunner refers to it as the passion, suffering and death of the autonomous ego.<sup>46</sup> While the mystical process of dying to self is merely a form of self-affirmation, the sense of guilt produced by this incomprehensible sacrifice really bestows the gift of a "broken and contrite heart."

But at the same time that the Cross judges and slays, it resurrects and liberates. Man has a new knowledge of truth and untruth, by which his existence as a whole is turned about. The new knowledge produces a new being, the true being of man.<sup>47</sup> Man is restored to his primal origin, and there is a renewal of human existence. The New Man is opposed to the Old Man in blunt contradiction.

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<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 473.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>47</sup>Eril Brunner, The Word and the World (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1931), p. 71.

God's unconditional love conquers the distrustful, self-centered heart of man, and the negative character of the sense of creaturoliness passes away. There is a self-abdication, a renunciation of independence, and a recognition of the sovereignty of God. Man renounces all self-security, and finds his security in God. He gives up that mistrust of God that springs from fear and arrogance. He no longer feels that God is depriving him of something, but seeks fulness of life in God.<sup>48</sup>

Brunner emphasizes the point that faith is, above all, an overthrow of the government of man.<sup>49</sup> The Word of God must effect this overthrow, because it is the absolute demand of the Lord Himself. Rather than mere knowledge, the Revelation is something that touches the rex cordis, and is the uprush of life itself. It does not touch the intellect alone, but seizes the core of the personality.

Hence there is no 'Light' which is not also 'Life,' no faith which does not bring obedience in its train, and trust, and godly fear, no knowledge or discernment which does not involve personal decision as well. Where this does not take place, there must be some radical misunderstanding of the message of Christ, and therefore no right faith.<sup>50</sup>

From this point Brunner moves to a deadly emphasis on Law. Faith is knowing God's will in its salutary moral earnestness. The Gospel is the exposition of the First Commandment. There is no other Gospel

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<sup>48</sup> Emil Brunner, Man in Revolt (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1947), pp. 480 f.

<sup>49</sup> Id., pp. 87 ff.

<sup>50</sup> Id., p. 203.

than this "Law" itself.

It is a terrible misunderstanding, the worst, the most subtle ever perpetrated in the name of God, if we think everything does not depend upon this obedience, if we hold that through faith in the Mediator, in justification, this obedience has become either superfluous or a secondary matter. Faith is obedience—nothing else—literally nothing else at all.<sup>51</sup>

In accord with his position on faith as existential experience, Brunner warns against the use of such terms as "appropriation of salvation," which falsely materialize the concept of salvation. He stresses the point that, while doctrine and acceptance of doctrine are merely human things, salvation is a mystery of God, the paradoxical combination of the subjective and objective, of the historical and the present. Faith is an entrance into the movement of God in Christ.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 592.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., p. 528.

## CHAPTER IV

### CRITICAL SYNTHESIS AND CRITIQUE

The substance of the first chapters can be summarized in the following points:

1. While there is divine revelation in the Works of Creation, man by nature turns this knowledge of God into idolatry.

2. The Logos therefore presupposes both the epistemological transcendence of God and the fundamental discontinuity of sin between God and man. It is only here, furthermore, that man really gains a knowledge of the reality of sin, being enabled to know the "first Adam" through the "second Adam."

3. Revelation is divine self-communication through the language of acts. The Scriptures constitute a literature pointing to the Supreme Event, the Revelation in man, the coming of the Incarnate Logos.

4. The kerygma is proclaimed by the Church as faith-awakening address. It is "truth as encounter," not historically verifiable, and received existentially only through the Witness of the Spirit. There is room for decision here and an offense to autonomous man.

5. In order to preserve this concept of "truth as encounter." Verbal Inspiration must be discarded, since Verbal Inspiration turns Christian Revelation into a timeless system of truth.

6. For the same reason the deity of Christ must be understood as a "secret of faith," and the event of the Cross must be understood

as that which can be known only when the historical plane has been transcended. The miraculous elements in the Synoptics must be sifted; the Gospel of John must not be read as history; and the Parthenogenesis must be rejected.

7. The Penal Theory of the Atonement should be stressed, since here the holiness of God, the seriousness of sin, and the transcendent love of God come into fullest perspective.

8. In the Penal Theory of the Atonement the Word of God becomes existential truth. As the objectivity of guilt is revealed, there takes place in man the suffering and death of the autonomous ego, and in the love revealed here man receives a renewal of his existence in love, trust, and absolute obedience.

