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EMIL BRUNNER'S THEOLOGY OF REVELATION

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Emil Brunner's life-long preoccupation[1] with the theology of revelation resulted from what he considered to be a twofold deformation of the biblical concept of revelation:

[1]Revelation was a partner-theme with faith in Brunner's first two works of protest against the theology of the nineteenth century: *Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube* (1921) and *Die Mystik und das Wort* (1924). Again in 1925, revelation was the theme of a small work, *Philosophie und Offenbarung.* In *Der Mittler* (1927), revelation dominates almost every page, for one of its main aims is to show that the Person of Christ *is* the unique revelation. In the same year appeared the *Religionsphilosophie evangelischer Theologie*, which is a confrontation of the Christian concept of revelation with Rationalism, Subjectivism, Historicism and Orthodoxy. The works *Gott und Mensch* (1930), "Die Frage nach dem 'Anknüpfungspunkt' als Problem der Theologie," *Zwischen den Zeiten* 10 (1932), "Gesetz und Offenbarung," *Theologische Blätter* 4 (1925), "Die andere Aufgabe der Theologie," *Zwischen den Zeiten* 7 (1929), and finally the work in which they all culminated, *Der Mensch im Widerspruch* (1937), are all, in whole or in part, attempts to expose and develop a Christian anthropology, and thus be able to define the relation between the natural man and the revelation in the Word of God, i.e., *der Anknüpfungspunkt* for God's revelation. Brunner's answer to Karl Barth in *Natur und Gnade* (1934) was a clarification of his views on natural revelation. His short work, *Vom Werk des heiligen Geistes* (1935), indicates how the "once-and-for-all" historical revelation in Jesus Christ is made present to all generations, or in Kierkegaard's terminology,

(1) a deformation by Protestant liberal theology that compromised its uniqueness and transcendence; (2) a petrification by the orthodox theology of Protestantism and Catholicism which transformed revelation from a living encounter into an object, either the Bible or a deposit of propositional truths. Against the first deformation, Brunner insists that the biblical conception of revelation is absolutely unique and differs radically from that of non-biblical religions. Against the second, he underlines the personal nature of the Christian revelation as event, and the impossibility of expressing its full meaning in an abstract definition independently of its manifold and concrete forms.

THE BIBLICAL CONCEPT OF REVELATION

Despite his insistence that the biblical concept of revelation is totally different from that of non-biblical religions, Brunner willingly admits that both notions contain certain elements in common. This is the reason why the same word can be used for both, for revelation is always and everywhere "a process, by means of which something previously closed to man is opened up; through which something mysterious is made known in a mysterious manner. It is always knowledge which comes from outside the formal sphere of knowledge, and which man cannot gain by himself but which is given to him, which unexpectedly and suddenly has meaning in his life, either for salvation or for damnation."[2]

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how all men are made *gleichzeitig*, contemporaneous with the revelation in Christ. The six conferences that appeared in 1938 under the title *Wahrheit als Begegnung* are an attempt to illustrate, in the personalistic categories of Ebner and Buber, the significance for Christian theology of the biblical concept of truth as the event that occurs when man in faith meets God in His revelation. In 1941 appeared *Offenbarung und Vernunft*, dedicated entirely to exploring the Christian concept of revelation. Finally, his views have received clarification on many points in the three volumes of the *Dogmatik* (1946, 1950, 1960).

[2]Emil Brunner, *Offenbarung und Vernunft* (Zürich: Zwingli Verlag, 1941), 24 (all translations from this source are the author's own).

Thus Brunner enumerates six elements which are always to be found in the general notion of revelation:

1. The negative presupposition that something is hidden from man, that man is somehow in darkness, cut off from what is to be revealed.
2. The mysterious manifestation of something formerly hidden.
3. The communication of a very special and extraordinary kind of knowledge; the opening up of a new dimension of knowledge.
4. The significance of this knowledge for man's life.
5. The unexpected nature of the new knowledge which can only be the result of an unawaited gift.
6. The supernatural character of the event as an abrupt "intrusion from another dimension," which distinguishes it from the ordinary course of events.[3]

These six elements are also contained in the biblical understanding of revelation. But Brunner points out that here they receive an entirely new meaning, because here and here alone are they understood absolutely and personally; here and here alone do they receive a double qualification which makes them personally absolute and absolutely personal.[4] In the biblical revelation, therefore, even the common elements are understood in a radical and unique fashion which has a parallel nowhere else. Only biblical revelation possesses this radical meaning, because only biblical revelation means God manifesting himself as a Thou, as a Subject, in dialogue with man through prophetic word and historical event. "Everywhere else God is understood as being either not absolute or not personal."[5]

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[3]Brunner, *Offenbarung und Vernunft*, 24-32; Emil Brunner, "Theologie und Kirche," *Zwischen den Zeiten* 8 (1930), 398.

[4]Brunner, *Offenbarung und Vernunft*, 24.

[5]Emil Brunner, "Theologie und Ontologie," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 12 (1931), 116 (author's own translation).

Consequently the six elements common to all revelation are transformed in biblical revelation in the following manner:

1. In biblical revelation, the negative presupposition of man's isolation in darkness becomes the absolute and personal darkness of sin. This darkness does not merely affect man's knowledge, but his entire being. Man is not merely in darkness, but his darkness is self-made. He himself has turned off the light.
2. The mysterious manifestation of that which was hidden is radically transformed by the fact that the biblical revelation is the absolute and personal manifestation of the personal and absolute Mystery, the Lord God, who can only be known by self-revelation.
3. The knowledge communicated in the biblical revelation is so radically different from what men ordinarily call knowledge that Brunner hesitates to call it knowledge. a) It is not the knowledge of "something" over which I have become lord, but the knowledge of an Absolute Person who communicates himself as man's Lord. b) It does not merely enrich me with a new content of knowledge, but it transforms my whole being. c) It does not leave me alone with the object of my knowledge, but creates communion with God and my neighbour.
4. Biblical revelation does not merely give a knowledge which is significant for life. It brings Life itself. The darkness which revelation dispels is sin and death and corruption. The light it brings is salvation and life, communion with God and participation in his own life.
5. The biblical revelation is absolutely unexpected. It is the absolute paradox, for it is the revelation of that which ought not to be expected because it is contrary to all rational human expectation: God's forgiving love for a rebellious and unloving creature.
6. Finally, the biblical revelation differs totally from all other revelation by its radical *Einmaligkeit*, its absolute uniqueness. The revelation of God in Jesus Christ is the absolutely

> unique event that has taken place once and for all, and that, by its very nature, cannot and need not be repeated. All the other forms of biblical revelation are either foreshadowings or reflections of the absolutely unique event which is the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, whose central point is the atoning death of God's Son on the cross. The entire process of biblical revelation in all its forms shares in the *Einmaligkeit* of this central event, according to varying degrees.[6]

