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Dialectic as Dialogue: Emil Brunner's Theology of Encounter

by

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Abstract

This thesis is an examination of Emil Brunner's theological epistemology, arguing that epistemic questions and concerns stand at the center of Brunner's entire theological project. One cannot properly understand Brunner unless they have attended to the epistemic concerns that his early work explores and to the epistemic claims that his later work makes, especially his understanding of 'truth as encounter.' *Encounter*, moreover, is a concept that Brunner formulates with assistance from the dialogical philosophy of Ferdinand Ebner and Martin Buber. Brunner is not understood based on his dialectical commitments alone but must also be read in light of his dialogical sensibilities – i.e., in light of the dialogical principles operative in his concept of encounter. Operating within a dialectical framework, Brunner utilizes dialogical philosophy to bring epistemic and personalist interests together under the doctrine of encounter.

The project starts by situating Brunner within a historical and conceptual context and follows with a descriptive analysis of Brunner's epistemic preoccupations as they developed across his career to arrive at the claim of truth as encounter. The final chapter moves beyond descriptive analysis into an exploratory application. Chapter 1 orients Brunner within an intellectual and historical context by clarifying the movement known as 'dialectical theology' based on its historical origins, theological commitments, and Brunner's self-understanding. Chapter 2 traces Brunner's early theological development between 1914 and 1924. This chapter highlights Brunner's early epistemic interests, intellectual influences, and ultimate disenchantment with the modernism of his youth. Chapter 3 takes up Brunner's claim that from 1925 onwards the dialectic of law and gospel stood at the center of his thought, showing how Brunner correlates these categories respectively with epistemic notions of the impersonal (law) and personal (gospel). Chapter 4 is an examination of Brunner's concept of *truth as encounter* which he claims to be the final 'lodestar' of his theological thinking. This chapter expounds on

Brunner's use of dialogical philosophy (esp. Ebner and Buber) to bring epistemic and personalist interests together under the doctrine of encounter. Chapter 5 builds on the dialogical logic operative in Brunner's concept of encounter and argues for the prospects of a dialogical theology – i.e., a mode of theological inquiry that explicitly utilizes the language and principles of dialogical thought. The outcome is a theological posture, a way of orienting oneself within theological inquiry that is acutely attuned to the possibilities and implications of one's relating to God, the world, and others. Herein, theology understands itself principally as a way of relating, holding only loosely to the authority and finality of its doctrine but firmly to the relationships in which it participates. This thesis utilizes the concepts of dialectic and dialogue to frame Brunner's theology around an epistemic center and, finally, suggests dialogical theology as a productive means for contemporary theological engagement. In this way, two contributions are made. First, a contribution is made to scholarship on Brunner by giving a more thorough and sustained examination of Brunner's epistemology than is otherwise available. Second, the proposal of a dialogical theology offers creative avenues for continued engagement with and beyond Brunner.

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This project is a study of the twentieth-century Swiss theologian Emil Brunner (1819 – 1966). Specifically, this study is interested in how Brunner understands and articulates the nature of truth. Brunner rose to prominence as a part of the early twentieth-century movement called dialectical theology. The dialectical theology movement developed in Germany and Switzerland and was deeply impacted by the social and political climate of Europe following the first world war. The theological commitments that emerged in this context had a lasting impact on Brunner's theology. In the second half of his career, Brunner was most deeply influenced by an intellectual tradition known as the philosophy of dialogue. In particular, his epistemology (i.e., his theory about the meaning of truth) was constructed based on the language and concepts that he found in this philosophical tradition. Brunner argued that the unique truth of the Christian faith was not contained in its theological statements about God. Instead, Brunner contended that, at the heart of the

Christian Bible, stands the concept of truth as encounter. Brunner believed that the Christian faith is established through encounters with God, and is best understood as a relationship with God. Brunner was able to make these claims by utilizing terms and ideas that he found in the philosophy of dialogue. Therefore, my thesis shows that Brunner should be read as an example of dialogical theology – i.e., a form of theology. that makes explicit use of dialogical reasoning. Finally, I argue that understanding Brunner in this way helps us think more clearly about relating to God, the world, and others in our contemporary context.