#### The Christological Problem

Brunner's demand that Christian truth can be known only through a special dispensation of the Spirit is the first determining factor in the formulation of his Christology. Because of this he demands a sharp separation between the "historical" and "pneumatic" elements. The incognito of Christ must be absolute. Even in this most personal revelation, God must be, from the historical viewpoint, the absolutely transcendent and hidden. Faith can only exist where there is nothing to be seen. The mystery of Christ's person must be credible only to faith.

This Divine Advent in the Mediator is no visibility.  
 ....no given fact, but, as the mystery of His existence,  
 credible only to faith, it is at the same time the  
 highest tension, because it is the most complete veiling.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Emil Brunner, The Mediator (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1947), p. 340. Hereafter referred to as H.

Brunner therefore demands that the historical accounts be freed of all that tends to make them historically perceptible or verifiable. The knowledge of faith must be different from rational or empirical knowledge. Faith must not rely on rational props; for faith only exists where there is nothing to be seen. A Christology, to be adequate, must take this into account, that

In the sphere of faith...there is no security; here there are no sensible or mental points of support; here is no calming of the mind; nor any self-assurance; faith is a venture, it means hanging on a thread, not standing on solid ground.<sup>2</sup>

The second determining principle in Brunner's Christology is the Calvinistic axiom, finitum infiniti non capax est. Stating that the Lutheran doctrine of the communicatio idiomatum leads to the intellectualization of the Christian faith, Brunner insists that faith looks to the "mystery" of the Incarnation, and does not dwell on doubtful disputations about the manner. Christ had two natures: the "empirical ego," that which is discernible historically; and a "transcendent ego," that which is a secret of faith. According to the former He is, in the most complete sense, a historical personality; according to the latter he addresses us with personal divine authority.<sup>3</sup> At the cost of those portions of the New Testament that reflect a high Christology,<sup>4</sup> the New

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 338.

<sup>3</sup>Refer back to pages 31-2.

<sup>4</sup>Colossians 2:9; Hebrews 2:14; John 1:14; 2:11; 17:15; and other passages.



Testament Christology is simplified. Higher criticism comes to the aid of Brunner in freeing him from some of Calvin's difficulties.<sup>5</sup>

Brunner's first object of attack at this point is the "Byzantine" Christ, the Christ who can be known through direct cognition. Brunner demands the dismissal of the Christ whose deity is a self-obvious historical truth. He demands that the Church free herself from that which Kierkegaard described as

The perpetual Sunday twaddle about Christianity's glorious and priceless truths....(in which) the sign of offense and the object of faith has become the most romantic of all fabulous figures...(so that) one does not know what it is to be offended, still less what it is to worship.<sup>6</sup>

In antithesis to the "Jesus of history" school, Brunner shifts the emphasis from the Jesus of history to the Christ of faith. Noting, parenthetically, that the historical evidence is so uncertain that on its basis it is impossible even to certify absolutely that there was a historical Jesus, and insisting that a fluctuating historical foundation is no basis for faith, Brunner demands that the "Jesus of history" be dismissed as a "corpse." Brunner's aim, to put it in Schweitzer's words, is to put an end to the type of scholar who paints the picture of Jesus

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<sup>5</sup>Calvin interpreted "closed doors" (John 20:19) as "open doors," and attributed Christ's vanishing (Luke 24:31) as due to the faulty vision of Christ's disciples. With the aid of a higher critical theory, Brunner goes far beyond this in "de-mythologizing." Calvin would never have dared to attack the Doctrine of the Virgin Birth, though he must have sensed that it is somewhat embarrassing to one who holds to a deistic Christology. Cf. Francis Pieper, Christian Dogmatics, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1951), II, 276.

(16)<sup>6</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, Training in Christianity (London: Princeton University Press, 1944), p. 38.

by the petty standard of modern man, at variance with himself... They keep continually forging new portraits of the historical Jesus, and think they have accomplished something great when they have drawn an Oml of astonishment, such as crowds in a great city exit on catching a sight of a new advertisement in colored lights.<sup>7</sup>

In developing these two antitheses, Brunner certainly performs a service for the church. But Brunner goes beyond this. Feeling certain that in the principle of incognito he has discovered the key to the understanding of the New Testament, he is determined to fit this into every lock, and to reconstruct the Gospels accordingly. (Having defined faith as "hanging on a thread," he is determined to define the "thickness" of this thread.<sup>8</sup>) The miraculous elements that he regards as superfluous he calls "proofs" of the Deity of Christ; the miraculous elements that he regards as necessary he calls necessary "signs."

