

11-1-1950

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### Recommended Citation

Moellering, H. Armin (1950) "Brunner and Luther on Scriptural Authority," *Concordia Theological Monthly*. Vol. 21, Article 71.

Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol21/iss1/71>

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# Concordia Theological Monthly

VOL. XXI

NOVEMBER 1950

No. 11

## Brunner and Luther on Scriptural Authority

By H. ARMIN MOELLERING

**I**N its struggle with Roman Catholicism the Reformation made its appeal from tradition and an authoritatively interpreting Church to the Scriptures. This basic approach of the Reformers is obvious and universally recognized. Some writers, nonetheless, have failed to note the complete cleavage between Romanism and the Reformers at this point.<sup>1</sup> Emil Brunner sees clearly that whatever the token deference of Rome to the authority of Scripture may be, in point of fact Rome forsakes Scripture and rests her authority in the interpretive and teaching office of the Church. Rome operates with "die massgebende Autoritaet der kirchlichen Schriftauslegung."<sup>2</sup>

### I. REJECTION OF VERBAL INSPIRATION AND CLAIM TO AFFINITY WITH LUTHER

Brunner does not wish to fall prey to the mistake of Rome. Rather he purports to represent and follow the example of the Reformers in grounding doctrine on the Scriptures. At the same time he rejects the orthodox doctrine of verbal inspiration with sharp condemnation. "Die absolute Auszeichnung des sprachlichen Wortes, der Bibel, wie sie in der traditionellen Gleichung Bibelwort = Gotteswort geschieht — oder doch wenigstens immer wieder zu geschehen droht —, waere ein Verstoess gegen das zweite Gebot; Kreaturvergoetterung, Bibliolatrie."<sup>3</sup>

In claiming the Reformers for his position, Brunner admits that Calvin gives him difficulty. "Calvin liebt es, von den *oracula Dei* zu sprechen und verwendet mit Vorliebe die Vorstellung vom goett-

lichen Diktat."<sup>4</sup> Brunner appeals to the Reformers of the first generation, Luther and Zwingli, who in his opinion penetrated to the proper understanding of Scriptural authority, whereas Melancthon, Calvin, and Bullinger are too much given to the doctrine of verbal inspiration. Since Brunner's special appeal is to Luther, it is with Luther that the investigation must concern itself.

Here an ominous difficulty is encountered. The scholars, as is well known, are in disagreement concerning Luther's view of Scriptural authority.<sup>5</sup> Their varied opinions are helpful in alerting the student for a critical approach to Luther's own words, which must be determinative in the evaluation of Brunner's understanding of Luther on this critical point.

## II. BRUNNER'S CONCEPT OF SCRIPTURAL AUTHORITY CONTROLLED BY THOUGHT OF "WAHRHEIT ALS BEGEGNUNG"

Brunner is concerned with rescuing theology from the equally fallacious extremes of objectivism and subjectivism. At its worst the objectivizing of theology is seen in Romanism, where the truth becomes a quantity manipulated by the Church. But subjectivism, with its exposure of the truth to the ravages of individual caprice, is to be rejected with equal emphasis. Brunner believes he has found the solution in his concept of "Wahrheit als Begegnung."<sup>6</sup>

This basic principle has become a formative factor in his entire theological presentation. In the foreword to Volume Two of his *Dogmatik*, Brunner mentions that when he visited in the United States shortly after the publication of the first volume of his *Dogmatik*, a colleague expressed the desire that the new insights of the book *Wahrheit als Begegnung* be applied to a presentation of the entirety of Christian doctrine. The proposed three volumes of Brunner's *Dogmatik*, two of which have now appeared, are to mark an attempt in this direction. Brunner regards as false the antithesis: Liberalism vs. Orthodoxy. It is his fear that the rediscovery of the Biblical truth on the part of the "dialectical theology" has begun to harden in a rigid Biblicism and confessionalism. The churches have failed to realize that their respective traditions are loaded with encrustations of many years' standing, which have developed from a lack of appreciation for the concept of "truth in encounter." Rather, it has been the traditional misunderstanding

that faith is the acceptance of revealed truths. From this only one development can follow, namely, the rigidity and sterility of orthodoxy.

Understanding of the concept "Wahrheit als Begegnung" is to achieve the living synthesis of critical thinking and believing Christian thinking. The frigidity of faith in orthodoxy is avoided. Freedom is won for a faith that roots only in the love of God revealed in Christ Jesus.<sup>7</sup>

How the principle espoused by Brunner is applied and to what kind of results it leads is clarified by an examination of his development of the thesis in his understanding of the authority of Scripture.

It is of primary importance that objectivizing of the truth be avoided. Truth is found not in an encounter with Scripture, but in an encounter with God. Hence faith is not an impersonal, mechanical process, but the warmly personal "Ich-Du" meeting of the individual with God in the Person of Jesus Christ.

To postulate a verbally inspired, infallible Scripture means for Brunner that the object of faith becomes the Bible and not the Christ of the Bible. Everything degenerates into cold objectivity.

Es ist von vornherein ausgemacht, dass der Christusglaube der richtige Glaube ist, weil dieser Glaube von der heiligen Schrift oder von der Kirche gelehrt wird. Dass aber die Lehre der Kirche oder der heiligen Schrift die Wahrheit ist, das muss von vornherein, axiomatisch angenommen werden. Man glaubt an Jesus Christus, weil man zuerst an die Lehrautoritaet der Kirche oder der Bibel glaubt.<sup>8</sup>

That this is hardly an accurate representation of orthodoxy is to be demonstrated below.