A final observation that Brunner makes concerning the biblical understanding of revelation explicitates the subjective aspect of this revelation. Revelation in the Bible is not merely an objective event, independent of the subjective reception of it by man for whom it is intended. Revelation in its full and proper sense includes a subjective illumination which makes possible a personal reception of the objective communication. Of course, Brunner does not prohibit the use of the word "revelation" to designate the objective event, considered independently of the subjective revelation. But when this is done it must also be remembered that this is an improper way of speaking. The full biblical understanding of revelation is a unity composed of objective forms and their subjective reception. Brunner finds that this subjective side of revelation, i.e., the subjective reception of the objective revelation, is designated in the New Testament by the word *pistis*, faith. Therefore, to fully understand what the revelation in Jesus Christ means, we must also understand what faith is.[7]

THE FORMS OF THE BIBLICAL REVELATION

As has already been noted, Brunner maintains that the biblical

[6]Brunner, *Offenbarung und Vernunft*, 24-33; idem, "Theologie und Kirche," 399-401.

[7]Brunner, *Offenbarung und Vernunft*, 33-34; Emil Brunner, *Dogmatik* I (Zürich: Zwingli Verlag, 1946), 23 (all translations from this source are the author's own).

revelation cannot be adequately expressed in an abstract definition. It can only be comprehended by studying its concrete forms. Only by viewing the characteristic diversity of these many forms in their relation to one another can we fully know the nature and unity of biblical revelation. The original revelation in creation, the historical revelations in the Old and New Dispensations, the revelation as witness to the revelation in Christ through the Bible, through the Church, and through the Holy Spirit, and finally the revelation in glory, these are the forms of the revelation that must be studied in order to comprehend the rich reality which is the biblical revelation.

1. The original revelation in creation. The first form of the revelation was the revelation given in creation, the original revelation. This revelation is present to all men in two forms: the created world as the manifestation of divine omnipotence and wisdom, and man created according to God's image. It was the insistence of Brunner on the reality of such a revelation which occasioned his break with Barth between 1934 and 1935. Brunner had always taught that there is an objective revelation of God in the created world and in man created in God's image. But at the same time he has always denied that man can obtain a valid and genuine subjective knowledge of this objective revelation apart from the historical revelation in Christ.

Brunner's explanation of the necessity of admitting this original revelation begins with the fact that God's historical revelation in the prophets and in Christ does not come to man who is without knowledge of God of any sort whatever. It comes to men who are sinners, and therefore, concludes Brunner, to men who know God but who have turned away from him. It does not come to ignorant and guiltless man, but to guilty and therefore knowing man. The fundamental statement that both Testaments make about the "natural" man, i.e., the man who has not yet been touched by the Word of God, and reborn through it, is that he is a sinner. But in saying that, the Bible is telling us that the natural man, both heathen and atheist, exists in a negative relation to God. Sin in the Bible is always a negative relation to God, a turning away from the Creator. But this in turn implies and presupposes that man originally possessed a positive relation to God which he denied and repudiated. It implies, therefore, an original revelation. To deny

this would lead to a denial of sin, or to the distortion of its meaning as a free, responsible act of repudiation, and to deny sin in this sense would be to deny the Christian significance of the unique revelation in the Person of Jesus Christ. But above all, argues Brunner, it is impossible to deny the reality of the objective original revelation so clearly attested by Saint Paul in the Epistle to the Romans and by the entire Christian tradition.

Yet despite this objective revelation of God in creation, despite man's possession of an intellect bestowed precisely that he might recognize God as manifested in the works of creation, man does not and cannot truly know God from this objective revelation. Man possesses no true and valid natural knowledge of God because he has deformed the original revelation by his sin. In fact, man's sin consists precisely in this, that he suppresses the knowledge of God that arises in him through God's original revelation, so that the revelation God has given him for a true knowledge of himself becomes for man the origin of his idolatry. The only effect of the primitive revelation is to place man continually before God, although he cannot perceive God as he really is. Man could not be a sinner if he did not know God in some deformed way from the original revelation, but because he is a sinner, and in so far as he, as a sinner, remains in self-isolation, man cannot know God correctly. His knowledge is as perverted as his heart. Thus the original revelation makes man responsible for his sin, but it has no meaning for man's salvation. Sin has made man blind to that which is visibly set before his eyes. This is the dialectical teaching that Brunner finds in Saint Paul's letter to the Romans (Rom. 1:18-21). Precisely because men do not want to recognize God who has manifested himself so clearly, Paul teaches that men are without excuse.[8]

Now, in fact, only the believer in Jesus Christ, with the guidance of Scripture, can see in creation the true God and not idols. The only

[8]Brunner, *Offenbarung und Vernunft*, 53-78; idem, *Dogmatik* I, 19-20; Emil Brunner, *Natur und Gnade* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1935), 12-14, 46 (all translations from this source are the author's own).

revelation which saves man from his sin and opens for him the path to God is the historical revelation of the Old and New Testaments. According to the teaching of Brunner, these two forms of the revelation constitute a unity in diversity. The revelation of the Old Testament is necessary for the understanding of the New Testament revelation in Christ. It is the same Word of God that reveals himself in different ways in the Old and New Testaments, and the two economies of revelation are related to each other in the same way that what is preparatory is related to what is definitive, or as prophecy is related to fulfillment. For this reason Brunner affirms, in opposition to Bultmann, that without the Old Testament revelation the Word of God of the New Testament is unintelligible.

2. The historical revelation of the Old Testament. In the revelation of the Old Testament, history and historical events take on decisive importance, for here the Word of God has entered history. This is not to be understood in the sense of the liberal theologians who taught that God manifests himself always and everywhere in history. Brunner means that the God of the Old Testament, who elsewhere does not manifest himself in history at all, does reveal himself at special points in history, in a chain of particular events, where the prophetic word and the act of God are fused into an indissoluble unity. The prophetic word is based on the revelatory act of God, and the revelatory act of God in history culminates in the prophetic word. Finally, the prophetic word possesses a creative power which produces and determines historical events, for the Word of God is itself an event, an in-breaking from the other side, a marvellous coming which is not in man's power and control.

At the same time, according to Brunner, the prophetic word occupies a special place in the revelation of the Old Testament, for even in his actions in history, God wishes to tell us "something," and it is only in an articulated and intelligible word that the act of God attains its perfection as divine revelation. Furthermore, since the prophetic word is always the self-manifestation of the God who comes and who is advancing towards a goal, it is always messianic, even when it does not expressly announce the final Messianic Kingdom, for it is always a

"coming," a presence, a revelatory movement of God, coming to man in and through the prophetic word and the historical event, revealing the sovereignty and the love of God, and establishing the Kingdom of God in community with him.[9]

Nevertheless, this revelation was incomplete, for the Word of God was not present in person. In the Old Testament revelation, Word and event were still distinct. Though the prophetic word designates a Person and makes him known, it does not make him present in person.