Contents

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Introduction

In 2006 the first full-length biography was published on Emil Brunner by Frank Jehle – *Emil Brunner: Theologe im 20. Jahrhundert*. Subsequently, a trio of monographs on Brunner appeared independently between 2013 and 2015. The first of these was David Gilland's *Law and Gospel in Emil Brunner's Earlier Dialectical Theology*; the second, Alister McGrath's *Emil Brunner: A Reappraisal;* and the third, Cynthia Bennett Brown's *Believing Thinking, Bounded Theology*. All of the above authors remark on the once great legacy and theological reach of Brunner which has been all but lost. Nevertheless, the very presence of these publications is evidence of renewed interest, however minimal. In different ways, these works contribute to deeper, more nuanced readings of Brunner and do much to recommend his continuing significance for the contemporary world. I am indebted to the work that has have done to interrupt the long drought in Brunner scholarship.

Notwithstanding my deep gratitude, it is necessary to differentiate my project and identify its particular contribution. In a 1955 article for *Japan Christian Quarterly*, Brunner states that the understanding of 'truth as encounter' became the 'lodestar' of his theological thinking in the second half of his career.[1] This confession is the point of origin for my thesis. I take this to mean that Brunner cannot be properly understood, on his own terms, without sustained attention to his notion of encounter. In the same article, he identifies the dialogical philosophy of Ferdinand Ebner and Martin Buber as foundational to the development of this epistemology. These two themes – Brunner's epistemology and the influence of dialogical philosophy – are the guideposts for my project. All other content derives from an interest in Brunner's early epistemic concerns, his later epistemic claims, and the place of dialogical reasoning within his thought.

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[1] Emil Brunner, 'A Spiritual Autobiography', *Japan Christian Quarterly*, 1955, p. 243.

These themes have been recognized and treated by others, but only as subpoints within much broader investigations of Brunner's theology. Here, Brunner's dialogical epistemology is the central and sustained motif that has guided the whole of my inquiry. In this way, I offer and more thorough investigation of Brunner's theology of encounter than is otherwise available. Furthermore, I will show that, by drawing on Brunner's dialogical reasoning, new avenues for imagining his contemporary significance emerge.

Another way in which my project separates itself from others is that it does not contain any section or chapter devoted to Brunner's relation to Karl Barth. In particular, I only give brief mention and passing notations on the 1934 published debates between Barth and Brunner. Barth is not altogether absent from my thesis; in fact, he makes frequent appearances. I affirm that Barth is an important influence and point of comparison for Brunner. Nevertheless, I have avoided foregrounding this comparison as previous authors have. Statements on Brunner's waning influence are almost always accompanied by observations about Barth's eventual eminence and its impact on this situation. This story remains valuable as a point of context. Nevertheless, even a favorable account defending Brunner against Barthian critiques can leave the impression that his legacy remains irrevocably tied to Barth. My thesis takes a small step in the direction of freeing Brunner's readers from the constraints of this comparison.

In Summary, this thesis is an examination of Emil Brunner's theological epistemology, arguing that epistemic questions and concerns stand at the center of Brunner's entire theological project. One cannot properly understand Brunner unless they have attended to the epistemic concerns that his early work explores and to the epistemic claims that his later work makes, especially his understanding of 'truth as encounter.' Encounter, moreover, is a concept that Brunner formulates with assistance from the dialogical philosophy of Ebner and Buber. Brunner is not understood based on his dialectical commitments alone but must also be read in light of his dialogical sensibilities – i.e., in light of the dialogical principles operative in his concept of encounter. Operating within a dialectical framework, Brunner utilizes dialogical

philosophy to bring epistemic and personalist interests together under the doctrine of encounter. This study begins by setting Brunner within a historical and conceptual context, then moves on to a descriptive examination of Brunner's epistemic preoccupations as they evolved over his career, culminating in his understanding of truth as encounter. The final chapter progresses from descriptive analysis to exploratory application.

Chapter 1 orients Brunner within an intellectual and historical context by clarifying the movement known as 'dialectical theology' based on its historical origins, theological commitments, and Brunner's self-understanding. Chapter 2 traces Brunner's early theological development between 1914 and 1924. This chapter highlights Brunner's early epistemic interests, intellectual influences, and ultimate disenchantment with the modernism of his youth. Chapter 3 takes up Brunner's claim that from 1925 onwards the dialectic of law and gospel stood at the center of his thought, showing how Brunner correlates these categories respectively with epistemic notions of the impersonal (law) and personal (gospel). Chapter 4 is an examination of Brunner's concept of truth as encounter which he claims to be the final 'lodestar' of his theological thinking. This chapter expounds on Brunner's use of dialogical philosophy (esp. Ebner and Buber) to bring epistemic and personalist interests together under the doctrine of encounter.