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<sup>7</sup> Albert Schweitzer, The Quest for the Historical Jesus (London: A. C. Black Publishers, 1926), p. 311.

<sup>8</sup> At this point Brunner has supposedly already dismissed the "Jesus of history," Jesus as He can be known by a cold, detached scientific criticism. It has been established that scientific criticism ner se is so uncertain that it cannot even establish adequately whether there was a historical Jesus. (II, p. 186.) and that the Gospels must be understood as kerygmatic. Yet, at this point Brunner "utilizes" several tenets of the Eschatological School, since they reinforce his principle of the incognito. Brunner seems to be guilty here of that of which he accuses Bultmann, of claiming to be "scientific" and "objective" in the use of the Gospels, while merely grasping for support for certain subjective judgments. While Brunner suggests giving up the Parthenogenesis, and sifting the Gospels of the mythological-catastrophic elements, Bultmann goes beyond him, asserting: "The resurrection, of course, simply cannot be a visible fact in the realm of human history." Brunner might be correct in asserting that there is a qualitative difference between his higher criticism and that of Bultmann, but he is certainly not free enough from subjectivism to "cast the first stone." Cfr. Rudolf Bultmann, The Theology of the New Testament, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), I, 295.

As a doctrine somewhat embarrassing to the Calvinistic Christology,<sup>9</sup> and as a "proof" of the Deity, he discards the Parthenogenesis.<sup>10</sup> For Brunner this is the kind of "guarantee" of the Deity that rules out faith, and a violation of the principle that Jesus was in every sense a historical personality. Brunner overlooks the fact that there is very little support for this view on the basis of textual or higher criticism.<sup>11</sup> He over-

<sup>9</sup>At least this is true, that while the doctrine of the Virgin Birth stands in close connection with the Lutheran doctrine of the Real Presence in the Lord's Supper, the doctrine is embarrassing to the Calvinistic Christology of separation. The doctrine seems to imply that Christ "took part in human flesh" in a more real way than Brunner will admit. (Hebrews 2:14)

<sup>10</sup>Brunner takes offense at the Parthenogenesis, first of all, because it is "an attempt to explain the miracle of the Incarnation," while the believer should rather stand amazed at the Fact itself. It might be stated, nevertheless, that Brunner would not be as offended by it as he is if he had a more serious regard for the doctrine of the Incarnation in the flesh. Cf. M, pp. 325 f.

<sup>11</sup>The narratives of the Birth of Jesus originated in Jewish-Christian circles, and the opportunity was not lacking to share in the knowledge of Mary, the Mother of Jesus. It is extremely unlikely, on the basis of textual criticism, that the narratives of Matthew and Luke could have been interpolations. The Gospel of Luke was written while Paul was alive, and there is internal evidence that he was acquainted with the Gospel of Luke. The nature of his missionary writing can easily explain his silence on the Virgin Birth. The Fourth Gospel contains at least a covert allusion, if not a direct reference, to the Virgin Birth. Cf. Alan Richardson, A Theological Word Book of the Bible (New York: MacMillan, 1951); Richard J. Cooke, Did Paul Know of the Virgin Birth? (New York: MacMillan, 1926); Edwin Hoskyns, The Fourth Gospel (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1947).

strains here the "elasticity" of the greatest creed of Christendom. He views as irrelevant the fact that the best New Testament theologians do not regard this as a "proof," but as a "sign" of the Deity.<sup>12</sup> He exalts his incognito principles to a position higher than the canon, the creeds, the patristics, and the councils of the Church.

In other respects, too, Brunner follows poor guides in Biblical criticism, and falls into some rather arbitrary thinking. In his denial of Jesus' declaration of his pre-existence with the Father, as recorded in the Fourth Gospel, for example, both of these traits are obvious. Brunner errs, first of all, in failing to consider the context in which this was spoken - that is, the lowliness of the person of Jesus and the rock of offense created by this lowliness.<sup>13</sup> Brunner errs, in the second place, in clinging to a prejudice against the Fourth Gospel that has been discarded by the best of New Testament critics today.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>The majority of scholars today who hold to the Virgin Birth, defend it not as a "proof" but as a "sign" of divinity, stating that it is not the Virgin Birth that makes the stature of Christ credible, but the stature of Christ that makes the Virgin Birth credible.