3. The historical revelation in Christ. This complete and perfect revelation took place in the historical revelation in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is *the* revelation, the totality of revelation, for in him the Word of God is personally present, revealing the Father. Jesus Christ is not a mere genius with a wholly original thought, nor a messenger bearing to men a general truth of reason, as the liberal theologians would portray him. He is not merely a very original teacher, nor merely a perfect model and exemplar of what he taught. He is the perfect and complete revelation because he is himself divine. He alone stands on the other side of the boundary beyond which only God can stand, and today, in opposition to Bultmann, Brunner continues to insist that that which alone makes Jesus Christ the perfect revelation of God is his divinity, his identical nature with the Father, the fact that he himself is "from above," from true transcendence, who "came" and became man.[10]

Like all the theologians who originally formed the so-called dialectical theology school, Brunner was at first mainly preoccupied with safeguarding the transcendence of this revelation in Christ from all historical pantheism. In this early reaction to historicism which he saw ascribing a revelatory character to history as such, Brunner

[9]Brunner, *Offenbarung und Vernunft*, 82ff.; Emil Brunner, *Das Ewige als Zukunft und Gegenwart* (Zürich: Zwingli Verlag, 1953), 33f (all translations from this source are the author's own).

[10]Emil Brunner, *Dogmatik* II (Zürich: Zwingli Verlag, 1950), 411-414.

so emphasized revelation as an inextended act of God, irrupting into history from above at an inextended point in history, that he obscured the fact that the historical life of Jesus is a necessary element of the revelation. In making use of Kierkegaard's term "incognito" to describe the humanity of Jesus, he frequently left the impression that the historical humanity of Christ was *only* an incognito. It is true that even at this time he also admitted that the historical life and action of Jesus, including his teaching, was an element of the revelation.[11] But the fact remains that at this earlier stage, Brunner manifested too little interest in the Jesus of history and the historical life of Jesus as essential to the revelation.

Althaus criticized him on this point,[12] and Brunner recognized the justice of the criticism.[13] He has come to realize that an adequate expression of the revelation in Christ must not merely emphasize revelation as a divine act from above, but must also give proportionate attention to the effects of that act of God in history. He now teaches clearly that the human nature and life of Jesus is not only an incognito (though it is also that) but that it is an essential part of the revelation. The revelation is the Person of Christ with his history.[14]

What Brunner said earlier needed saying. History as such is not revelation. He was also correct in noting that the history of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, could be mistaken for the history of a mere man, and therefore that the humanity and history of Jesus were not a direct revelation of God, but an indirect revelation, and a true incognito. However, his frequent denials that the history and humanity of Jesus were in themselves the revelation were open to the misinterpretation that the humanity of Jesus and his history were in no way revelation.

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[11]Emil Brunner, *Der Mittler* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1927), 371.

[12]Paul Althaus, "Brunner's 'Mittler': Zur Aufgabe der Christologie," in *Theologische Aufsätze* II (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1935), 169-182.

[13]Brunner, *Offenbarung und Vernunft*, 280.

[14]Brunner, *Dogmatik* II, 427; idem, *Dogmatik* I, 40.

In this dialectical theology stage, he was afraid that by uniting the history of Jesus too intimately with the revelation of God he would be relativizing the revelation of God and betraying its transcendence. Today he sees that in the history of Jesus divine revelation is not relativized by history, but that the history is here absolutized by the divine revelation, by union with the Word. "How is that possible? How can the relative receive an absolute meaning? It *can* not receive it, but it *has* it because and wherever it is, at one and the same time, relative-human-temporal-terrestrial and also divine-absolute, the presence of God, eternity in time, heaven on earth."[15]

This is what has taken place in Jesus Christ. At a point of the relatively unique history which the historian describes, the Absolute has united himself with a human history. At one point the relatively unique and the absolutely unique are identical. Jesus *is* the Christ.[16] Jesus Christ *is* the Christian revelation.

Brunner believes that his most original contribution consists in the application of the category *Einmaligkeit*, uniqueness, to the revelation in Christ. The revelation in Christ is absolutely unique, and at the same time absolutely decisive, because it alone is at one and the same time a relatively unique event (like all other purely historical events) which is identical with the absolutely unique event of eternity in time. It is only here that the God-man is man-God. It is this absolute *Einmaligkeit* of the Christian revelation, which by its very nature can only take place once and for all, that separates it from all historical pantheism and from all mythology.

Brunner has pointed out that Bultmann has completely failed to understand the significance of this *Einmaligkeit* of the Christ-event as an event in the historical *continuum*, i.e., that there is a point in the historical *continuum* which is *at the same time* historical fact *and* God's personal

[15]Brunner, *Das Ewige als Zukunft und Gegenwart*, 44.

[16]Brunner, *Das Ewige als Zukunft und Gegenwart*, 44-45.

revelation. He believes that Bultmann is still under the influence of Lessing's dictum concerning the relative nature of *all* historical events, and he blames Bultmann's excessively critical reduction of the New Testament narratives on this deficient understanding for *das Einmalige* as an event in the historical continuum. Consequently, by speaking of God as acting only in the sense that he acts for me here and now, Bultmann is open to the objection of being in danger of eliminating the historical action of God *once and for all* on behalf of the whole world in Christ.[17]

From all that has been said it is clear that for Brunner the revelation in Christ is a Person. "Therefore, He, this Person, is the true Word. He Himself is the communication of God."[18] "Where God reveals Himself to me in His Word, there it is not a question of 'something'. In His Word, God does not hold a dogma class with me; He does not expose or propose a confession of faith to me, but He opens to me Himself."[19] "The revelation of God in Jesus Christ is not itself a doctrine (*Lehre*), but a Person with its history."[20]

The question, therefore, naturally arises: What is the relation between doctrine and personal revelation in the revelation in Jesus Christ? Brunner expresses this relationship in a dialectic of two statements. The first part of this dialectic we have already seen. "The incarnation of the Word, the entrance of God into our human condition ... that is the genuine revelation.... Therefore, ultimately, it is not a question of words, not even of divine words, but of the Word that he himself, Jesus Christ, is. Because he, himself, is the Word of God, all words have merely an instrumental meaning. Neither the spoken word,

[17]Brunner, *Dogmatik* II, 314-315.

