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The Principles and Teachings of the Dialectical Theology

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The Principles and Teachings of the Dialectical Theology.

(Continued.)

Enthusiasm in its gross form and Enthusiasm in its dialectical form is an evil thing. It is destructive of all assurance, of the certainty of salvation, and of the certitude of the doctrine. There can be assurance only where the objective character of redemption, the objective character of the means of grace, and the objective validity of the Bible-teaching is recognized. Where subjectivism rules, certainty departs. *"Das ist ja eben die ganze Schwache der Theologie Barths, dass nach ihr ein bestimmter Inhalt der Schrift, der dem Menschen das Bekenntnis abnoetigen wuerde: 'Hier redet Gott mit dem Menschen,' nicht fixiert werden kann. . . . Der Begriff 'Wort' Gottes ist voellig aufgeloeset und die Sache selbst einem uferlosen Subjektivismus anheimgegeben."* (R. Jelke, *Die Grunddogmen des Christentums*, p. 9.) In the first place, the "Word of God" of the dialecticalists cannot serve as authority for doctrine because the concept is too nebulous. Which of the various forms of the "Word" with which Brunner operates is the real source of doctrine? Which of Barth's three forms? And, in the second place, when they have decided that a certain passage of Scripture has been vitalized by the Spirit and is valid for proof, how will they determine that the right decision has been made? They may tell me: This is a good proof-text, I am absolutely convinced of it. I will answer: Your personal conviction means nothing to me; I am ready to bow to God,—"it is written,"—but not to your experience; you may be mistaken. You cannot convince me, and what is more, your own conviction is based on a nebulous foundation. All the assurance that you have for the truth of your doctrine is your subjective experience. And you know that no reliance can be placed on that; for experiences change.

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The only thing that stands firm is the unchangeable word of Scripture.¹⁾

And this "outward word" as it is written in Scripture and confronts us in the promise of the Gospel and the Sacraments is the only

1) The uncertainty inherent in subjectivistic theology manifests itself in the inability of the dialecticalists to establish a fixed *corpus doctrinae*. The subjectivist never knows what doctrines must be added, subtracted, and revised under the rule of his theological principle. Subjectivism is *uferlos*. It will not be confined in fixed boundaries. As R. Jelke sees it, Barth's theory on this point is: "*Von der Antwort, die das Wort Gottes gibt, koennen wir niemals als von einer fertigen Groesse reden. . . . Es ist unmoeglich, dass das Wort ein fuer allemal geltende Erkenntnis bietet.*" (Luthardt-Jelke, *Komp. der Dogm.*, p. 53.) That is true, says Brunner. "Nor does this book claim to be a 'doctrine of Christ.' In my opinion the time is not yet ripe for this." (P. 15.) And as to specific points: "Haitjema accuses me 'of beginning to operate with faith, revelation, the Word, as though they were impersonal entities,' in the spirit of a mere spectator. I am fully sensible of the force of this accusation; for as soon as we use comparisons in speaking of the Christian religion, it is impossible to avoid 'operating' in a certain sense with 'fixed' conceptions. This danger can be avoided of course by renouncing this work of comparison altogether. . . . I see clearly that this cannot be done if we wish to avoid the danger of gradually falling a prey to a kind of spiritual conservatism, which may lead to obscurantism. . . . It is inevitable that we should employ certain fixed fundamental conceptions of Christianity. This does not mean that we regard the actual theological labor as already finished, but . . . from the second and third sections of this book, if not from the first part, it ought to become quite clear that I do not really regard those conceptions as 'fixed.'" (P. 24.) To get the matter clear, we might ask Brunner whether the doctrine of the Virgin Birth, for instance, is fixed. He tells us, No. You can affirm and you can deny the Virgin Birth. And A. Keller declares that that is the ideal situation. The dialectical theology is "attacking not only modernistic theology, but also conservative theology, which interprets Christian truth as an objective statement, similar to, and of the same certainty as, a scientific fact. . . . A heavy attack is being directed against the static certainty of those who deal with the divine promises as elements of a theological system and not as the free acts of a divine will." "The dynamic character of God's revelation . . . connotes a process of continual development." "Karl Barth is strongly opposed to any canonized interpretation of the Bible which defines once for all the meaning of the Word of God and prevents the Holy Spirit from using the written Word as a manifestation of God's will." The Bible must not be "treated as a *datum*, a static entity, which can be classified by the human mind." "God's will or Christ's will may appear different to different generations and different persons." (*Religion and Revolution*, pp. 48. 62. 66 f. 70.) Barth pities the Lutheran Church for its insistence on the *Confessio Augustana INVARIATA*. He demands: "*Keine Invariata und Invariabilis!*" He is proud of the Reformed Church, which has no "symbolical books," but only "confessions," "several of which contain the express provision that the doctrinal statements might be changed on fuller information." (*Das Wort Gottes*, etc., p. 186.) He will consequently, says one of his associates, "censure no man as an 'errorist, false teacher,' for to do that one would first have to possess a '*reine Lehre.*'" (*Zwischen den Zeiten*, 1928, p. 528.) — So, where does the dialectical theology stand? Not where it stood yesterday. And to-morrow it will have moved on to another position. Says the *Churchman*, as quoted in the *Pastor's Monthly*, 1931, p. 311: "Refutations of Barthianism are beside the mark; Barth is constantly writing refutations of himself and writing refutations of the refutations. So to do is an essential part of his 'dialectic' method."