Chapter 5 moves toward an exploratory application of Brunner theology. This concluding chapter builds on the dialogical logic operative in Brunner's concept of encounter and argues for the prospects of a dialogical theology – i.e., a mode of theological inquiry that explicitly utilizes the language and principles of dialogical thought. The outcome is a theological posture, a way of orienting oneself within theological inquiry that is acutely attuned to the possibilities and implications of one's relating to God, the world, and others. Herein, theology understands itself principally as a way of relating, holding only loosely to the authority and finality of its doctrine but firmly to the relationships in which it participates. This thesis utilizes the concepts of dialectic and dialogue to frame Brunner's theology around an epistemic center and, finally, suggests dialogical theology as a productive means for contemporary theological

engagement. In this way, two contributions are made. First, a contribution is made to scholarship on Brunner by giving a more thorough and sustained examination of Brunner's epistemology than is otherwise available. Second, the proposal of a dialogical theology offers creative avenues for continued engagement with and beyond Brunner.

Chapter 1

Dialectical Theology: Historical Origins and Theological Distinctions

The following examination of Emil Brunner's theological epistemology shows that, while operating within a dialectical framework, Brunner utilizes dialogical philosophy to bring epistemic and personalist interests together under the doctrine of encounter. The starting point, therefore, is the so-called 'dialectical framework' within which Brunner operates. Although Brunner is often identified as a representative of the dialectical theology movement, it is not self-evident that dialectical is the best term for broadly capturing his theological commitments. However, by the mid-1920s, there were a few basic commitments in place which remained decisive throughout Brunner's lifetime and which, as will be shown below, are associated with the moniker dialectical. This opening chapter orients Brunner within an intellectual and historical context by defining the movement known as 'dialectical theology' based on its historical origins, theological commitments, and Brunner's self-understanding. This chapter forms the groundwork for the remainder of the project which will show how Brunner's dialectical commitments get extended and refracted through his engagement with dialogical philosophy, culminating in his doctrine of encounter.

Due to theological variance and disharmony, supplying a succinct and encompassing definition of dialectical theology is difficult. It is more accurate to speak in the plural regarding dialectical theolog**ies** rather than any singular mode of theolog**y**. Nevertheless, it will be prudent to represent, as far as is possible, both the diversity and

the continuity of dialectical thought. The plurality of language applied to the tradition presents a further difficulty. 'Theology of Crisis,' 'Theology of the Word of God,' 'Neo-Orthodoxy,' and 'Barthian Theology' are all titles that have appeared as synonyms for dialectical theology. However, it will be fitting to employ each of these titles and, in due course, to consider their potential divergence. The present preference for dialectical stems from the conceptual and linguistic proximity between dialectic and dialogue and suits my interest in Brunner's use of dialogical principles.

In its origins, dialectical theology was shaped as much by its historical and social context as by its theological commitments. For this reason, this chapter moves in two parts. The first section gives a historical sketch characterizing dialectical theology based on its origin – i.e., its emergence in a particular social context and set of relations. The second section turns to theological distinctions and highlights the tradition's thematic commitments. This means of assessment does not suggest two independent modes of definition. Instead, the historical and theological distinctions are two sides of the same coin, one dependent upon the other and mutually useful for clarifying the tradition known as dialectical theology. While this chapter represents the diversity and continuity of the dialectical movement, it does not intend to offer a comprehensive assessment. Instead, the current focus on Brunner will come through. Brunner's self-understanding of the dialectical tradition is given the final say in the assessment offered here.

I. Historical Origins

On its own, the term 'dialectic' is vague and obscured by the breadth of its application. I am not interested in giving an essentialist definition that would clarify or differentiate dialectic within its general usage. I am concerned with the theological movement that emerged in the German language world in the 1920s, centered loosely around Karl Barth, and is commonly labeled 'Dialectical Theology.' For this reason, it is important to begin with a historical and social location. I am concerned with the meaning

of dialectic in this precise context and, especially, with the relation of Emil Brunner to this movement and these ideas.