[18]Emil Brunner, *Wahrheit als Begegnung* (Zürich: Zwingli Verlag, 1938), 82 (all translations from this source are the author's own).

[19]Brunner, *Wahrheit als Begegnung*, 62.

[20]Brunner, *Dogmatik* I, 40.

nor its conceptual content is the thing (*Sache*) itself, but its 'frame', its container, and its instrument."[21]

The second part of the dialectic tells us that we cannot possess Jesus Christ, the content, the thing itself, the personal revelation except in this container. The frame is necessarily bound up with its content. Without the doctrine, the thing itself is not present for us. "God tells us 'something' in order to be present as the Lord and the Father in the Son through the Holy Spirit."[22] Even the most personal encounter with the personal revelation, Jesus Christ, which Peter experienced at the Sea of Galilee, involved doctrine which had to be grasped conceptually: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God." Though it is true that God does not hold a dogma class with us, nor propose to us a confession of faith, still "He does authentically teach us about Himself."[23] Brunner concludes that we can never separate the conceptual container from the personal presence contained in it. "We know that we can never have the one without the other, and we know at the same time that the important thing is to have this one in this other. Certainly the doctrine is related to the Word of God as sign and container; as instrumental and subservient to the thing itself; to real personal communion with God."[24] Doctrine is inextricably bound up with the personal revelation Jesus Christ himself. Yet only Jesus Christ is the revelation. Brunner consistently refuses to call doctrine revelation.

4. Revelation as witness to the revelation in Christ through Scripture. We who are not the contemporaries of Jesus Christ can only have access to this absolutely unique and personal revelation of God through the witness of the apostles. We only possess him in their witness to him. This should not be surprising. The revelation in Christ is an historical revelation. It is of the very nature of an historical

[21]Brunner, *Wahrheit als Begegnung*, 82.

[22]Brunner, *Wahrheit als Begegnung*, 83.

[23]Brunner, *Wahrheit als Begegnung*, 83.

[24]Brunner, *Wahrheit als Begegnung*, 83.

revelation that it can only reach later generations through the testimony of eyewitnesses.

Furthermore, Brunner finds that the written fixation of this testimony is implied in the nature of the historical revelation as such. "Only through its written fixation could the word of the apostles as the founding word, be set in confrontation with the living, oral word of the later Church as the founded word."[25] In order to preserve the original witness of the apostles in all its purity, it had to be fixed in writing. This alone could preserve it from distortion and contamination in the living stream of historical tradition. All later oral tradition and witness of the Church must have its source and norm in this written, original tradition of the New Testament canon precisely in order to preserve the genuinity of the tradition itself.[26]

Brunner warns, however, that the Scriptures are not the absolute norm, nor are they to be simply identified with the Word of God, for the normative authority of Scripture is conditional and relative. The absolute norm and authority is the revelation itself, Jesus Christ himself, who reveals himself to us by means of and in the witness of Scripture. We are unconditionally bound to Scripture as the medium of revelation for us. We are only conditionally bound to the authority of the witness of Scripture, i.e., on condition that and in so far as it bears witness to Jesus Christ himself. "Scripture is an absolute authority in so far as in it the revelation, Jesus Christ himself, is present there (*zur Geltung kommt*)."[27]

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[25]Brunner, *Offenbarung und Vernunft*, 124-125.

[26]Emil Brunner, *Dogmatik* III (Zürich: Zwingli Verlag, 1960), 69 (all translations from this source are the author's own). "Der neutestamentliche Kanon ist das von der Christusgemeinde geschaffene Gefäss, in dem die Urtradition gesammelt, bewahrt und gleichzeitig von der späteren Tradition als norma normans von der norma normata unterscheiden wird" (Brunner, *Dogmatik* III, 69).

[27]Brunner, *Dogmatik* I, 57; cf. 53-57.

For the same reason, Brunner objects to orthodox Protestantism's simple identification of the word of Scripture with the word of God. He concedes that the designation of Scripture as the "Word of God" was correct in the sense that it recognized and underlined the fact that the witness of the Scriptures is an authoritative form of the revelation, which is inseparable from the revelation in Christ, for the Scriptures are the mediating witness to the revelation in Christ, the true Word of God, and as such are a special form of the revelation.[28] But orthodox Protestantism went too far in identifying the human word of the Bible with God's Word and God's revelation by its teaching concerning the verbal inspiration of Scripture, in the sense of infallible divine dictation. Brunner admits that the biblical writers benefited from divine inspiration and from the guidance of the Holy Spirit. But this inspiration was not of such a nature as to exclude all human activity and research, nor even human weakness and capacity to err. Certainly it could happen that the inspiration and interior witness of the Spirit was perfectly received and mirrored by the human spirit, so that the "echo" in Scripture perfectly corresponds to the word whose echo it is. But it could also happen and did happen that this correspondence did not take place. The apostles could err and did err, for the human spirit can more or less fail to echo and reflect the witness of the divine Spirit.

Thus Brunner affirms that the apostolic witness in Scripture does possess a divine foundation in inspiration, "but nowhere does it raise the claim to be inspired *eo ipso* because it is apostolic witness, or in its entire extent and in all its particulars."[29] All the varied witness of the apostles are repeated attempts to express ever more adequately that which can never be fully expressed in human words: the revelation which God has given in the person of Jesus Christ. All their witness stands in a circle about Christ and points to him. Brunner compares

[28]Brunner, *Dogmatik* I, 22.

[29]Brunner, *Dogmatik* I, 36.

the Bible to a funnel, every point on whose surface is orientated toward the centre. This centre is Christ. Not everything stands in the same relation of proximity or of importance to the one who is really intended by all of Scripture. But the closer a statement of the Bible is to this point, the closer it is to him who is the real meaning of the Bible, and therefore the more important it is for the personal encounter in faith.[30] The Scriptures, therefore, are not to be identified directly with the Word of God, for they are at the same time a human word, and therefore are afflicted with all the infirmity and imperfection of all that is human. They are, as Luther wrote, "The crib in which Christ (the Word of God) lies."[31]

Brunner's teaching that Scripture is the witness to the revelation in Christ does not mean that the Scriptures are mere records of a revelation that has taken place. They themselves are a special and unique form of the revelation, for in them God himself, through the illumination of the apostles by his Spirit, provides us with the meaning of his unique and historical revelation in the life, suffering, death and resurrection of his Son. "The sending of the Son is one thing; the illumination of the apostles about the mystery of His Son is another; God has revealed Himself fully in His Son; but this revelation would not reach us without the sending and illumination of the apostles, who bear witness concerning Him."[32]

Brunner, therefore, in opposition to Barth, teaches that the Bible, as inspired interpretative witness to the revelation in Christ, is itself revelation in some objective sense. He admits with Barth that in the final and full sense of the word, revelation can only be an act, the act of God speaking to me here and now. Yet he insists that there is another side to the biblical concept of revelation that Barth did not see. This other side is the exact opposite of revelation as act. It tells

[30]Brunner, *Wahrheit als Begegnung*, 85-86.