basis of our assurance of salvation. There stands the objective word and promise, solid and firm, abiding and unchangeable. Whatever the devil may tell me to the contrary, whatever my subjective experience at the present moment may be, I know that Christ died for me because God tells me so in His Word, in the Gospel, in the Sacraments. No, says the dialecticalist. I can know it only when "God speaks through Christ to me and thus speaks *in me*." (P. 527.) "When I know that it is God who is speaking to me in this event,—that God is really speaking to *me*,—I believe." (P. 524.) Assurance must thus be based not on the objective word as we find it in the Bible, but on the fact that God is speaking in my heart. But that does away with all assurance. It may be the devil who is speaking to you. And where will you be if you do not *hear* the voice of the Spirit in your heart? You cannot fall back on what God says in the Bible, in the Gospel. For that is a dead letter, useless unless it is vitalized. God does not speak to us, we heard Barth say, everywhere in the Bible, but only wherever, whenever, and through whatever words He will. Accordingly the Christian cannot take the promise at its face value, but must wait till a subjective experience makes the promise real. The point at issue is *not* whether the Christian knows that God is speaking to him, whether faith must be defined as the assurance that God is speaking to me. We are agreed on that, and we are agreed that the promise does not avail anything to him who does not believe. But this is the question: Am I certain that Christ died for me because the words written in Scripture assure me of it, or am I certain because the Holy Spirit assures me of it? The dialecticalist answers: Not because the words, of themselves, say so, but because God's Spirit has made them God's Word to me. The Lutheran answers: The two factors go together; they belong together; they are in reality one; I am certain because the Holy Spirit assures me *through these words*; these words *are* spirit and life. We get our assurance from the objective words, not from a subjective experience.

Brunner indeed takes exception to the charge of subjectivism. He knows that it is an evil thing. He insists that his theology stands for objectivity. He speaks of this matter on pages 516—529 and presents it thus: "That God speaks through Christ to me and that He thus speaks in me is an absolutely present and thus an absolutely subjective experience. It is the speech of the Holy Spirit. But the fact that it is *Christ* in whom and through whom God thus speaks to me is the most objective fact possible" (p. 527).² An "objective fact" of this nature does not help us here. Surely it is a *fact*

²) It happens that the liberal C. H. Dodd uses similar language. "The ultimate 'fact' is the unity of experience in which 'subjective' and 'objective' are one." (*The Authority of the Bible*, p. 297.)