<sup>13</sup>This is Kierkegaard's view. Brunner states that, while Kierkegaard's principles of the incognito are correct, Kierkegaard falls into some rather "arbitrary" reasoning by using the Fourth Gospel as a historical source. But Kierkegaard's thinking is really sound here, and Brunner is the one who is "arbitrary." Cf. *M.*, p. 430 (footnote), and Kierkegaard, *op. cit.*, pp. 107 ff.

<sup>14</sup>A. M. Hunter notes that in recent years many scholars have come to the conclusion that the Fourth Gospel contains a genuine aspect of Jesus' teaching which has not found a place in the Synoptics. Hunter quotes T. W. Manson as summing up the whole tendency in the words: "It is no longer possible to say, 'If the Fourth Gospel contradicts the synoptics, so much the worse for the Fourth Gospel.'" Cf. Archibald N. Hunter, Introduction to the New Testament, 1900-1950 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1951), p. 134.

The basic weakness in Brunner's Christology lies in its general tendency to minimize the real Incarnation. In his lengthy discussion about the mystery of the Word made flesh, Brunner's total interest is in the Word, and he is almost completely disinterested in the flesh. With all of his emphasis upon the incursion of the Divine into human life, Brunner can hardly be said to have a theology of the Incarnation. (There is a keen discernment in D. M. Baillie's remark that Brunner's theology should be given the title "Logothelism." The ultimate implication of this trait in Brunner is clear:

If revelation is by the Word alone, then Christ lived for nothing, and the Word was made flesh in vain.<sup>15</sup>

By a fortunate inconsistency, Brunner does not carry it this far.)

This tendency in Brunner is brought on not so much by incognito principle as by the misplaced Reformed emphasis on the absolute separation between the finite creature and the transcendent God. No one can adequately deal with the New Testament Christology without taking into account that which is central in the New Testament mystery of the Incarnation: infinitum finiti capax est. This does not mean that one must reduce the personalistic into impersonal physical and biological categories. It does mean that one must catch the full paradox of the theanthropic person, of whom nothing said can be too high and nothing too low, who is the "crucified and hidden" God, and yet the One in whom dwelleth all the fullness

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<sup>15</sup>D. M. Baillie, God Was in Christ (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948), p. 89.

of the Godhead. To Luther must be given the credit for grasping the full humanity of Christ. While Brunner's Christology is simpler than the Lutheran Christology, and more easily popularized, it is an over-simplification.

In answer to Brunner's charge that Lutheran Theology has perverted its Christology into a metaphysical theory, it must be noted that Brunner's Christology is based upon a metaphysical presupposition—finitum infiniti non capax est. It must be noted further that Luther's aim was not to develop an "intellectualized" Christology,<sup>16</sup> but simply to grasp the New Testament mystery - God really taking part in flesh and blood. The two natures in Brunner's Christ seem to appear—as Brunner claims the three persons of the Trinity seem to appear in inadequate formulations of the Trinitarian doctrine—"alongside each other." Luther simply aims to preserve the unity of the Person. While Brunner gets so wrapped up in his terminology about the Transcendent nature of the Logos that he misses this, Luther grasps the ~~central New Testament~~ the central New Testament emphasis—merciful condescension of God.

#### The Atonement

Brunner has done a service for the Christian Church laying down a polemic against the "watered-down" Christianity that loses the sense of mystery and proclaims the forgiveness of sins as a simple truism. Perhaps no one before Brunner, except Barth, has delivered such a forceful polemic

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<sup>16</sup>Refer back to pages 31-2.

against that kind of flippancy (which echoes Heine's words: "God will forgive. That is His business."<sup>17</sup>) The subjective doctrine of the Atonement, which is rooted in Abelard and the Socinians, and reaches its culmination in Schleiermacher and Ritschl, is deprived of the prerogative of replacing or overthrowing the objective doctrine.

In his emphasis on the continuity of the self-movement of God in the Incarnation and Atonement, and in the emphasis upon the personal rather than the objective nature of the Act of the Cross, Brunner frees the Latin Theory of the Atonement of its two basic weaknesses. At the same time he introduces those elements which, according to Aulen, cannot be synthesized with this view: the elements of conflict and victory in the Classic View of the Atonement.<sup>18</sup> He recaptures the Lutheran emphasis on the justitia extra nos et aliena nobis. He formulates a theory of the Atonement that takes into account the fact that God is here dealing with men who neither realize nor mourn their sin, and must be led into a realization of its gravity.