[31]Brunner, *Dogmatik* I, 40.

[32]Brunner, *Offenbarung und Vernunft*, 134.

us that God speaks with me here and now through the Holy Spirit on the basis of that, and by means of that which he has already spoken in Jesus Christ and the apostles. This implies what Barth refused to recognize, that there is "something 'revealed' or, as he (Barth) perhaps would say: *Offenbartheit.*"[33] This *Offenbartheit*, continues Brunner, is the Bible. He concedes that the Bible only becomes the Word of God for *me* through the present action of the Holy Spirit. But he insists that it is the word of the Bible which becomes God's word for me, and that it can only do that because it already *is* God's word in some sense.

Brunner compared the relation of the Bible to God's revelation in act, or actual revelation, with the relation of a phonograph disc to the music which has been engraved upon it, and which can be produced from it again. "It [the Bible] is a 'record'; an act that has become a substance. It is fixed and unchangeable; it is a portion of the world; it is available for everyone, even though its aspect as revelation (*Offenbarungssein*) is not at everyone's disposal. That which is at everyone's disposal, i.e., the bible-book with its fixed meaning, is that which God uses in order to say His personal Word to me today."[34] In this respect, Brunner appears to be closer than Barth to the "traditional" reformation conviction according to which the forms and means in which and through which God chose to reveal himself, and to which he freely but expressly bound the revelation, retain their character as revelation, even when they are not recognized as such.[35]

However, it must be noted that most recently Brunner has again placed the emphasis on God's Word as a present event for the believer in a manner similar to Barth. "Only God's communication of Himself to me is God's Word ... God does not teach us 'about' this and that. He opens Himself to me and by that fact also makes me open to Him.

[33]Brunner, *Natur und Gnade*, 35.

[34]Brunner, *Natur und Gnade*, 35.

[35]Willem van de Pol, *Das reformatorische Christentum in phänomenologischer Betrachtung* (Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1956), 165.

That is the meaning of the 'Word of God' as it meets me in the bible. It is an 'I-Thou' Word. It does not allow itself to be universalized or objectivized. God's Word is no 'something', no objective 'in-itself', but it is a transitive event, a promise and a claim. The bible is not 'in itself' the Word of God...." " ... the word of the bible only becomes God's Word, when God Himself speaks to us."[36]

The question remains, therefore, whether Brunner today would still subscribe to the qualifications he formerly made to Barth's doctrine concerning revelation as the act of God speaking to me here and now in and through Scripture. He has not repudiated his former position explicitly. But neither has he repeated it in his most recent clarification of the relation between the Word of God and the word of Scripture in the third volume of his *Dogmatik*. It could be that while still admitting that the Bible is in a "certain objective sense" the Word of God, he finds it embarrassing with his theory of inspiration to explain this "certain objective sense" in a more accurate and less confused manner. He would prefer therefore to insist more on the other aspect of his doctrine: that the Scripture does not become the Word of God *for me* in the full sense, except when God himself by the Holy Spirit makes me certain of his immediate presence and permits me to hear his "Thou"-word, so that it meets me here and now in a completely personal manner.[37]

5. Revelation as witness to the revelation in Christ through the Church. The revelation in Christ and in the Scriptures is transmitted to men of all ages through the living witness of the Church. Because Jesus Christ is the living and present Lord of the Church, "his revelation is a living present event in the Church and through the Church."[38] The proclamation of the revelation in Christ by the community of the faithful living in union with Christ through the Spirit (the *Ekklesia*) is

[36]Brunner, *Dogmatik* III, 274; cf. 281.

[37]Brunner, *Dogmatik* III, 274.

[38]Brunner, *Offenbarung und Vernunft*, 135.

itself a form of the revelation. This preaching of the Church becomes living revelation whenever God wills to vitalize it with his Spirit.

It is the essential function of the *Ekklesia* to bear witness to the revelation in Christ in which God manifested his own nature to be communicating love. It exists for the sake of this witness. The Church is primarily nothing else than the organ and bearer of the Good News by its preaching and proclamation. "Everything which serves this proclamation is church, and it is nothing else than this function which makes church to be church: preaching existence as the historical continuum of the revelation."[39]

In using the word "preaching" (*Verkündigung*), Brunner does not restrict its meaning to verbal preaching. It is for this reason that he employed the phrase "preaching existence." There is question here not merely of proclaiming words, but of carrying to future ages the life in which God communicated himself. For this reason, Church is "every form of historical life which has its source in Jesus Christ, and in which the self-communication of God continuously takes place."[40] The Church is the bridge and the *continuum* for the historical revelation in Christ, not merely because it bears the word concerning the Christ down through the ages, but also because it carries his Spirit and life as communicated by him to his first *Ekklesia.* The Church, therefore, is both the organ for proclaiming the word concerning Christ, and at the same time the place where he makes himself present.

Consequently, the *Ekklesia* bears witness to Christ in two ways: through its word and through its life. It is only in the unity of witness by its word and witness by its life that the *Ekklesia* can perfectly fulfill its function of historically mediating God's revelation in Christ to men. Genuine tradition, as the *continuum* that binds the unique, historical revelation in Christ with the present, is the preaching existence of

[39]Brunner, *Dogmatik* III, 17; cf. 159.

[40]Brunner, *Dogmatik* III, 18.

the brotherhood of the faithful which mirrors the preaching of the apostles and the life of the original *Ekklesia* as recorded in the biblical canon.[41] It is this preaching existence of the *Ekklesia* which makes known the revelation that occurred in Christ, that announces the revelation to come in glory, and that, while doing so, becomes itself faith creating revelation—*ubi et quando visum est Deo.*[42]

6. Revelation as witness to the revelation in Christ through the Spirit. All the forms of the revelation that we have encountered thus far have been revelation in the objective sense. In all these forms, revelation is something outside of me, and because of this fact they are not revelation in the full sense of the term. "For revelation is not a 'something', a thing, but an occurrence, an event, involving us and in us."[43] The receiving subject is always an essential and integral part of the full reality of "revelation" in its full and proper sense. Unless the objective form of the revelation becomes a revelation for someone, it is abortive. It remains merely an attempt at revelation. Without faith, revelation in the full sense of the term has not really taken place.