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that the Christian believes, and he is absolutely sure of his case. But that is not the objectivity with which we are here concerned. What we need as the basis for the assurance of our faith is the objective certainty of God's Word and promise. We need to have words whose certainty does not depend on the hearer's attitude. Unless God's promises and the words of Scripture are of such nature, no subjective assurance will ensue.—The dialectical theology does not serve the need of the Christian. It is, as Prof. Th. Laetsch says, "not Scriptural, not Lutheran theology; it is rather the theology of subjectivism, which refuses to submit to Scripture as the sole and sufficient authority on all matters theological. Such theology cannot establish the heart nor engender that faith which overcomes the world." (CONC. THEOL. MTHLY., 1935, p. 716.) "*Damit kommen wir zu der Schwaermerei Karl Barths. . . . Er findet letzten Endes die Begegnung mit der Wirklichkeit, 'Gott,' ausser dem Wort, das in Schriften steht. . . . Er kaempft so scharf mit Worten gegen den Subjektivismus, liefert aber selbst die Kirche demselben aus, indem er sich nicht auf das Wort der Apostel und Propheten gruendet, sondern auf den wahnwitzigen menschlichen Versuch, in dem Wort der Apostel und Propheten das eigentliche Wort aufzuspüren.*" (Schrift u. Bekenntnis, 1930, S. 88.)³⁾

Brunner bases his theology on the "Word of God,"—but not exclusively. He relies to a great extent on an additional *principium cognoscendi*—and that is philosophy, his dialectical philosophy. Metaphysical and psychological, etc., investigations, disquisitions, and argumentations bulk large in our book. It is half theological and half philosophical. Indeed, it is more than half philosophical argumentation. The proof from Scripture comes in only rather incidentally. Metaphysics claims the greater part of Brunner's energy. And so the book makes very hard reading. Much of it, in the first place, is hard to understand. The reader must first acquire a new

3) Dr. H. W. Tribble of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary has written an "introductory interpretation of the dialectical theology" which "is sympathetic in general, but not critical." Our interpretation is not written in a sympathetic spirit. However, Dr. Tribble and we are agreed on the essential point. He writes: "This throws some light on Barth's view of revelation. It is not mediated through nature or discovered by man's reason. It is the Word of God that comes to man entirely apart from, and independently of, human and temporal conditions. It is altogether supernatural. Man can receive it because God gives him the grace to receive it, not because he has the inherent capacity to grasp it. *And that Word of God is always a spoken Word, spoken directly to man. It is never contained in anything that man can hold in his hand or read with his physical eyes. The Bible as a printed book is not this living, spoken Word; it does not contain the Word of God, but witnesses to it.*" (Italics our own.) "When the Bible is read in true faith, the Spirit of God speaks through it to the believing person." (*The Review and Expositor*, 1936, p. 38.)

and sometimes strange vocabulary⁴⁾ and then finds it ordinarily rather difficult to follow the lines of abstruse thinking and finely spun argumentation set before him. And in the second place, after he has, after a manner, understood it, he is asking himself, *Cui bono?* Brunner has perhaps proved a point philosophically, but that does not prove it theologically. And so the reader pursues his way through the dreary waste rather unwillingly. It makes hard reading. There is room certainly for philosophy in a theological book. It is permissible to meet the false arguments drawn from reason and science also by showing that there is something wrong about those arguments logically and scientifically. But we must not give this method *much* space. *Cui bono?* It does not, as a rule, convince the opponent. Here the philosophers have been arguing with one another for centuries, both sides offering unanswerable arguments, and there are as many systems to-day as there ever have been, and more.⁵⁾ And it does not help the believer. Metaphysical methods and systems may (or may not) satisfy reason, but it takes the word of Scripture to engender and nourish faith. "The defenders of Christianity are not concerned with speculation at all; they are not thinking about satisfying the metaphysical sense of scientific need; their whole concern is with the Word of God." That is the correct principle, as set down by Brunner himself on page 232. But he forgets that rule time and again. He resents such a charge indeed and says: "It seems likely that to the very end of time the reproach will be hurled at us again and again that we are here simply spinning metaphysical or speculative theories." (P. 284.) We certainly do charge him with that. In this respect he is no better than the other modern theologians. These men act on the theory that, while it is sufficient for the simple Christian to believe, it is the business of theology to demonstrate the truth of faith with scientific processes. A few examples will illustrate Brunner's way of applying this false *principium cognoscendi*.⁶⁾

The article of the Trinity is thus demonstrated: "God manifests Himself to us in revelation [in the Revealer, Christ] as the One who communicates Himself as Love. That He is the One who communicates Himself we cannot conceive otherwise than through the thought that in Himself—and not only in relation to the world—He is loving, self-giving. It is this truth which is expressed in the

4) "*Die sogenannte 'dialektische Theologie' vollends—ihr Verdienst steht nicht in Frage—erscheint als ein 'Dialekt,' der sich nicht eindeutschen laesst.*" (W. Vollrath, *Vom Rittertum der Theologie*, p. 45.) Vollrath is referring not only to the terminology, but also to the philosophical thought-forms of the dialectical theology.