The narrowest historical boundaries for dialectical theology are offered by the publication dates of the journal *Zwischen den Zeiten* which promoted the movement and operated from 1923 to 1933. In its diversity, this enterprise developed prior to and persisted well beyond the publication of one journal. Nevertheless, *Zwischen den Zeiten* forms the axis around which dialectical theology takes its historical origin, especially in any cooperative form. The central figures in the journal's formation and its dissolution were Karl Barth, Eduard Thurneysen, and Fredrich Gogarten. Although not a part of the inner circle that founded the journal, Rudolf Bultmann contributed to every edition between 1925 and 1929. An assessment of historical origins requires reference to these figures. Because of their prominence, especially in Brunner's self-understanding,[2] Barth and Bultmann are of primary interest. Friedrich Gogarten, due to his role in the formation of the journal *Zwischen den Zeiten* and his influence on Bultmann's early dialectical thought, will also receive consideration. Due to the present focus, others associated with dialectical theology who did not exert as much influence on Brunner (esp. Edward Thurneysen, Paul Tillich, and George Merz) are only mentioned in passing. Moving concentrically, Barth and Gogarten are placed at the center of the historical movement, and Bultmann will follow as a peripheral influencer. After a brief historical review of these figures and their place in the dialectical tradition, we will turn to Brunner.

a. Friedrich Gogarten and Karl Barth

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[2] In *Truth as Encounter*, Brunner describes his own project as 'theology beyond Barth and Bultmann.' In his self-understanding, and tied to his epistemology of *encounter*, Brunner views himself as offering a third option that moves beyond the opposing objective-subjective tendencies of Barth and Bultmann. - Emil Brunner, *Truth as Encounter,* 1963 edn (Philadelphia: Westminister Press, 1943). p. 41.

In James Robinson's introduction to *The Beginnings of Dialectical Theology* – a collection of writings from the tradition selected by Jürgen Moltmann – he reiterates the point at hand. Robinson states, 'An expression coined by Schleiermacher to refer to Fredrick the Great and used by Barth to refer to Schleiermacher himself can equally well be applied to Barth: "It was not a school he founded, but an era."'[3] This claim reflects the inherent diversity within the dialectical movement as well as the truth that historical boundaries may be, in this case, more accessible than conceptual or theological distinctions. As is stated above, the publication of *Zwischen den Zeiten* (1923 – 1933) offers the narrowest historical boundaries. In his biography of Karl Barth, Eberhard Busch reports Barth's recollection of the journal's founding. The following quote is from a conversation between Barth and a group of students in Tübingen on March 2nd, 1964:

> There is a picture in which Thurneysen, Gogarten and I are sitting opposite one another on the day when we… founded this journal. At the time I had quite a large mustache, which suited me very well. Next to me was Gogarten, who also had a moustache – that was a legacy of the nineteenth century! I'm looking at him in a remarkably sharp and mistrustful way, while Thurneysen is sitting peacefully – clearly in between the two of us. There is much to be said for involving Gogarten in this journal. I did not want to say no. But I did not say yes from the bottom of my heart. I always smelt something about Gogarten which I did not quite like.[4]

It was mainly on the prowess of Barth and Gogarten that the dialectical movement flourished, and as Barth's recollection suggests, their growing disagreement was at the

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[3] James M. Robinson, ed., *The Beginnings of Dialectical Theology: Volume One,* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1968), p. 10.

[4] Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1976), p. 145.

heart of its demise. For this reason, a view from the center of the dialectical tradition must give special treatment to Barth and Gogarten.

Though Gogarten is less well known today, Robinson offers the reminder that 'originally his was a more prestigious voice than any other within the group.' Gogarten was a German Lutheran theologian and minister. From as early as 1911, Gogarten's engagement with Martin Luther and Søren Kierkegaard caused him uneasiness towards much of the prior liberal tradition.[5] In 1920 his well-known article 'Zwischen den Zeiten' was published in the leading journal of liberal theology, *Die Christliche Welt*, and announced his break from the prevailing theological traditions. This article, from which the journal *Zwischen den Zeiten* took its name, was an exercise in historical consciousness that implicated the disparate historical location of Gogarten's generation and especially its fundamental disconnect from the previous age. His opening line states, 'It is the destiny of our generation to stand between the times. We never belonged to the period presently coming to an end; it is doubtful whether we shall ever belong to the period which is to come.'[6] Because of such a stark severance, Gogarten contends that the theologians of the former era were entirely unequipped to understand, much less answer, the questions facing the present generation.[7]

Along with Gogarten's 'Between the Times,' his other essay of the same year, 'The Crisis of Culture,' was presented to the 1920 assembly of the '*Freunde der Christlichen Welt*' and must be noted for its force and influence. Larry Shiner reports that 'both these essays are not only a denial of theological liberalism but a rejection of

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[5] Larry Shiner, *The Secularization of History: An Introduction to the Theology of Friedrich Gogarten* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1966), pp. 193-194.