In order to safeguard the personal, "existential" character of the encounter, Brunner's recurring emphasis is that Scripture points man to something outside itself and is therefore best described not as itself being the revelation but as "Zeugnis," testimony, or witness, to the revelation proper. "Die Apostel, die ersten Lehrer der christlichen Gemeinde, wissen sich selbst als Zeugen der goettlichen Offenbarung."<sup>9</sup>

Since the written word of Scripture is only a testimony and a witness, the revelation proper is not at all a word as ordinarily

understood but the "Word made flesh," Jesus Christ. "Damit ist unmissverstaendlich gesagt, dass 'das Wort Gottes' nicht das ist, was wir Menschen unter 'Wort' verstehen; er selbst, Jesus Christus, ist das 'Wort' Gottes."<sup>10</sup> This reduces the status of the written word of Scripture to that of a means whose function it is to point to Christ. "Das Wort ist dabei nur Mittel; denn das eigentliche Wort ist, ja eben Jesus Christus selbst."<sup>11</sup> The function of Scripture in Brunner's thought is to make accessible to later generations an encounter with the "Word made flesh." Men need to be brought into a "Personen-begegnung" and "Personen-gemeinschaft" with Christ Jesus. To realize this "Ereignis," the written word is important in the secondary status of functioning as a medium.

Even from this sketchy outline it is evident that Brunner's concept of Scriptural authority is dominated and controlled by an abhorrence for objectivity. Properly speaking, revelation is, therefore, a process or an event. ". . . denn Offenbarung ist ja nicht ein Etwas, eine Sache, sondern ein Vorgang, ein Geschehnis. . . ."<sup>12</sup> Accordingly, Scripture must be experienced. Only on the basis of this experience and encounter with Christ in Scripture does the Biblical message become truth for the individual. Christ, not the written word of Scripture, is the *principium cognoscendi*.

For an evaluation of Brunner on the topic of Scripture the final issue of his presentation must be brought to the fore. Where truth is communicated through an encounter with Christ mediated by Scripture, *there is no need for a reliable, infallible Scripture*. ". . . Gott kann, wenn er will, einem Menschen sogar durch falsche Lehre sein Wort sagen. . . ."<sup>13</sup> In fact, Brunner's presentation forces the student to the conclusion that the encounter with Christ is better mediated by a fallible than by an infallible Scripture. This is apparent from the repeated charges Brunner makes against orthodoxy. "Die Orthodoxie ist falsche Heteronomie, die an die Stelle des eigenen Glaubens an Jesus den Glauben an das Zeugnis der Apostel, also den Glauben an die Autoritaet der Schrift setzt."<sup>14</sup> "Man glaubt an Jesus, weil man zuerst an die Schrift glaubt."<sup>15</sup>

Is this erroneous exchange of the object of faith inextricably interwoven with the orthodox belief in an infallible Scripture? Since John Gerhard seems to be the particular target of Brunner's accusations, it is apropos that he be given a hearing.

*Fides autem non est nuda opinio et professio, sed viva et efficax Christi in Evangelio propositi apprehensio; est plenissima de gratia Dei persuasio, fiducialis cordis nostri quies, et pax in Christi merito recumbens. Nascitur haec fides ex verbi divini semine; nam fides et spiritus unum sunt, verbum autem Spiritus sancti vehiculum: fructus sequitur naturam sui seminis. Fides divinus fructus est, ergo et semen divinum adesse oportet, scilicet verbum.<sup>16</sup>*

There is no evidence here that Brunner's charge is warranted. Faith is still the apprehension of Christ and His merit. Brunner has not correctly analyzed the difference between himself and orthodoxy. Where does it lie? Compare with Gerhard's definition the words of Brunner. "Nach der biblischen Auffassung des Glaubens glaubt man an Jesus als den Christus nicht darum, weil er durch Kirche oder Schrift so gelehrt wird, sondern darum, weil er, Jesus, der Christus, als das wahrhafte Gotteswort uns im Zeugnis der Schrift begegnet."<sup>17</sup> Gerhard's definition adds that such a divine fruit as faith requires the presence of a divine seed, namely, an infallible Scripture. Here Brunner dissents. One cannot but infer that Brunner believes a fallible Scripture is better, in fact, is necessary.

Neither is Brunner's charge accurate that Gerhard first requires acceptance of Scripture as infallible and from this argues for faith in Jesus set forth in the infallible Scripture as the Christ. The order is reversed. Jesus the Christ is encountered in the Scripture. Because Scripture has effected this meeting in faith, there develops also a profound respect for the Scripture in which Jesus the Christ has been found. Gerhard believes that accurate testimony includes an accurate testifier. Brunner is convinced that reliable testimony is better found in the muddled witness. As soon as the witness is said to be unimpeachable, the objection is made that credence is placed in the witness and not in that to which he bears testimony.<sup>18</sup>

The issues of Brunner's presentation of Scriptural authority as controlled by the principles of "Wahrheit als Begegnung" must come to an understanding with Luther. Orthodoxy linked reliable testimony to a reliable testifier. Did Luther?

*Quod alias monui saepe, hic repeto, iterumque monebo, ut*

Christianus lector primam operam navet quaerendo sensui illi, ut vocant, literali, qui solus tota est fidei et theologiae christianae substantia, qui in tribulatione et tentatione solus subsistit et portas inferi cum peccato et morte vincit atque triumphat in laudem et gloriam dei.<sup>19</sup>

The literal sense of Scripture is the substance of faith. This is precisely what Brunner has proscribed. This is not merely a chance remark of Luther, but rather a constant emphasis. "Auff das bestendig bleib die schrift in einem gewissen, einfeltigen, untzurtelligen vorstand, darauff sich unsser glaub on alles wancken muge bawen."<sup>20</sup> *Quomodo enim fidem certam doceas, quando sensum incertum facis?*<sup>21</sup> *Nusquam cerni potest, quid Deus velit, quid ei placeat, nisi in verbo ipsius. Hoc certos nos reddit Deum objecisse omnem iram ac odium erga nos, cum tradiderit filium suum unigenitum pro peccatis nostris etc.*<sup>22</sup> Luther grounds certainty on Word and Sacrament. . . . *Deus promisit, Deus mentiri non potest, Dei neque dicta, neque facta fallunt. . . . Verum hoc omnium est gravissimum peccatum existimare, quod et in verbo suo, signo et opere Deus mentiatur. . . .*<sup>23</sup> The substitution of faith in the Scriptures for faith in the Christ of the Scriptures on the part of orthodoxy is a myth of Brunner's invention. The conjoining of reliable testimony and infallible witness is present also in Luther's thought.