5) The philosopher "is constantly writing refutations of himself and then writing refutations of the refutations."

6) We are willing to substitute the term *principium demonstrandi*. It amounts to the same thing.

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Christian doctrine of the Trinity. . . . The Triune God alone gives Himself within Himself." (P. 280 f.) This argument (put forth already in earlier times) — Since God is Love, there must be in God one who loves and one who is loved — cannot convince reason; and even if it did, it would not strengthen faith. Again: "Only the God in Three Persons is truly personal." (P. 282.) You will never be able to convince a man that according to the laws of psychology, if God be a personal Being, there must be more than one person; let alone that there must be three persons. — This matter of personality plays an important part in Brunner's book. He makes the Scriptural statement: "Christ has indeed assumed human nature, but not a human *person*." (P. 319.) But instead of emphasizing the mystery here encountered, he supplies a lot of psychological information, which of course cannot explain the mystery, but leaves us floundering and gasping: *Cui bono?* "The *Nous* is the rational nature, the means of communion which arises out of the historical connection and unites with history, that whereby the Person makes Himself visible and clear from the human and historical point of view. The *Nous* is the historical manifestation of the mystery of the Person. . . . This mystery of personality lies behind all historical and psychological perception. It lies even behind all self-perception, etc., etc." (P. 318.) This much we know, that, if we would understand Brunner, we must get his definition of *person*. Here it is: "A person, in the full sense of the word, is not an entity which exists in its own right; one becomes a person through the call of God, 'heard' in the decision of faith." "Our personality remains an object of faith, not an historical form. For as persons we cannot be known, only believed. Our being, as persons, is determined by our attitude towards God." (Pp. 270. 319.) This much we know now, that all these psychological investigations and pronouncements have not shed any light on the mystery of the *anhypostasia*. We accept Brunner's statement: "Christ has indeed assumed human nature, but not a human *person*"; but after reading his explanation, we do not know what to make of it.⁷⁾

7) Besides, his philosophical cogitations have enmeshed him in an absurdity, as P. Althaus points out. Althaus has written a review of Brunner's *Mediator* (*Theologische Aufsätze*, II, p. 169 ff.), and he sides with Brunner, in general. "On the whole, I can gladly assent to Brunner's Christology and his whole teaching on the question of revelation." (P. 171.) But he takes issue with Brunner's treatment of the *anhypostasia* (*anhypostasia*), establishing, first, that Brunner does not use this term in the sense of the old dogmaticians. Brunner distinguishes between "personality" and "person." He says that Christ is in the full sense of the word a historical personality, — for that belongs to the wholeness of the human nature, — but that Christ did not assume a human person in the sense of the personal mystery of man, for that is sin. "Instead of the human mystery of personality, sin, Christ possesses the divine mystery of per-

Next you will have to study the meaning of the word *history*. The use of this term by the dialecticalists is most confusing to the outsider. "Easter, the resurrection of the Lord, is not an 'historical event' which can be reported." "It is superhistory, eschatological history; hence it is no longer historical at all." (P. 575. 583.) But: "The Resurrection was an actual event. Without the reality of the Resurrection," etc. (P. 432.) "By revelation we mean that *historical event* which is at the same time the end of history." 8) (P. 27.)

Offensive use of the term *mythological*: "The Christian knows that all his statements about the faith are mythological, that is, quite definitely they are inadequate." (P. 377.) "The time-myth, the historical event as an act of God, inadequately describes the action of the personal God and His movement towards man." (P. 392.) "The Christian 'myth' is that form of thought in which time is taken seriously; hence it is the only type of thought in which God is regarded as truly personal, that in which the Word, as the Word of God and as the real Personal Word, is the decisive factor. Thus is the Myth of the Word." (P. 386.)