Brunner differs from Luther in his emphasis on Anselm's nihil rationalibus over Luther's contra legem. While Brunner states that God's real nature is love, his emphasis in his treatment of the Atonement is so centered in Law that the love seems obscured, or put in a secondary position. Luther more habitually regarded Law as a tyrant from which man is

<sup>17</sup>Refer back to pages 35-6.

<sup>18</sup>Brunner speaks of the Atonement of Christ, at least parenthetically, as a heavenly offensive against the historical sphere dominated by the "Prince of this World," and thus a battle including the elements of conflict and victory. Cf. H. p. 511.

to be delivered. As Aulen points out, Luther was sure that

God's work in Christ of atonement, forgiveness, and justification bears the signature contra rationem at legem. In his view, Law and Reason belong inseparably together; they represent the way of the natural man, not God's way manifested in Christ.<sup>19</sup>

(Luther, if he were living today, would also be offended by Brunner's complete circumscription of the aim and thanatos concepts, which are so interwoven in the web and woof of all New Testament thinking. While Brunner substitutes such phrases as "the cup of alienation from God" and "the idea of an equivalent" to convey the sacrificial, expiatory nature of Christ's death, Brunner fails to convey another aspect of the aim,<sup>20</sup> that it represents an outpouring of life. Thus the culminating point is also forgotten: the sharing in this life in a common meal.)

It is interesting to note that in the four books on Revelation from which this thesis is drawn, there are only a few brief allusions to the sacrament. It is hard to understand that a man who seeks to recover the early New Testament kerygma can overlook the towering importance of the Sacrament which goes back even to the very earliest documents of Christendom. This deprecation of the Sacramental method of revelation is a result not only of the divisive nature of Brunner's Christology, and of his abridgement of the Scriptural understanding of the Atonement, but is a result also of the absolute Objectivism-Subjectivism antithesis that he

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<sup>19</sup>Gustav Aulen, Christus Victor (London: Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge, 1950), p. 137.

<sup>20</sup>Even outside of the Epistle to the Hebrews, which speaks of "blood" and sacrifice from beginning to end, there are, in Eucharistic and non-Eucharistic passages, nineteen clear references to the "blood" of Christ.



sets up.<sup>21</sup>

### Static and Dynamic Revelation

Brunner's Theology of Crisis tends to make experience the final reference point in the doctrine of Revelation. The characteristic expression is, "When God meets man, truth comes into being." The answer to religious doubt is to go back to an experience.<sup>22</sup> Any notion of clinging to words or a word of Scripture, is regarded as an indication of the idolatry of a heteronomous principle. The Sacrament is hardly more than a means of recalling an experience. Any thought of the presence of the body and blood in the Sacrament is looked upon as "materialism."<sup>23</sup> (An absolute antithesis is set up between "static" and "dynamic" revelation.)

Luther's doctrine of the Word, on the other hand, transcends this antithesis. Luther, as Brunner, has an existential understanding of the Word. But in the context of the Lutheran understanding of the means of grace, the existential approach to the word takes on a different form. Luther's characteristic expression is, "God's Word is God's Word, to be sure. . . (but) it must strike me!"<sup>24</sup> For Luther Word is not only Deus loquens, but also Deus loctus. Outside of man's experience it is a "given." While the Word becomes man's possession only by that experience

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<sup>21</sup>Refer back to page 16.

<sup>22</sup>ibid. p. 207.

<sup>23</sup>Refer back to page 15.

<sup>24</sup>ibid. XXIV, 12-13, quoted by Jaroslav Pelikan, From Luther to Kierkegaard (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), p. 18.

in which the words that bring him Christ are authenticated by the Holy Spirit, man henceforth exalts these words over his subjectivity and finds in them the strength to overcome doubt. Every word of Scripture that assures him of the redemptive work of Christ and of the forgiveness of sin is a word to which he can cling. The Christian finds in the Sacrament an opportunity to "lay hold" of the Word of God.<sup>25</sup> The "living" Word is also the "abiding" Word.