The passage from the objective form of the revelation to the complete revelation in and for the subject is effected by the illumination of the Holy Spirit. By means of this illumination of the Spirit, the historical distance and exteriority of the revelation in Christ, Scripture and the Church are overcome. By this one act of enlightenment, I become contemporaneous with Christ just as Peter was, and in a way that Caiphas who refused to believe was not. The revelation is no longer outside of me, but now speaks interiorly to me through the Spirit. "It is God making Himself present to me; the experience of the presence of God in His Word. Here faith and experience are one.

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[41]Brunner, *Dogmatik* III, 160; 18-19.

[42]Emil Brunner, "Der Zweck der Verkündigung," in *Sinn und Wesen der Verkündigung* (Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1941), 44.

[43]Brunner, *Dogmatik* I, 23.

That I can believe is the same thing as that I experience God's presence in His Word; that I experience Christ's Lordship over me."[44]

Corresponding, therefore, to the historical revelation and accompanying it is the Holy Spirit, "the interior revelation and self-presence of God."[45] It is only through this interior and personal presence of God through the Holy Spirit that the historical revelation becomes known. Faith is no mere recollection of a past event, but experience of *Him Who* is present in his revelation.

Brunner defines "Holy Spirit" as the mode of God's existence (*Existenzweise*) through which he is interiorly present to us and operates in our mind and heart. He sees the primary and decisive effect of the operation of the Spirit to consist in making present to us the Christ, who in the apostles' testimony to Jesus as the Christ confronts us as a fact of the past. It is the operation of the Holy Spirit which transforms the word about Christ into the Word of God. "The Holy Spirit in the New Testament meaning of the term is the presence of God witnessing to the historical Christ as a living and personal presence, and making Him effective as living and personally present."[46]

To this mysterious interior illumination of the human spirit by the Holy Spirit corresponds, on the part of man, that act by which man receives the revelation, the personal act of man which is given to man in the illumination itself. In the New Testament, Brunner finds this subjective aspect of revelation clearly summarized in the word *pistis*, faith. *Pistis*, translated by Brunner as "trusting-obedience" (*Vertrauensgehorsam*), is described as the personal answer of self-surrender to the Word of God, in which the divine self-communication first achieves its goal, and also in which true communion between God and man first begins. *Pistis* implies the personal recognition of the Lord as Lord, obedience, and the personal acceptance of God's

[44]Brunner, *Offenbarung und Vernunft*, 167-168.

[45]Brunner, *Dogmatik* I, 226.

[46]Brunner, *Dogmatik* III, 26.

prodigal love in a grateful return of love. Faith is total self-surrender on the basis of, and in reception of, the unconditioned self-surrender of God.[47]

Thus faith is, Brunner admits, "first of all an act of knowledge (*Erkenntnis*) ... the awareness of the revealing God ... the *Aufgeschlossenwerden* for the revelation," which "is itself revelation."[48] But this act of personal knowledge, which is such a very unique kind of knowledge that Brunner hesitates to call it knowledge, is at the same time an act of acknowledgement that Christ is the Lord, in obedience and submission, and because in this act of personal encounter with the Lord he is recognized as absolutely selfless, prodigal love, this obedience of faith is deepened to include trust, which Brunner calls the heart of faith.[49]

Therefore, faith for Brunner is wholly and completely a personal relation: "My trusting obedience to Him whom I encounter as my gracious Lord."[50] "The self-disclosure of the gracious Lord in the 'I', and the obedient trusting surrender of the previously self-centred 'I', are the two sides of the same event."[51] "The faith of the Christian has no other object than Jesus Christ, God in His personal revelation."[52] Faith, therefore, is an act *sui generis*, which does not take place in the dimension of "I-something," or in the dimension of "I-truth," but in the dimension of love, the dimension of "I-Thou." Faith is not belief in a teaching, but in Jesus Christ himself, who in the proclamation of the Good News takes possession of our hearts and overpowers them

[47]Brunner, *Wahrheit als Begegnung*, 52.

[48]Brunner, *Offenbarung und Vernunft*, 35-36.

[49]Brunner, *Offenbarung und Vernunft*, 36.

[50]Brunner, *Offenbarung und Vernunft*, 37.

[51]Brunner, *Offenbarung und Vernunft*, 37.

[52]Brunner, *Offenbarung und Vernunft*, 38.

as the truth and reality of God. In faith Christ is present, revealing himself as the living Lord.[53]

However, Brunner tempers this teaching by admitting that though ultimately faith is not a "thinking about something," but personal encounter, this personal event is inseparably united with a conceptual content which can be the object of thought, with truth in the ordinary sense of the term, truth as knowledge, knowledge as the perception of an object or of a fact, for God only communicates himself to us in such a way that at the same time he tells us the truth about himself. We can only enter into communion with him, and we can only surrender ourselves to him, by believing "that which" he says to us. Jesus Christ is only present to us "in, with and under" the doctrine concerning him. We can never separate the conceptual form and framework from the personal presence contained in the form. But we must clearly distinguish them.[54]

The presence and operation of the Holy Spirit in the heart of man does not make man completely passive in faith, the mere stage for the action of God. "Faith is certainly a gift of God, but it assuredly is not an *action* of God, in the sense that God would be the one who believes in us."[55] Faith is unequivocally an act of man, even though it is at the same time a gift of God and a work of the Holy Spirit. Spirit never works upon spirit in any other way than by calling forth the self-activity of understanding and will. "The communication of the Spirit in the New Testament is always personal, and therefore is to be understood according to the analogy of a dialogue, not according to the analogy of a causal process. Faith is response, answer to God's Word, a personal act...."[56] "God does not believe; God does not obey; God does not

[53]Brunner, *Dogmatik* III, 199.

[54]Brunner, *Wahrheit als Begegnung*, 83-85.

[55]Brunner, *Dogmatik* III, 27.

[56]Emil Brunner, *Vom Werk des heiligen Geistes* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1935), 43 (all translations from this source are the author's own).

say: Abba, Father. But God causes me to do it."[57] "That our own decision is *God's gift*, and precisely in that fact *our decision*—that is the marvel of the Holy Spirit."[58]

It is only in faith, which God alone produces in man, that the self-manifestation, self-revelation and self-communication of God attain their goal. Only when God's being-for-us and man's being-for-God (*Für-Gott-Sein*) become one, does that occur which every self-manifestation of God properly intends: the establishment of his influence in the creature, the recognition by the creature that he is the God of Love, and the gift of the creature's love in return. Brunner believes that if we oppose revelation and faith to one another as "content" and knowledge of this content, we do not fully appreciate what happens in faith. Here faith and its content no longer permit themselves to be distinguished. Faith itself is what is intended in the revelation. "In ipsa fide Christus adest," repeats Brunner after Luther. The certitude of divine sonship is nothing else than God himself speaking in us—that which the New Testament calls the presence of the Spirit. Revelation attains its goal and perfection in the fact that man now only listens, i.e., that he allows God alone to speak in him. It is only here, in the ὑπακοὴ πίστεως, in the "listening from below," that revelation is complete.[59]

7. The revelation in Glory. The completion and perfection effected by the Holy Spirit in faith is necessarily relative and temporary, for the revelation in Christ in all its forms orientates the believer towards the revelation in the future at the end of time—toward the *parousia* of the Lord, the unveiled presence of him whose presence is now veiled. Although God has already come in Christ and in the Spirit, although the faith is already a possession of him, nevertheless,

[57]Brunner, *Vom Werk des heiligen Geistes*, 45.