What becomes of the simple word *soon* when dialectically treated? "Once we have recognized that in eschatological thought Time is an intensive quality,—and thus how far removed from the idea of mathematical Time, which has to do with watches and calendars,—it will be no longer possible to say that Jesus and His apostles were 'deceived' in their expectation of the Parousia. The 'soon' of the Eschatological Hope cannot be expressed in the terms used to describe mathematical astronomical conceptions. If we confuse this neutral

sonality: divine authority." (P. 320.—The present writer calls attention to these philosophical subtleties without attempting to explain them.) Then Althaus shows that Brunner's theory is not tenable; it involves an absurdity. Commenting on Brunner's statement on page 498: "To be a human being means to be a sinner. To predicate sinlessness of any human being, when one knows what sin really is, means that this man must be more than human. Only the God-man can be the Sinless One," Althaus writes: "We, too, say that only the God-man is without sin. But to say that for that reason He has no human person comes close to Manichaeism and contradicts the important statement made on page 497: 'Christ is "the whole man," the "second Adam," in whom the nature of man is restored to harmony with the divine creation.' If this statement is true,—and it is true according to the New Testament,—then the *anhypostasia* either must fall, or it must apply to all children of God, regenerated to the image of Christ; apply not only to the God-man, but also to the 'man of God.' Is Brunner ready to abide by this necessary inference?" (P. 180.) Althaus, on his part, denies the *anhypostasia*. "It is an untenable dogma." (L. c.)

8) We have not the time to study this term in its full dialecticalist sense. And why should we take the time?—Vollrath characterizes the dialecticalists' attitude towards history as "*dialektische Schwärmerci*." (*Vom Rittertum der Theologie*, p. 10.)

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material idea of Time with that existential decisive idea of Time, then certainly there is nothing left but to admit that the prediction was not fulfilled, and therefore that it was erroneous. But at the Judgment the 'error' of the apostles will hold its own against the 'truth' of their critics. Seriousness and 'soon' are indissolubly connected. The 'soon' is an intensive quality, that is, it increases with the increasing seriousness of God. The chronological 'soon' and the truly historical 'soon' cannot be compared. Where God is truly known, there at the same time the speedy coming of His kingdom is recognized. In the literal sense the critics are indeed right: Jesus and the apostles did identify this 'soon' with a point in the time series; and this definition of a special time has proved to be incorrect." (P. 421.)

"The Christian religion does not say: 'You can, therefore you ought,' but rather: 'You ought, therefore you cannot. For if you could, you would know nothing of duty; God's will would be to you no alien law, but fatherly mercy.'" (P. 148.) Brunner may be expressing a truth here; but why these mental gymnastics?—We wonder whether all philosophers will admit the truth of the following: "A philosophical system and the admission of the presence of evil in the world are mutually exclusive. For every system in which evil would be acknowledged would automatically transform evil into a concept, which would be to deny it, because it would mean turning something which is antirational into something which is less rational." (P. 123.) — What do you make of this: "Christ Himself possesses the authority which is ascribed to God alone. He Himself stands on the other side of the frontier, beyond which only God Himself can stand. Here, too, the one thing that matters is to pay attention to this 'place.' For the place is decisive in the question of authority." Now: "In all that belongs merely to the realm of ideas there is no question of a place or of what happens, because here no secret is disclosed. . . . Therefore here there is no authority." (P. 247.) — Try this from K. Barth: "He comes *ἐν ἀτόμῳ* [in a moment], says Paul, in an indivisible, non-temporal, eternal moment and Now [*Nu und Jetzt*]. Is it yesterday, to-morrow, to-day? Is it always? Is it never? In each case we may answer yes and no." (*Das Wort Gottes u. d. Theol.*, p. 95.) Or this: "Rom. 2, 2: 'Wherein thou judgest another thou condemnest thyself.' By taking a definite position [*indem du dich auf einen Standpunkt stellst*], you are putting yourself in the wrong. By saying 'I' or 'we' or 'that's it', you change the glory of the uncorruptible into the image of the corruptible (1, 23). Undertaking to give honor to the unknown God, deeming that undertaking possible, you again cover up and hide the truth." (*Der Roemerbrief*.)