### III. EXAMINATION OF BRUNNER'S APPEAL TO LUTHER

Brunner definitely claims Luther for his understanding of Scriptural authority: "Die Lehre von der Unfehlbarkeit des Schriftbuchstabens — die der groesste Bibelmann unserer Kirche, Luther selbst, ausdruecklich verworfen hat. . . ." <sup>24</sup> This assertion can probably be best evaluated by examining critically the quotations from Luther to which Brunner makes appeal.

A. Without any pretense at reproducing every Luther quotation to which Brunner refers in this connection the following are listed as of special significance in Brunner's estimation. The attempt is made to group quotations under a heading derived from the interpretation Brunner gives them. There are two points of emphasis.

1. The Scriptures are Christo-centric: "Die Krippe, darinnen Christus liegt."<sup>25</sup> "Was Christum treibet, das ist apostolisch."<sup>26</sup> Christ is: *rex et dominus scripturae.*<sup>27</sup> "Das ist der rechte Pruefstein,

alle Buecher zu tadeln, wenn man sieht, ob sie Christum treiben oder nicht, sintemal alle Schrift Christum zeigt und St. Paulus nichts denn Christum wissen will. Was Christum nicht lehrt, das ist noch nicht apostolisch, wenn's gleich S. Peter oder Paulus lehrte."<sup>28</sup> "Weiss ich aber, was ich glaube, so weiss ich, was in der Schrift steht, und die Schrift hat nicht mehr denn Christum und den christlichen Glauben in sich." *Si adversarii scripturam urserint contra Christum, urgemus Christum contra scripturam. Scriptura est non contra, sed pro Christo intelligenda, ideo vel ad eum referenda, vel pro scriptura non habenda.*<sup>29</sup>

2. The Scriptures are self-authenticating. "Es muss ein jeglicher allein darum glauben, dass es Gottes Wort ist und dass er inwendig befinde, dass es Wahrheit sei." "Es ist nicht genug, dass du sagst: 'Luther, Petrus oder Paulus hat das gesagt,' sondern du musst bei dir selbst im Gewissen fuehlen, Christum selbst und unwaenklich empfinden, dass es Gottes Wort sei. . . . Solange du das Fuehlen nicht hast, solange hast du gewisslich Gottes Wort noch nicht geschmeckt."<sup>30</sup>

Virtually all of Brunner's references to Luther in this connection may be placed in one or the other of these two categories. This simplifies the task of analyzing the accuracy of Brunner's interpretation. It is unnecessary to isolate and examine each quotation separately. The question is, Do the two points of emphasis, admittedly present in Luther, warrant the conclusions Brunner draws?<sup>31</sup>

The Scriptures are Christo-centric. There is nothing here to justify the assertion that Luther rejected the authority of the letter. The import is not to establish a second canon within the Scripture, so that Scripture is pitted against Scripture. Rather, the opposition is between Scripture and Scripture misinterpreted by the Romanists.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, that Christ is "Lord of the Scripture," that He is "cradled therein," calls attention to the majesty of Him who is the center of the Scripture and by no means undermines a strict concept of Biblical authority.

The attempt to build up the argument on Luther's many pronouncements concerning the self-authenticating nature of the Scriptures likewise proves to be a case of reading a wrong meaning into his words. Pieper's remark applies: "Jedermann wird zugeben, dass dieses Argument: Weil die Heilige Schrift nur durch den



Heiligen Geist verstanden oder erfahren wird, darum koennen die Worte der Heiligen Schrift nicht vom Heiligen Geist eingegeben sein' gaenzlich ausserhalb aller Logik gelegen ist." <sup>33</sup>

To this it is helpful to add that even such a proponent of Verbal Inspiration as John Gerhard understands that acknowledgment of Scripture as the Word of God comes to man only through the testimony of the Holy Spirit. Thus Gerhard writes that those who entertain doubts concerning Scripture but whose questionings are remediable may be won over first and foremost by the testimony of the Spirit.

*Primum est internum Spiritus sancti testimonium qui ut reddit testimonium spiritui credentium, quod sint filii Dei ita quoque efficaciter eos convincit quod in Scripturis vox Patris coelestis contineatur ac solus Deus est idoneus et authenticus testis. Ad hoc testimonium pertinet vivus piorum sensus in quotidiana invocatione et exercitiis poenitentiae ac fidei, virtus consolandi et roborandi animum adversus omnis generis adversitates, tentationes, persecutiones etc. quam in lectione et meditatione Scripturae pii quotidie experiuntur.* <sup>34</sup>

The difference between Brunner and Gerhard is not that the former emphasizes the self-authenticating character of the Scriptures whereas the latter neglects this point. Rather it is this: Whereas for Brunner the encounter with God in Scripture carries him beyond submission to the written Word, for Gerhard the meeting with God in Scripture brings the conviction that the Word is authoritative.