[58]Brunner, *Vom Werk des heiligen Geistes*, 46.

[59]Brunner, *Dogmatik* III, 200-201.

this coming awaits its consummation, and this possession in faith is at the same time an expectation of the living God who is leading history to its goal. This goal of God's movement toward men is his self-glorification and self-communication through his perfect presence to man in personal encounter. We cannot believe in Jesus Christ, the revelation of the Father, without at the same time believing in the revelation in glory. "As the Word of God, He is the revealed plan and decision of God. In Him, God reveals the goal of mankind and of the world. To believe in Jesus Christ is to believe in this goal."[60]

Only from this final revelation, where the perfect presence and encounter are effected, can we understand the intention of every form of revelation and its meaning. Revelation is never merely a communication of knowledge, but life-giving and life-creating communion, and perfect revelation in glory is perfect communion through the complete presence of God with us, and the complete presence of man with God in Jesus Christ. It is in Jesus Christ, at his *parousia* and *apokalypsis*, that we shall see God face to face.[61]

Brunner insists on this point because he accuses Bultmann's demythologizing of having effected a de-kerygmatization.[62] The essential Christian message does not merely tell us that God will act in the future through the fulfillment of human life, as Bultmann teaches.[63] The essential Christian eschatological hope is that God will act in the future in the presence (*parousia*) of the risen and glorified Christ. It is this action that Brunner insists must be assured.

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[60]Brunner, *Offenbarung und Vernunft*, 196.

[61]Brunner, *Dogmatik* I, 24.

[62]Brunner, *Dogmatik* III, 452.

[63]Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology* (London: SCM Press, 1960), 77; Rudolf Bultmann, "Die Christliche Hoffnung und das Problem der Entmythologisierung," in Rudolf Bultmann, *Glauben und Verstehen* III (Tübingen: Mohr, 1960), 90.

EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION

The attention given to revelation in the theology of Emil Brunner and of other modern Protestant theologians has provided a stimulus to Catholic theologians[64] that has even reached the level of the textbook.[65] The result has been a deepening and enrichment of our understanding of a concept that had all too often been taken for granted. Too frequently, Catholic theologians have emphasized revelation as supernatural truth in too exclusive a manner, while paying slight attention to revelation's character as event and to its personal nature as encounter between God and man. Not that what they said was not true, but it called for complementation, and provided an apparent excuse for the Protestant misunderstanding of the Catholic conception of revelation. Karl Rahner has noted that: "In the 'school-theology', in opposition to modern Protestant and Catholic biblical theology, revelation is, as a matter of course, treated as a purely educational revelation in the form of propositions, and not as an eventful revelatory action in which God deals creatively and graciously with man, and in so doing, speaks his Word as an interior element of his action upon man; or (expressed more biblically) in which this action is God's Word, because God's Word essentially effects what it says."[66]

Consequently, Brunner's theology of revelation with its emphasis upon revelation as the unique event of God's personal self-disclosure in Jesus Christ in order to effect personal encounter with his creatures

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[64]Cf. for example: Michael Schmaus, *Katholische Dogmatik* I (Munich: Hueber Verlag, 1960), 7-22; idem, *Katholische Dogmatik* III-1 (Munich: Hueber Verlag, 1958), 751; Otto Semmelroth, *Gott und Mensch in Begegnung* (Frankfurt: Knecht Verlag, 1958), 43ff.; Werner Bulst, *Offenbarung* (Düsseldorf: Patmos Verlag, 1960), 55ff.

[65]Albert Lang, *Fundamentaltheologie* I (Munich: Hueber Verlag, 1962), 46-53.

[66]Karl Rahner, "Wort und Eucharistie," in Karl Rahner, *Schriften zur Theologie* IV (Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1960), 316 (all translations from this source are the author's own).

in faith has much to recommend it to the Catholic theologian seeking to restate more adequately his own theology of revelation. The emphasis on sin as revelation's contrast and background; the stress on revelation as personal truth whose objective is not mere knowledge or instruction, but which demands self-surrender and transformation in faith; the application of the "I-Thou" categories of Ebner and Buber to this personal encounter between God and man; the original use of the category of *Einmaligkeit* to underline the unique character of biblical revelation; the appreciation of the history of revelation as the history of God's revealing acts; all these are to be counted among the not-so-small feathers in Brunner's theological bonnet, at a time when orthodoxy, both Protestant and Catholic, was placing the emphasis upon revelation as the communication of a list of doctrinal propositions.

Of course there are also a number of flaws in Brunner's synthesis concerning revelation, but it is not possible to deal with all of them in this article. However, the question must be raised whether Brunner's principal contribution has not also become his Achilles' heel. Has Brunner's reaction against the propositional conception of revelation betrayed him into an exaggerated personalism?

The answer would seem to be that despite Brunner's frequent use of exaggerated overstatement as a quasi-literary form, his underlying intention and meaning cannot be interpreted as an exaggerated personalism. For all his insistence that the revelation is the person of Jesus Christ, and that the truth of revelation is the truth of personal encounter with God in Jesus Christ in which we "become" truth, Brunner also makes it clear that this personal revelation "is inseparably linked with a conceptual content, with 'truth' in the ordinary sense of the word, truth as doctrine, knowledge as the interior perception of an objective reality. God only speaks to us and gives Himself to us in such a way that at the same time he tells us 'something', i.e., the truth about Himself; and we can only enter into communion with Him, we can only give ourselves to Him in trusting obedience by believing 'that which' He says to us."[67]

[67]Brunner, *Wahrheit als Begegnung*, 84-85.

In Brunner's conception, revelation is above all the personal presence of God in Jesus Christ who is made present to us through the Holy Spirit in the personal encounter of faith. But it is implied in the explanation given above that revelation is secondarily, and as a means to the primary end, a communication of truths concerning God and his saving Will, for "God tells us 'something', in order to be present as the Lord and the Father in the Son through the Holy Spirit."[68] In reaction to the exaggeration of Protestant orthodoxy, and in a rather arbitrary manner, Brunner insists on calling the primary element alone revelation. But this is principally a matter of terminology. He has already made it clear that the personal presence of God in the Person of Jesus Christ and the communication of truths are two necessarily connected elements in the single process by which God communicates himself to man. This is the essential, and this admission makes his restriction of terminology appear inconsistent.