Barren wastes! Says the *Lutheran Herald*, referring to the dialectical theology: "We would say, beware of a religious teacher

who tries to force the Christian religion into a new or old philosophy. All you get out of it is 'confusion worse confounded.'"

The particular form of philosophy in which the dialectical theology specializes is Dialecticalism. What is that? Brunner defines it thus: "The dialectic, the affirmative in the negative and the negative in the affirmative." (P. 532.) "Darkness — light, death — life, perdition — salvation, judgment — grace, guilt — forgiveness, sin — redemption. This discontinuity, these pairs of antitheses, are not, as you may hear it said of late, a peculiar fad of dialectical theology..." (*The Word and the World*, p. 48.) Barth's definition: "There is never so decisive a yes that it does not harbor the possibility of a no. There is never so decisive a no that it is not liable to turn into a yes." (*Das Wort Gottes und die Theologie*, p. 75.) Hans Asmussen: "*Jedes Ja ist zugleich ein Nein.*" (Cp. *Schrift und Bekenntnis*, 1928, p. 140.) The discovery of the alleged law that every affirmation (every truth) is necessarily linked up with a negation (a *valid* negation) of this very affirmation and the application of this law to theology constitutes the *raison d'être* of the dialectical theology.

We grant the metaphysicians the right to discuss the law of the dialectic. If we had time to join in the discussion, we should probably deny its validity. We deny the statement in its generality that every yes harbors a possible no. There is the affirmation of sin. The dialecticalist says that calls for the counter-truth of grace. It does not. The Bible indeed tells us that where sin abounded, grace did much more abound. But that is so because of the grace of God, not by force of the law of the dialectic.⁹⁾ We are able to meet the fact of sin with the great counter-fact of grace — on the basis of the Gospel-teaching. If the thoroughgoing dialecticalists imagine that they can find a universal law ("*allgemeines Weltgesetz*") covering this situation and want to discuss it *philosophically*, let them do it to their hearts' content. But the trouble is that they want to make a theological use of these researches. And we are not willing to permit them to demonstrate theological truths with their philosophical maxims. That is just what they are doing. They do say that their sole authority is the Word of God; but if we ask them why they are then filling their books with the metaphysical discussion of the law

9) "*Es ist wahr, in mannigfachen paradoxen Sätzen hat es Luther ausgesprochen, dass Gott durch Töten lebendig macht. Fides vitae in morte exercetur. (De Servo Arbitrio. W. A., 18, 633.) Doch warum ist in der Suende die Gnade? WEIL CHRISTUS SICH ZU IHR GESELLT! Warum kann der Glaube im Sterben geuebt werden? Weil er sich an Christus klammert. Jene Paradoxien sind fuer Luther nichts ohne die grundlegende Ueberzeugung, die sein ganzes Leben erfuehlt. Seine tiefste Erkenntnis betrifft KEIN ALLGEMEINES WELTGESETZ; sie haengt an einem ganz bestimmten, geschichtlich wirksam gewordenen Nein, dem NEIN AUS HEILIGER GNADEN, also an einem geschichtlichen Faktum.*" (G. Wehrung, *Geschichte und Glaube*, p. 454 f.)