*Quomodo enim ecclesiae filii de veritate fundamenti, cui ecclesia innititur, dubitare poterunt? Quomodo de auctoritate verbi divini in Scripturis contenti possunt quaerere, qui vim et efficaciam verbi in corde suo ipsimet sentiunt, et per illud ad vitam aeternam sese regenitos esse agnoscunt?* <sup>35</sup>

Apparently it needs to be emphasized and re-emphasized that recognition of the indispensable need for the work of the Holy Spirit in authenticating Scripture is not incompatible with the acceptance of Scripture as God's fixed, authoritative revelation.

B. Luther has declared his humble submission to the authority of Scripture in most emphatic terms. It is apparently this fact which has wrung from Brunner an important concession.

Wie ist nun aber das reformatorische Schriftprinzip selbst begründet oder zu begründen? Auf diese Frage hat die Reformationstheologie darum nur ungenügend zu antworten gewusst, weil in ihr neben der richtigen Auffassung der Schriftautorität, welche die Offenbarung in Jesus Christus und das biblische Zeugnis von ihr unterscheidet, eine falsche "orthodoxe" Lehre von der Schriftautorität wirksam war und mehr und mehr die Oberhand gewann.<sup>36</sup>

Brunner acknowledges only the presence of this "false," "orthodox" concept of Scriptural authority which more and more won out over the "correct" understanding. It would seem that in the interest of scholarly objectivity Brunner should introduce some of the statements from Luther in which he declares his respect and awe for the written word of Scripture, so that the reader may be in a better position to determine whether Luther is implicated in the "false," "orthodox" concept. Several characteristic sentences should be listed. Luther maintains that the letter of Scripture is authoritative. "Ja, ob es auch nur ein paar 'arme und elende Worte' sind, so muss man auch einen tutel und buchstaben groesser achten denn die gantze welt und dafur zittern und furchten als fur Gott selbs."<sup>37</sup> "Denn mir ist also, dass mir ein jeglicher Spruch die Welt zu enge macht."<sup>38</sup> If there is a lapse of grammar, the Holy Spirit is responsible. "Solches aber ist dem Heiligen Geist, der in St. Paulo geredet hat, wohl zu gute zu halten, ob er nicht allezeit so eben nach der Grammatik redet. . . ."<sup>39</sup> If there are trifles in Scripture, the Holy Ghost is their author. *Quaeri iterum hoc loco potest, quare scribit Spiritus sanctus nugas istas.*<sup>40</sup> *Propter hasce igitur fanaticas opiniones Spiritus sanctus tam puerilia et oeconomia scribit.*<sup>41</sup> Luther clings to the word of Scripture. ". . . sondern wir halten uns an der Propheten und Aposteln Schrift, die da vom Heiligen Geist getrieben, geredet haben, darin sie mit klaren Worten von Christo reden und zeugen. . . ."<sup>42</sup> God used Moses, and this means Moses' words are those of the Holy Spirit. *Sic hujus Mosis facta et dicta sunt divina judicanda et habenda pro dictis Spiritus sancti. . . .*<sup>43</sup>

How does Brunner dispose of these and the many similar statements of Luther? Luther's insistence on the authority of Scripture is too evident to be denied, and Brunner does not deny it. He

postulates the presence of two doctrines concerning Scriptural authority in Luther's thought. The orthodox view then becomes a sort of remnant of the old leaven which needs to be purged out so that the new view may triumph.<sup>43a</sup>

It is evident that Luther's professions of humble obedience to the letter of Scripture occasion grave difficulties for those who claim him for a loose view of Biblical authority. An illustration from Karl Barth is too choice to by-pass, particularly since Brunner professes himself to be in substantial harmony with Barth on the subject of Scriptural authority, whatever disagreements may obtain in other areas of doctrine.<sup>44</sup> In the controversies concerning the Sacrament of the Altar, Luther repeatedly professes to be bound by the letter of Scripture. What does Barth make of this?

Mit philologischer Treue gegen den Text oder gar mit der vielberufenen Gebundenheit an die Verbalinspirationslehre (der Luther gar nicht folgte) hat die Leidenschaft, mit der er sich an die drei Buchstaben *est* klammerte, mit der er sie mit Kreide auf den Verhandlungstisch zu Marburg schrieb, nichts zu tun. Dieser professorale Zwirnsfaden haette den Simson so wenig gebunden, wie die Stricke, die er anderweitig, wo er sich nicht selbst gebunden, zerrissen hat.<sup>45</sup>

Charitably interpreted, this means Luther was self-deluded. Uncharitably understood, it means Luther was a liar. When an interpretation thus stigmatizes the man, its accuracy may be justly questioned and critically examined before it is accepted. At least, when Luther is considered to believe in the binding authority of the letter, the extremes of such a maligning interpretation are not necessary.

C. Fidelity to Luther on the score of Scriptural authority may be measured in another way. Luther demands doctrinal certainty. Does Brunner attain it with his interpretation of Luther? The clarion call of Luther is to doctrinal certainty. "Wer sind denn die so da heissen Christen? Es muessen ja Leute sein die der Sache gewiss seien, und sagen: Ich weiss, was ich itzt rede und predige. . . ." <sup>46</sup> In fact, Christians should be so sure of their doctrine that they are ready to die for it. That blessed assurance, Luther contends, is possible only when the infallible Scriptures are made normative, believed, and accepted. "Also musst du mit der Schrift geruestet

sein, dass du nicht allein den Papst ein Endchrist schelten kunntist, sondern wissest dasselb auch klar zu beweisen, dass du sicher darauf kunntist sterben und wider den Teufel im Tod bestehen."<sup>47</sup> ". . . Glaube lehrt und haelt die Schrift; denn er haftet an der Schrift, die truegt noch luegt nicht."<sup>48</sup>