[6] Friedrich Gogarten, 'Between the Times' in Robinson, p. 277.

[7] Gogarten does not use the label 'liberal theology' but Shiner identifies 'Between the Times' as an attack on 'liberalism.' – Shiner, *The Secularization of History,* p. 197.; Gogarten describes the former theological era as one which sought to explain all things 'in terms of historical development,' to handle matters 'scientifically,' and immersed itself so thoroughly in the 'human element' that the human was mistaken for the divine. – Gogarten, 'Between the Times' in Robinson, pp. 278-280.

the entire nineteenth-century liberal view of the world with its confident faith in rationalism, social organization, and humanitarianism.' Moreover, Shiner suggests that Gogarten's 'The Crisis of Culture' 'stands along with Barth's *Epistle to the Romans* as a turning point in contemporary culture.'[8] Having published the first edition of his *Epistle to the Romans* in 1919, Barth furthered his impact and solidified his break with liberal theology later that year in the famous Tambach lecture.[9] The gathering at Tambach, intending to promote religious socialism, occasioned the first meeting between Gogarten and Barth. Commenting on the production of Gogarten and Barth during 1919 and 1920, John M'Connachie writes, 'Thus acting in complete independence, Gogarten and Karl Barth took, almost at the same time, the same decisive turning point which brought them into line with one another.'[10]

Although Barth and Gogarten were turning away from a prior (liberal) tradition, they had not yet settled on a new direction.[11] Barth's theology, especially, would continue to undergo revision, including the release of the second edition of *Romans* in 1922 and a consequential trilogy of lectures presented later that year in Elgersburg. In Busch's telling, it was in these 1922 lectures that Barth's dialectical theology began to take a concrete shape. The 'high point' of these was the final lecture, 'The Word of God

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[8] Shiner, *The Secularization of History*, pp. 195-196.

[9] Busch, *Karl Barth*, pp. 111-112;

[10] John M'Connachie, 'The Barthian School, III, Friedrich Gogarten', *Expository Times*, 43 (1932), p. 391

[11] The 'liberal' label requires qualification because it has become multivalent and caricatured. 'Liberal theology' was coined by Rudolf Bultmann to describe the theological opponent of the dialectical movement. It refers most specifically to a diverse German theological tradition with roots in Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Schleiermacher, and G.W.F. Hegel. This 'liberalism' shares certain ideals but is distinct from later liberal movements in the English-speaking world. – Rudolf Bultmann, 'Liberal Theology and the Latest Theological Movement,' in *Faith and Understanding*, V.I (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), pp. 28-52; Gary Dorrien, 'Theology in a Liberationist Liberal Spirit: A Post-Hegelian Perspective,' in *Liberale Theologie heute – Liberal Theology Today*, 1st edn. Lauster, Jörg, Ulrich Schmiedel, and Peter Schüz, eds. (Mohr Siebeck, 2019), esp. pp. 9-11.; Mark Chapman, 'The Past, Present and Future of Liberal Theology,' in *The Future of Liberal Theology*, Mark Chapman, ed. (Ashgate, 2002), pp. 3-17.

as the Task of Theology,' delivered on October 3rd. Busch writes that 'Barth's remarks again created a sensation and were regarded as the rebellion of a new generation against the old liberals… Barth found allies here in Bultmann and Gogarten.'[12] Subsequently, the founding of *Zwischen den Zeiten* (1923) gave 'dialectical theology outward form as a distinctive theological movement.'[13]

In the early 1920s, Gogarten and Barth both began using the language of 'crisis.' One of the ways that Barth's second edition of *Romans* moved beyond the first was its frequent use of the 'category of crisis,' alluding to the post-war European culture.[14] Alasdair Heron has summarized this time of crisis with its cultural, political, and theological associations:

> The most dramatic and explosive of these changes [changes in the first half of the 20th C.] was the devastating impact upon the social and political fabric of Europe of the First World War. It did not only transform the political and military map…. it hurled a black question mark against the confidence in the onward and upward progress of Christian civilization which had so strongly characterized Liberal Theology, and forced the bitter question whether the advanced theological thought of the nineteenth century as a whole had not been far too unaware of the darker side of human nature, too optimistic about innate human capacity for good, too willing to take contemporary culture as its own high evaluation of itself, and overall too disposed to take God for granted, and to assume that he was somehow simply 'given' in what it regarded as the highest ethical, spiritual and religious values of mankind.[15]

Heron presents a historical narrative that is central to the emergence of dialectical theology. The modern world, underpinned by assumptions of optimism and human

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[12] Busch, *Karl Barth*, pp. 139-140.