Students of Luther who hold to a static conception of Revelation in antithesis to a dynamic conception of Revelation, cannot overlook the fact that a biblicistic view of Revelation makes Luther's theology unintelligible at many points. Emil Brunner, who holds to a dynamic conception of revelation in antithesis to a static conception of revelation, cannot help but be embarrassed frequently by passages of Luther in which he seems to hold, with certain reservations, to a belief in the verbal in-

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<sup>25</sup>Luther frequently talked of winning battles over doubt by clinging to "one little word" of Scripture that brought him Christ. He continually sought to lay hold on this "objective" Word rather than merely to strengthen his own faith by recalling an experience. This was not the result of a desire for fleshly pacuritas, but the result of a Scriptural understanding of the means of grace. Cf. Roland H. Bainton, Here I Stand (New York: Abington-Cokesbury Press, 1950), pp. 368-372.

piration of Scripture.<sup>26</sup> Luther did not hold to the doctrine of inspiration in such a manner as to make it the basic premise of Christian assurance, or in such manner as to undermine the central nature of Christian Theology as the Theologic-Gracis. There are a host of passages in which Luther states that, just as the eye must pierce through the Jesus of Nazareth to lay hold of the Theanthropic person, so the eye of faith must pierce through the historical documents to find the Word. But Luther did hold a belief in the "inspired words" of Scripture, and this embarrasses anyone who regards static and dynamic revelation as absolutely antithetical, and fails to realize that Scripture transcends this antithesis.

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<sup>26</sup>Brunner errs both in equating verbal inspiration with mechanical dictation and in regarding error-ridden Scriptures as a necessary concomitant of a dynamic conception of revelation. While Luther spoke much of the "inspired words" of Scripture, he recognized the dynamic relation between the Divine and the human in the writing of the Scriptures, and he certainly did not make the doctrine of inspiration the basic premise of the Christian assurance. The question of whether, or to what extent, the Scriptures are inerrant in their cosmology and in non-religious matters, is beyond the scope of this thesis. Let it suffice to recognize the fact that there is a difference between Luther's understanding of the Word and that of the "orthodoxists" who followed him, that it was not without certain reservations that Luther spoke of all the Bible being inspired, and that new difficulties in defending verbal inspiration have arisen since Luther's time. But let it be added that the most powerful attack upon the Doctrine of Verbal Inspiration would have to come from one who is free from Brunner's subjectivism. Cf. K. Ren, Luther and the Scriptures (Columbus, Ohio: Wartburg Press, 1943); Philip S. Watson, Let God Be God (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1950).

### Conclusion

To be sure, Brunner recaptures many of Luther's emphases. His doctrine of the revelation in creation is essentially that of Luther.<sup>27</sup> In his understanding of Revelation as historical action made revelatory through the Holy Spirit, and in his emphasis on the personal, contemporary, and dynamic nature of the Word, Brunner draws much on Luther.

But in his divisive Christology, in his abridgement of the Scriptural doctrine of the Atonement, and in his manner of setting up an antithesis between the "living" and "abiding" Word, he breaks with Luther. In his stress upon the sovereignty<sup>28</sup> rather than the love of God, and in the transcendence of God rather than the condescension of God in the Incarn. he breaks with Luther further. He completes the break in that exegetical subjectivism by which casts aside the testimony of the whole "cloud of witnesses" and denies the Parthenogenesis. The ultimate result of all this, the deprecation of the sacramental bridge through which

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<sup>27</sup>Refer back to pages 6-8. According to Luther, God's eternal power and divinity are manifest in the revelation in creation, putting man in a position in which he is without excuse. While the revelation in creation does not enable man to live in harmony with the Maker, it provides a point of contact for the Christian message. Many of Brunner's statements almost precisely parallel those of Luther. Cf. Philip S. Watson, op. cit., pp. 76-85.

<sup>28</sup>The sovereignty of God is emphasized not only in the Doctrine of the Atonement, but in every phase of the Doctrine of Revelation. Brunner holds, from beginning to end, to a regal concept of the Word, while he views the Atonement as purely a means to the end of the glory of God in his dominion over men. He never clarifies the point of whether or to what extent God remains to the justified man the Wholly Other. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to treat this central motif in detail.

Christ comes to us today in the most forceful expression of the Deus loquens, is a view of revelation easily distinguished from the Lutheran view.

Brunner has given us a Jesus who is infinitely better than the "Sunday School teacher" of the liberal movement, a Jesus who is more than a Prophet, a Jesus who is indeed capable of bearing the weight of the world's sin. But Brunner's Jesus is something less than the Incarnate Lord of the New Testament, the Jesus who really took part in human flesh and blood, who really "climbed down" from heaven and became man in Mary's womb, and who really imparts Himself to us in the Sacraments today.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Joseph Sittler cites the passage of Luther in which he says: "(God) comes to you. He has made a ladder, and he says: I will climb down from heaven to you and become man in the Virgin Mary's womb, lie in the cradle in Bethlehem, suffer and die for you." Wg. 37,43, quoted in The Doctrine of the Word (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1948), p. 8.

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