With the shift from an authoritative Scripture to an encounter with God mediated by a fallible Scripture the certainty Luther demands is gone. Brunner admits: "Aber nun gibt es die Moeglichkeit der Taeschung. . . ." <sup>49</sup> Even though this concession is somewhat qualified, Brunner's views do not measure up to Luther's demands. For Brunner there is no final uniformity in the New Testament Scriptural testimony but only in Jesus Christ. "Die Einheit des neutestamentlichen Zeugnisses liegt, im strengen, unbedingten Sinne, einzig und allein in Ihm, dem Bezeugten selbst, nicht aber in den Lehren der Zeugen."<sup>50</sup> Luther with his requirement for doctrinal certainty has a different view. "Aufs Erst, ist zu wissen, dass alle Apostel einerlei Lehre fuhren."<sup>51</sup> The same applies to the Old Testament as well. "Also sind die Buecher Mosi und die Propheten auch Evangelium, sintemal sie eben das zuvor verkundiget und beschrieben haben von Christo, das die Apostel hernach gepredigt oder geschrieben haben."<sup>52</sup>

Worse still, Brunner subjects the Apostolic doctrine to critical examination. ". . . so unterliegt auch die theologische Lehre der Apostel von Jesus Christus der kritischen Pruefung."<sup>53</sup> The result can only be that doctrine becomes relative and uncertain, just what Luther maintains it dare not be. Brunner draws the forbidden conclusion: ". . . sind wir nur in relativem Sinn an die Autoritaet dieses Zeugnisses gebunden."<sup>54</sup> Finally, there is not the remotest resemblance when Brunner arrives at his conclusion: ". . . ein letztgueltiger Rekurs auf eine Schriftaussage ist unmoeglich. Darum ist und bleibt alles christliche Lehren in jedem Falle ein Wagnis des Glaubens."<sup>55</sup> It is, then, but natural that Scripture be rejected in the sphere of the sciences. But the flaunting of Scripture is carried even farther. Barth is approved when he speaks of the "Irrtumsfaehigkeit der Bibel in ihrem religioesen, bzw. theologischen Gehalt."<sup>56</sup> Luther with his contention that faith clings to Scripture which does not lie nor deceive has been forsaken.

Luther's demand for doctrinal certainty does mean that there

not only is but always must be "ein letztgueltiger Rekurs auf eine Schriftaussage." Against the proof-text method, Brunner appeals to Luther's sentiment that the written Word was more appropriate to the Old Testament, but that the New Testament emphasis is on the Word preached. "Luther hat mit Recht auf den heimlichen Zusammenhang hingewiesen, der zwischen  $\gamma\rho\acute{\alpha}\mu\mu\alpha$  und Gesetz einerseits, zwischen der *viva vox* und dem Heiligen Geist andererseits besteht."<sup>57</sup> It is not accurate to conclude from Luther's emphasis that he meant to disparage the normative authority of the letter. If Luther is permitted to interpret himself, the result is not Brunner's doctrine. Although Luther lays strong stress on the need to preach the Gospel,<sup>58</sup> the Gospel for him is established on the letter of the Old Testament. This can be illustrated from his comment on First Peter, for here he stresses the office of preaching, while at the same time he calls attention to the requirement that what is preached must be in conformity with the Old Testament Scriptures. The "Predig und Geschrei von der Gnad und Barmherzigkeit Gottis" was deserving of acceptance because it was proved by the Old Testament Scriptures.

Aus dem allen siehest du, wie mit grossem Fleiss die Apostel allweg Grund und Bewahrung ihrer Predig und Lehre angezeigt haben. . . . Die Apostel waren voll Heiliges Geists, und waren gewiss, dass sie von Christo gesandt waren, und das recht Evangelion predigten: noch wurfen sie sich herunter, und wollten nicht, dass man ihn glaeuben solt, wenn sie es nicht gruendlich aus der Schrift bewaehreten, dass es also waere, wie sie sagten.<sup>59</sup>

It is clearly demonstrable: Luther demanded proof from Scripture. He believed in the proof-text method. In dispute Luther recommends: ". . . sprich nur also: Ich will dir Grund gnug aus der Schrift geben; willst du es glaeuben, so ists gut; willst du nicht, so will ich dir nicht mehr geben."<sup>60</sup> It is fitting that the Christian be "wohl geruestet mit Spruechen."<sup>61</sup> The weapon of the Word is adequate to suppress the objections of reason. "Aber ich danke meinem Gott, der mir die Gnad thon hat, dass ich von solchem Artikel [Trinity] nicht disputiere, ob er wahr sei und sich reime, sondern weil ich sehe, dass er in der Schrift so eigentlich gefasset und gegruendet ist, glaub ich Gott mehr, denn meinen eigen Gedanken und Vernunft. . . ."<sup>62</sup>

Luther thus believes that submission to the word of Scripture is

obedience to God. Brunner, however, feels constrained to keep his transcendent God at a safe distance from Scripture. He proceeds from the basis: ". . . keine Rede, kein Wort, dem Persongeheimnis Gottes adaequat ist."<sup>63</sup> The fact that the fullness of God's essence cannot be comprehended in words is indisputable. The question, however, has to do with the problem whether it is a necessary deduction that what is and can be stated of God in Scripture is unreliable because incomplete in that it is not exhaustive in its description of the divine essence. Brunner's argument may be paraphrased: Since words are not adequate to describe the fullness of God's being, words cannot properly be called the revelation. The real revelation is something beyond the letter of Scripture, namely, the divine-human encounter. It was not unknown to Luther that the fullness of God exceeds the power of words. *Desine frustra contendere ad videndam faciem Dei.*<sup>64</sup> Nevertheless, though revelation is not complete, it is accurate as far as it goes. *Ex Deo non revelato fiam revelatus, et tamen idem Deus manebo.*<sup>65</sup> The difference between Brunner and Luther is obvious. Whereas Brunner is unwilling to implicate the divine majesty in the Scriptures, Luther is concerned to rouse from the lethargy which fails to recognize God in the humble word. "Denn do ist kein Engel, noch hundert tausend Engel, sondern die goettliche Majestaet selbst. . . ." <sup>66</sup> Luther's respect for God's majesty does not frighten him away from the proof-text method.<sup>67</sup>