If we do not agree with his terminology, we must agree with the order he assigns to the two elements that constitute God's revelation of himself to man, for "revelation is not, in its primary form, the communication of a determined number of propositions ... but an historical dialogue between God and man, in which something *occurs* ... and the communication refers to and is related to the occurrence, to the act of God.... Revelation is a saving event, and therefore, and in relation to this, a communication of truths."[69]

This action of God is the Word of God, the means by which God manifests himself and his saving Will to man at the same time that he communicates himself to man. This word whose culmination is the personal Word, Jesus Christ, "in its complete and original nature may not be conceived as a propositional instruction 'about something', nor as a mere intentional pointer to another reality."[70] Revelation is God's

[68]Brunner, *Wahrheit als Begegnung*, 83; cf. 82.

[69]Karl Rahner, "Zur Frage der Dogmenentwicklung," in Karl Rahner, *Schriften zur Theologie* I (Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1954), 59 (author's own translation).

[70]Rahner, "Wort und Eucharistie," 322.

personal and saving action in the historical event and prophetic word that attained its supreme expression in the person of Jesus Christ, which includes a communication of truth as an inner element, but which is not exhausted by this aspect. It is through their encounter with God in his personal presence in his saving events in history, of which the truths communicated are for the most part the interpretation and explanation, that men personally experienced in faith who God is and what are his plans for man.[71]

But if Brunner's underlying intention and meaning must be absolved from exaggerated personalism, his expression and terminology often obscure the fact that revelation is *also* a communication of truth. A stigma has been stamped upon viewing revelation as a communication of truths because of the inadequate way that this has been done in the past. Certainly revelation is not primarily a set of propositions, nor is revelation given to us as a mere addition to our store of theoretical knowledge. It is likewise erroneous to believe "that the revelation has been made to us without an intrinsic relation with the one and total reality which is Christ; that it has been delivered to us as a simple formulary in a series of propositions detached from this unique mystery and therefore, separated one from the other like majors of syllogisms all ready for our future reasonings."[72] It cannot be repeated too often that the revealed datum is primarily the incarnate Word. It is in him that the mystery of unity which is Christianity has been communicated in an intelligible way. He is the Life and the revelation of that Life. He is the mystery of the fullness of the gift of God, and the communication of that mystery. "As He is the donation of the trinitarian Life, He is also its revelation. He is the very Word made flesh, the Word that has become perceptible, the Son in whom the Father appears, in whom the Spirit makes Himself known, and who dwells among us."[73]

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[71]Schmaus, *Katholische Dogmatik* III-1, 751.

[72]Henri de Lubac, "Le problème du développement du dogme," *Recherches de Science Religiense* 35 (1948), 155 (author's own translation).

[73]Emile Mersch, *La Théologie du Corps Mystique* II (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1944), 72 (all translations from this source are the author's own).

But at the same time, it is true that the abstraction which separates the revealed message from the Person of the Revealer is a legitimate one: *abstrahere non est mentiri.* It is not only legitimate but even necessary to separate the global and substantial revelation in Christ into particular truths concerning the Trinity, the incarnate Word, the Church, etc., for the human spirit cannot assimilate and preserve the total truth presented in Christ except by actively analysing and dissecting it according to its own laws, by expressing it in clear and explicit terms.

Admittedly, it must never be forgotten that this process is one of abstraction from an object which is identical with the revealing Person, whose content we will never exhaust.[74] The light which is Christ has been broken and refracted into numerous propositions and formulae to direct and control the inner impulses of faith. As Brunner says, these propositions are the signs and pointers to the substantial revelation which is Christ himself. Each expresses a particular aspect of the inexhaustible riches of God's Wisdom disclosed in the incarnate Word. "The words, the revelation in formulas are the manifestation on the empirical plane of the substantial revelation which is Christ."[75]

The frequently too-exclusive identification of propositions and revelation should not blind us to the truth contained in this exaggeration. Formulas and propositions are not the substantial revelation which is Jesus Christ. But neither is the substantial revelation, the Person of Jesus Christ, the only element in the complex process by which God manifests himself to man, revelation. Jesus Christ is the primary element. This Brunner has emphasized well. He is not the only element, however, even though the other elements are secondary and derive their value from their intrinsic relation to him. As the explicitation of the significance of the action of God in Jesus Christ, propositions are a necessary and essential part of the revelation in its finished form.

In reality, there is no contradiction between Brunner's conception

[74]de Lubac, "Le problème du développement du dogme," 155, 156, 157.

[75]Mersch, *La Théologie du Corps Mystique* II, 113.

of revelation as a Person and the conception of revelation as being, in addition, a communication of truths, which Brunner eyes with suspicion. Each conception is true at its proper epistemological level. In the order of the concrete with its vital and existential character, the revelation is Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word. On the level of abstraction and of concepts, where the mind seeks to distinguish formal aspects of the unified and concrete reality, revelation finds expression in propositions and formulas, and is a communication of truths. Both levels are legitimate and necessary, for God's revelation to man is given on both levels. Consequently, an adequate explanation must consider both levels, in their proper order of importance and in their relation to one another.

It must be conceded, however, that Brunner's reaction to orthodox Protestantism in this respect was a healthy one, even though it may not have been expressed with sufficient care, for Christ is the most important element in Christian revelation, and the concrete, existential order is the order in which we must always begin, and the order to which we must always return. Otherwise, revelation will be erroneously conceived as having been given to us simply in order to add some new elements (admittedly very elevated and profound) to the store of knowledge that man has already acquired or can acquire by natural reason. Actually, revelation is the vehicle of a personal call to God's Kingdom, demanding a conversion of man's entire being in faith at the same time that it opens up for him new horizons into a whole new world.[76]

Nothing could be more disastrous than to reduce the concrete and personal revelation of God in Jesus Christ to the level of a class in scientific theology. The revelation of God in Christ is the personal self-disclosure of God that calls for personal acceptance in faith and love. Brunner has highlighted this aspect well. But just as personal self-disclosure implies a communication of "truth," so God's self-communication in Jesus Christ implies a communication of "truths"

[76]de Lubac, "Le problème du développement du dogme," 157.

in the form of propositions, and biblical truth that "becomes" implies truth that "is." Christian revelation is never an abstract system,[77] and yet it is also a communication of truth in and through the personal self-communication of God in the incarnate Word.

[77]Romano Guardini, *Die Offenbarung* (Würzburg: Werkbund Verlag, 1940), 118.