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of the dialectic, they will have to answer that they do it for the purpose of establishing or at least strengthening their theology. They do not indeed set out to *reconcile* the contradictions. They are not disciples of Hegel. But they do declare that this particular kind of philosophical wisdom is necessary in order to *apprehend* the truth. "It is only by means of the contradiction that we can apprehend the contradictory truth that the eternal God enters time," etc. (*The Word and the World*, p. 6.) Professor Weber of Bonn declares that the dialectical theology has made this valuable contribution to theology: "*Sie lehrt aus der Dialektik der menschlichen Existenz heraus das paradoxe Gotteswort ergreifen.*" (*Pastoralblaetter*, 1935, p. 594.) We insist that the theologian has no business to buttress his theology with philosophy. Even G. Wobbermin protests against the dialectic method. He makes the objection, says the *Theological Forum* (1931, p. 258), "that the dialectic method belongs to philosophy and is an intruder in the field of theology. This method, which opposes each truth with a counter-truth, which contrasts to complete, which destroys to reenforce, would not be admitted by ancient theology and is considered a *Fremdkoerper*, an alien element, scholastical, philosophical, in theology. (Cp. G. Wobbermin, *Richtlinien*, etc., p. 17.)" Here is certainly a great paradox: God *justifies* the sinner; God's love — God's wrath; sin — grace. Why does Christian theology teach that? Simply and solely because Scripture reveals this truth — in no way because it happens to agree with the law of the dialectic. It is destructive of Christian assurance if the theologian is led to have recourse in any way or degree to philosophical considerations in the presentation of the truths of the Bible. A sample to show how Brunner applies his law: "The Christian faith points beyond itself to the end, to the resurrection of the body, *because* in itself it is inconsistent." (P. 532.) Add to this the fact that the dialecticalists, in applying their theory, are frequently led into error. Illustrating his statement that "there is never so decisive a yes that it does not harbor the possibility of a no," Barth declares: "*Kein Erwaehtsein, aus dem nicht Verworfensein, kein Verworfensein, aus dem nicht Erwaehtsein werden koennte.*" Another point: an ordinary Christian and an ordinary theologian cannot follow the dialectic thinking. It goes beyond all bounds. You are dizzy long before you reach the top. Take this from Barth's *Roemerbrief*, on chap. 3, 2: "The impossible, God, stands within the limits of the possible, not indeed as a possibility among others, but, as becomes apparent in the case of the just, as the impossible possibility." Even Erich Schaeder, himself not a novice in this field, grows impatient and speaks of Barth's "continual talk about a possibility that is impossibility and an impossibility that is possibility. You enter a magic forest of dialectic turns and denying yeas (*verneinende Bejahungen*)."

(*Theol. Theol.*, p. 216.)¹⁰ The dialectic, as a *principium demonstrandi*, is of no help to the theologian.

There is a Scriptural dialectic: Sin and grace! Grace for the sinner! Law and Gospel! God's wrath against the sinner—God's grace for this very sinner! That is the supreme art of the Christian—knowing what to make of these antitheses. If Brunner had only confined himself to *this* dialectic! He treats of it indeed, for instance, on page 519. Quoting Luther, he says: "God, 'outside Christ,' is really angry, but 'in Christ' is 'pure love.'" Biblical dialectic trains the Christian to distinguish between the Law and the Gospel. Luther knew how to enforce it. "Theoretically this distinction is easily made, but at the point of death and in perils we find that we are but poor dialecticians. A good dialectician distinguishes between the Law and the Gospel and indeed admits that he has not kept the Law, but insists: From this premise the conclusion does not follow that I should despair and be lost. For the Gospel commands me to believe in Christ and stand on the works and righteousness of Christ." (4, p. 2078.) If Brunner and the rest would only spend their time in inculcating this dialectic! They need not

10) "Freilich, was heisst denn das: dialektisch, Dialektik? Obwohl, vielleicht weil bedeutsamer Ausdruck des Suchens unserer Zeit, entbehrt dieser Begriff einer einheitlichen Handhabung. Was Hegel einmal (Enzyklopaedie, § 81) beklagt, scheint fuer die Gegenwart gesprochen: 'Oft ist die Dialektik auch weiter nichts als ein subjektives Schaukelsystem von hin- und herueberggehendem Raesonnement, wo der Gehalt fehlt und die Blossse durch solchen Scharfsinn bedeckt wird, der solches Raesonnement erzeugt.'" And speaking specifically of the dialectical theology of Barth and Brunner: "Es kommt endlich hinzu ein scholastisch-dialektischer Zug, dessen erstes Anliegen es ist, . . . in der Christologie das ueberkommene Problem des Zusammenbestehens von Gottheit und Menschheit kunstvoll weiterzufuehren oder etwa in der Gotteslehre die wohldurchdachten Bestimmungen der alten Kirche ueber das Verhaeltnis der drei Personen zur Einheit des Wesens, wenn es sein muss, mit den Denkmitteln des heiligen Thomas gegen eine widerspenstige Welt zu verteidigen. Das Dialektische mithin Hilfsmittel zu einem neuen Dogmatismus!" (G. Wehrung, *op. cit.*, pp. 449. 465.) — We might submit at this stage of our discussion a new definition of "dialectic." It is given by Ludwig Schlaich, as published in *Zwischen den Zeiten*, 1928, p. 502: "In unserem Predigtgottesdienst findet ein Dialog zwischen Gemeinde und Wort Gottes statt, sofern das Wort Gottes Antwort gibt auf die Frage der Gemeinde. Anmerungsweise darf hier betont werden, dass die dialektische Theologie von diesem Dialog her den Namen hat. Der Begriff Dialektik ist also hier nicht im Hegelschen Sinn gefasst, sondern im Sinn der platonischen Dialoge. Er hat auch mit dem Begriff des Paradoxen zunachst gar nichts zu tun in dem Sinne, als ob eine dialektische Behauptung als dialektische jeweils den logischen Satz vom Widerspruch aufheben muesste, also immer die Form 'a = non a' tragen muesste. Dialektische Theologie heisst urspruenglich nichts anderes als THEOLOGIE DES DIALOGS, dialogische Theologie, ausgehend von dem Dialog des nun genugsam beschriebenen protestantischen Gottesdienstes." We are not particularly interested in the question as to which definition of the term dialectic is authoritative. But it is most interesting to hear from a dialecticalist that, as the term is commonly understood by the dialecticalists, it means that the law of the dialectic removes the difficulty which the logical contradictions in the Bible present.