Only one conclusion is possible. Brunner's views cannot be harmonized with those of Luther. Juxtaposition of the summary of the view of each clearly discloses the irreconcilable breach between the two. Brunner: "Und auch das Schriftliche . . . ist nicht als Schriftliches, das heisst ein fuer allemal Festgelegtes und dadurch Hervorgehobenes gemeint. . . ." <sup>68</sup> Luther: "Solche Sprueche leiden keinen Lochbohrer."<sup>69</sup>

Brunner has endeavored to apply his "Wahrheit als Begegnung" concept also to his presentation of Scriptural authority. It has been his purpose to avoid the pitfalls of objectivity and subjectivity. That he has not objectivized the truth may be conceded. But he has definitely involved himself in the uncertainties and vagaries of subjectivism. The divine-human encounter does not yield the sturdy, durable stuff needed for Christian doctrine. What the individual

theologian experiences in Christ as the *principium cognoscendi* is personal and will differ.

One example will clearly illustrate. In his evaluation of Barth's doctrine of predestination, Brunner appeals to Scripture. "Aber eines werden auch sie nicht bestreiten koennen: dass damit Karl Barth . . . zur klaren Lehre des Neuen Testaments in schneidenden Widerspruch geraet."<sup>70</sup> In reply, Brunner's own words are sufficiently demolishing: "Und auch das Schriftliche ist nicht als Schriftliches, das heisst ein fuer allemal Festgelegtes . . . gemeint." With the authority of the Word undermined, the doctrine of predestination cannot be certainly established. Only relativism and subjectivism remain where "Wahrheit" is found in "Begegnung" and not in the written revelation. Nor can Luther be claimed for an understanding of Scriptural authority which has admittedly excised one part of the Reformation emphasis and so reworked what is left that the issue is a relativism in doctrine condemned by Luther in no uncertain terms. In the interests of accuracy the records should be kept straight by the frank admission that the principles of "Wahrheit als Begegnung" as applied to Scriptural authority are indeed "neue Erkenntnisse,"<sup>71</sup> strictly those of Brunner and not in any vital connection with Luther.

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#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. For example, Philip S. Watson writes: "His [Luther's] quarrel with Rome . . . was not so much about the authority, as about the interpretation of Scripture." *Let God Be God! An Interpretation of the Theology of Martin Luther*, Philadelphia, Muhlenberg Press, 1948, p. 174.
2. Cf. Emil Brunner, *Die christliche Lehre von Gott, Dogmatik*, Band I, Zuerich, Zwingli-Verlag, 1946, pp. 114—115.
3. Emil Brunner, *Offenbarung und Vernunft, Die Lehre von der christlichen Glaubenserkenntnis*, Zuerich, Zwingli-Verlag, 1941, pp. 118—119. In separating himself from orthodoxy on this point, Brunner is voluble and sometimes vehement. He charges the orthodox doctrine with having barred men from the kingdom of God. Cf. *Das Wort Gottes und der moderne Mensch*, Zuerich, Zwingli-Verlag, 1947, p. 44. Similar statements are scattered throughout his various writings.
4. *Offenbarung und Vernunft*, p. 126. "Seine Lehre von der Bibel ist ganz die traditionelle, formal-autoritaere." *Die christliche Lehre von Gott*, p. 117. For a bolder attempt to claim Calvin for the dialectic understanding of Scripture compare Karl Barth, *Die kirchliche Dogmatik*, Zuerich, Evangelischer Verlag, 1944 ff., I, Zweiter Halbband, p. 560 ff.
5. Several examples will illustrate. A. C. McGiffert alleges that Luther transferred the seat of authority to the "enlightened conscience of the individual

- Christian." *Martin Luther, the Man and His Work*, New York, The Century Co., 1919, p. 144. Edwin Lewis carries his conclusions farther than Brunner and makes even Calvin a representative of a more liberal view of Scripture. *The Creator and the Adversary*, New York-Nashville, Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1948, pp. 119—120. Heinrich Bornkamm concludes: "Sein [Luther's] Glaube an Gottes Wort bedurfte der Kruecke des Inspirationsdogmas nicht." *Luther und das Alte Testament*, Tuebingen, J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1948, p. 161. On the other hand, there are those who with the post-Reformation orthodox writers regard Luther as the proponent of a verbally inspired Scripture. Thus Th. Engelder, *Scripture Cannot Be Broken*, St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 1944, p. 31 ff. Franz Pieper, *Christliche Dogmatik*, I, 334 ff. It is interesting to note that the Neo-Calvinism of Holland criticizes Barth for rejecting Verbal Inspiration. Cf. Th. L. Haitjema, "Der Kampf des hollaendischen Neu-Calvinismus gegen die dialektische Theologie," *Theologische Aufsätze, Karl Barth zum 50. Geburtstag*, Muenchen, Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1936, p. 583.
6. For an elaboration of this fundamental thesis see Brunner's book *Wahrheit als Begegnung, Sechs Vorlesungen ueber das christliche Wahrheitsverständnis*, Zuerich, Zwingli-Verlag, 1938. Translated by Amandus W. Loos under the title, *The Divine-Human Encounter*, Philadelphia, The Westminster Press, 1943.
  7. See the brief but instructive foreword of Brunner, *Die christliche Lehre von Schoepfung und Erloesung, Dogmatik*, Band II, Zuerich, Zwingli-Verlag, 1950.
  8. *Op. cit.*, 284.
  9. *Die christliche Lehre von Gott*, p. 17. See also pp. 21, 185. For a more detailed elaboration consult *Offenbarung und Vernunft*, p. 117 ff.
  10. *Die christliche Lehre von Gott*, p. 18. Cf. *Offenbarung und Vernunft*, pp. 95—117. *Die christliche Lehre von Schoepfung und Erloesung*, p. 102.
  11. *Das Wort Gottes und der moderne Mensch*, p. 128.
  12. *Die christliche Lehre von Gott*, p. 23.
  13. *Wahrheit als Begegnung*, pp. 87, 88.
  14. *Die christliche Lehre von Schoepfung und Erloesung*, p. 299.
  15. *Op. cit.*, 402.
  16. *Meditationes Sacrae, Lipsiae*, Sumt. Joh. Frid. Gleditschii B. Filii, 1728, p. 50. At the request of the editor, translations of lengthier Latin quotations are included. "Faith, however, is not naked opinion and profession, but living and efficacious apprehension of Christ as set forth in the Gospel; it is the most full persuasion of the grace of God, the trusting quiet of our heart and peace resting in the merit of Christ. This faith is born of the seed of the divine Word; for faith and spirit are one, and the Word is the vehicle of the Holy Spirit: the fruit follows the nature of its seed. Faith is a divine fruit, and therefore a divine seed ought to be present, namely, the Word."
  17. *Die christliche Lehre von Schoepfung und Erloesung*, p. 402.
  18. The presentation of Gerhard's position is based not only on the quotation from his *Meditationes*, but also on various sections of his *Loci*.
  19. WA, XIV, 560, 13. Quoted, Karl Holl, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kirchengeschichte*, I. *Luther*, Tuebingen, Verlag von J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck). Sechste Auflage, 1932, p. 551. "The warning I have frequently given I repeat here and I shall again admonish that the Christian reader devote primary attention in searching out that meaning which is commonly known



as the 'literal' sense. This alone is the whole substance of faith and Christian theology. It alone stands in tribulation and temptation and conquers the gates of hell together with sin and death and triumphs to the praise and glory of God."

20. WA, VI, 307, 7 ff. Quoted *ibid*.
21. WA, V, 647, 2. Quoted *ibid*. "For how will you teach a sure faith when you make the meaning [viz., of Scripture] uncertain?"
22. EA, Op. Lat., Gal. 2, 180. "Nowhere can it be discerned what God desires, what pleases Him, except in His Word. This makes us sure that God has cast aside all wrath and hatred toward us, since He has delivered His only-begotten Son for our sins."
23. EA, Op. Lat., Var. Arg. 3, 466. "God has promised; God cannot lie. Neither the statements nor the deeds of God deceive. . . . Indeed, this is the most serious sin of all, to think that God lies both in His Word and in His sign and work."
24. *Das Wort Gottes und der moderne Mensch*, p. 44.
25. *Offenbarung und Vernunft*, pp. 166, 172. *Wahrheit als Begegnung*, p. 131. *Die christliche Lehre von Gott*, p. 40.
26. *Die christliche Lehre von Gott*, p. 55.
27. *Op. cit.*, 53. *Offenbarung und Vernunft*, pp. 166, 272.
28. *Die christliche Lehre von Gott*, p. 116.
29. *Ibid*.
30. *Ibid*. More quotations expressing the same sentiment are to be found in *Offenbarung und Vernunft*, p. 168.
31. References to Luther's critical remarks on the canon are guarded and hesitant. Cf. *Offenbarung und Vernunft*, pp. 128 ff., 273. This is understandable. "How can Luther's opinion about a non-canonical book change our findings concerning his attitude toward the canonical books?" Martin Reu, *Luther and the Scriptures*, Columbus, Ohio, The Wartburg Press, 1944, p. 44.
32. Cf. Franz Pieper, *Christliche Dogmatik*, I, 353 ff. There has apparently been no fundamental change of tactics in the attempt to claim Luther for a loose understanding of Scriptural authority since the time of Pieper's work.
33. *Op. cit.*, 358.
34. *Loci*, I, 26. Because of the importance Brunner himself attaches to the testimony of the Spirit, the quotation is given in greater fullness. "First, there is the inward testimony of the Holy Spirit, who, as He bears testimony to the spirit of believers that they are the sons of God, thus also He efficaciously convinces them that in the Scriptures there is contained the voice of the heavenly Father and God alone is the fit and authentic witness. To this testimony belong the living experience of the pious in their daily prayer and exercises of penitence and faith, the power of comforting and establishing the mind against adversities, temptations, and persecutions of every kind, etc. This power, believers experience daily in their reading of and meditation on Scripture."
35. *Loci*, I, 25. "For how will the sons of the Church be able to doubt concerning the truth of the foundation on which the Church rests? How can they question the authority of the divine Word contained in the Scriptures who in their own hearts have themselves experienced the power and efficacy of the Word and acknowledge that through it they have been regenerated unto eternal life?"