bother about forming it "dialectically." The Christian is not asking them to do so. He is not asking them to do so in *any* doctrine. But the dialecticalists are bound to reduce all doctrines to the terms of the dialectic, and instead of assurance in theology we get uncertainty and confusion.

We have no use for a theology which bases its teachings on a nebulous "Word of God" and buttresses them with precarious pronouncements of philosophy.

TH. ENGELDER.

(To be continued.)

Der Pietismus.

(Fortsetzung.)

In der Vorrede zu seinen *Pia Desideria* sagt Spener: „Das Elend [in der Kirche], welches wir beklagen, lieget vor Augen, und ist niemand verboten, seine Tränen über dasselbe nicht nur im Geheim zu vergießen, sondern sie auch an den Orten fallen zu lassen, wo sie andere sehen und so zum Mitleiden als Witraten bewogen werden mögen.“ Und den ersten Teil der Schrift, in dem er den verderbten Zustand der Kirche schildert, beginnt er so: „Wenn wir mit christlichen und nur etwas erleuchteten Augen — nach unsers Erlösers Ermahnung, die Zeichen der Zeit und deren Beschaffenheit zu beurteilen — den jetzigen Zustand der gesamten Christenheit ansehen, so möchten wir billig mit Jeremias (9, 1) in die klagenden Worte ausbrechen: Ach, daß wir Wassers genug hätten in unsern Häuptern und unsere Augen Tränenquellen wären, daß wir Tag und Nacht beweinen möchten den Jammer unsers Volkes!“ Er beschreibt dann erstlich, wie traurig es im „weltlichen“ Beehrstand und im „geistlichen“ Lehrstand aussieht; davon haben wir in früheren Artikeln gehandelt.

„Da es nun in den Ständen also gehet, welche am meisten sollten regieren und zur Gottseligkeit führen, so mag nun leicht erraten werden, wie es in dem dritten Stande [Laien] gehet.“ Trunksucht wird kaum mehr für eine schwere Sünde gehalten; Rechtsprozesse sind allgemeine Gewohnheit geworden und ein Werkzeug der Rachgier, Unbilligkeit und unziemlicher Begierden; Selbstsucht ist die Triebfeder in Handel und Wandel; Wohlthätigkeit ist eine vergessene Tugend. Vor allem aber hat sich eine falsche Sicherheit in der Kirche eingebürgert. „Wie viel sind derjenigen, welche ein so offenbar unchristliches Leben führen, daß sie selbst nicht in Abrede sein können, es gehe in allen Stücken von der Regel ab; ohne Voratz, auch künftig anders zu leben, bilden sie sich gleichwohl mit fester Zuberficht ein, daß sie selig werden wollen. Fragt man, worauf sich dies gründe, so wird es sich finden, wie sie auch selbst bekennen, daß sie sich darauf verlassen, weil wir ja nicht dürften