36. *Die christliche Lehre von Gott*, p. 52. Cf. pp. 57, 117, and *Offenbarung und Vernunft*, p. 271.
37. WA, 26; 450, 21 ff. Quoted, Ernst Sommerlath, "Luthers Lehre von der Realpraesenz," in *Das Erbe Martin Luthers und die gegenwaertige theologische Forschung*, Leipzig, Verlag von Doerffling & Franke, 1928, p. 328.
38. St. Louis, XX:788.
39. Martin Luther, *Ausfuehrliche Erklaerung der Epistel an die Galater*, Berlin, Verlag von Gustav Schlawitz, 1856, p. 133.
40. EA, Op. Lat., 6, 269. "At this point it may be asked again, why does the Holy Spirit write these trifles?"
41. *Op. cit.*, 287. "On account of these fanatical opinions the Holy Spirit writes such childish things and household matters."
42. EA, 45, 317.
43. EA, Op. Lat., 18, 270. "Thus the deeds and words of this Moses are to be adjudged divine and to be considered words of the Holy Spirit."
- 43a. Cf. *Die christliche Lehre von Gott*, pp. 117—118.
44. *Ibid.*
45. Karl Barth, "Ansatz und Absicht in Luthers Abendmahlslehre," *Die Theologie und die Kirche*, Evangelischer Verlag, A. G. Zollikon, Zuerich, n. d., p. 73.
46. EA, 49, 169. Cf. Th. Engelder, "*Haec Dixit Dominus*," *CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY*, July and August, 1947, pp. 484 ff. and 561 ff.
47. EA, 51, 486.
48. St. Louis, XI:162.
49. *Die christliche Lehre von Gott*, p. 51.
50. *Op. cit.*, 54.
51. EA, 51, 326.
52. *Op. cit.*, 345—346. Luther carried out this principle in his translation of the Old Testament. "Luther hat beim Deuten und Uebersetzen dem Alten Testament das Evangelium gleichsam in die Blutbahn [circulatory system] gespritzt, dass es sich darin fast von selbst und bis in die feinsten Verastelungen [veins] breitet." H. Bornkamm, *Luther und das Alte Testament*, p. 185.
53. *Die christliche Lehre von Gott*, p. 55. Cf. *Die christliche Lehre von Schoepfung und Erloesung*, pp. 286, 291, 420.
54. *Ibid.*
55. *Ibid.*
56. *Die christliche Lehre von Gott*, p. 118.
57. *Offenbarung und Vernunft*, p. 124.
58. "Evangelion aber heisset nichts anders, denn ein Predig und Geschrei von der Gnad und Barmherzigkeit Gottis. . . ." EA, 51, 326. *Sic vocale verbum recte appellatur verbum Domini*. EA, Op. Lat., 19, 243. *Porro in speculatore vox requiritur*, EA, Op. Lat., 23, 127. "Denn durch die muendliche Predigt des Worts . . . richtet unser Herr Gott dies alles aus in seiner Christenheit." EA, 39, 93. "Aber das hats gethan, dass Gott dennoch allezeit Prediger gegeben hat, und das Wort ausgebreitet, dass es durch den Mund und Ohren der Seinen gegangen ist." EA, 49, 170.
59. EA, 51, 350. St. Louis, II, 177 f.
60. *Op. cit.*, 452.
61. *Ibid.* Cf. also pp. 349, 389.

62. EA, 2, 342.
63. *Die christliche Lehre von Gott*, p. 19. "Die Offenbarung ist jetzt nicht mehr ein Wort, sondern Er selbst, der zwar auch 'das Wort' heissen kann, aber nicht so heissen muss, der mit keinem dieser Begriffe ausgesagt werden kann, weil er, als Person, selbst ueberbegrifflich ist." *Op. cit.*, 29.
64. EA, Op. Lat., 6, 294.
65. *Op. cit.*, 293.
66. EA, 47, 221.
67. Brunner's strictures on the incompleteness of the Biblical revelation can be turned against the revelation he himself espouses. After the divine-human encounter it still needs to be said that God "als Person, selbst ueberbegrifflich ist." Not only is it true that "keine Rede, kein Wort, dem Persoengeheimnis Gottes adaequat ist," but it is equally true that no "Begegnung" is adequate to bring exhaustive knowledge of God.
68. *Offenbarung und Vernunft*, p. 124.
69. EA, 2, 343.
70. *Die christliche Lehre von Gott*, p. 377. A glaring instance of the subjectivity of Brunner's approach is to be seen in his discussion of angelology. Doubt and difficulty are associated with the existence of angels because human experience in this area is limited and rare. "Aber wer von all diesen Glaebigen koennte bezeugen, dass er persoendlich um die Existenz von Engeln wisse? Wer von denen, die 'an die Engel glauben,' wuerde diesen Glauben anders begruenden koennen als so, dass er an sie glaube, weil die Schrift ihre Existenz lehre?" *Die christliche Lehre von Schoepfung und Erloesung*, p. 154. Once the dike of Scripture has been perforated by subjectivity, it is difficult, if not impossible, to keep all from being swept away in the torrent that inevitably develops. When the monster of uncertainty is pastured in the garden of the Word, it is not content to graze on weeds. Anyway, there are none. Cf. Brunner's own dissatisfaction with Bultmann's "Entmythologisierung," *op. cit.*, 311 ff. And yet Bultmann operates substantially with principles Brunner himself allows. Cf. also Bultmann's essay "Das Problem des Verhaeltnisses von Theologie und Verkuendigung im Neuen Testament," in *Aux Sources de la Tradition Chrétienne*, Neuchatel, Delachaux & Niestle, 1950, p. 32 ff. Professor Bente's warning that rejection of Verbal Inspiration brings the floods of rationalism proves to be true. Cf. *Scripture Cannot Be Broken*, 1944, p. 405.
71. Foreword, *Die christliche Lehre von Schoepfung und Erloesung*. As an illustration of honest admission of dissatisfaction with Luther, attention may be called to Karl Holl's remarks in regard to Luther's belief in the unity of Biblical thought. "Luther fusst selbstverstaendlich auf der Ueberzeugung, dass die Bibel in allen ihren Teilen einen und denselben Sinn habe. Unter diesem Zwang deutet er das, was ihm in der Bibel das Wichtigste geworden war, das paulinische Evangelium, auch in die Psalmen hinein. Er merkt nicht, dass er damit dem Text die schwerste Gewalt antut. Die Psalmen predigen ja wie das ganze Alte Testament die Selbstgerechtigkeit. . . ." *Gesammelte Aufsaezle* I, 549—550.