[13] Ibid, p. 147.

[14] Bruce McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 209.

[15] Alasdair I. C. Heron, *A Century of Protestant Theology* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1980), p. 69.

progress, was devastated by the violence and destruction of the First World War and further disenchanted by the aftermath of social and political upheaval. This historical viewpoint, whether or not entirely correct, was of inestimable importance to dialectical theology's self-understanding. Brunner and his contemporaries were trained and educated in intellectual traditions that were rooted in these no-longer-tenable modern assumptions. This moment of crisis was an unavoidable catalyst for theological change, and the category of crisis traded on this situation.

Despite the use of '*crisis*,' Bruce McCormack cautions against the designation of *Romans* II as 'theology of crisis,' arguing that Barth borrowed the cultural language to draw attention to a universal theological predicament: '*Romans* II reveals a careful attempt to subject the term "crisis" to a searching *theological* criticism… to employ it to speak of the dialectic of judgment and grace disclosed in the real event of revelation. In so far as an individual recognizes in the cross of Christ the word of divine judgment, she is placed in crisis.'[16] McCormack argues that Barth's use of *crisis* intended to draw attention away from historically relative predicaments and towards a universal eschatological dilemma.

However, the etymology of the 'crisis category' maintains its historical location even if Barth's conceptual distinctions did not intend to be so bounded. His wordplay with the language of *crisis* derived special gravitas by alluding to the present conditions which his theology intended to elude. Gogarten was more explicitly committed to addressing the particular historical conditions and boundaries of his day.[17] Shiner presents Gogarten's work as 'not only a denial of theological liberalism but a rejection of the entire nineteenth-century liberal view of the world,' Yet, 'Karl Barth did *not* reject political liberalism along with the liberal theology.'[18] That is to say, Gogarten was more conscious of reacting against a broader cultural, political, and theological moment in which a shared historical development and disintegration united these facets of the

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[16] McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectal Theology,* p. 212.

[17] Ibid, p. 213.

[18] Shiner, *The Secularization of History*, p. 196.

social world. Although embedded within the same social world, Barth focused his critical response more narrowly on the insufficiency of present theological systems.

Whether it be the explicit historical consciousness of Gogarten's sweeping criticism or the more focused theological critique of Barth and his attempt to supersede the present, dialectical theology gathered its force and owed its existence to the social conditions which gave birth to it. Even supposedly ahistorical theological claims were thrown into greater relief by the perceived inability of the liberal tradition to cope with the post-war disarrangement. Dialectical theology emerged from a moment of cultural and intellectual crisis in the German language world, with Barth and Gogarten as its original thought leaders. As editors and founders of *Zwischen den Zeiten*, they were the central actors in the advent of dialectical theology. The shared language and commitments of the dialectical group will be detailed below. However, Barth and Gogarten already represent two divergent approaches to how the moment should be addressed. Unity of ideas and harmony of temperaments were never markers of dialectical theology.

b. Rudolf Bultmann

Like Barth and Gogarten, Bultmann's way into the world of dialectical theology resulted from growing social disillusionment. In a 1919 letter to Walther Fisher, Bultmann wrote, 'Like nearly all Germans, I was convinced of our cause and believed in our victory at the start of the war; but from 1916-1917 on [I believed] in neither…. More and more, the corruption of the official culture and the middle class in Germany has also become clear to me.'[19] The time frame presented by Bultmann corresponds with the death of his younger brother Arthur who was killed in action in February of 1917 and his childhood friend Leonhard Frank suffering the same fate only five months later. At this time, the German defeat was also becoming a veritable certainty.[20] These occurrences

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[19] Rudolf Bultmann to W. Fischer, 23 June 1919, quoted in: Konrad Hammann, *Rudolf Bultmann: A Biography* (Salem: Polebridge Press, 2013), p. 96.

[20] Hammann, *Rudolf Bultmann,* p. 98.

are worth noting, but it is impossible to quantify their impact. As with Barth, Bultmann and his interpreters insist that the wartime context did not substantially affect the formation and development of his theology.[21] Instead, his explicit concerns remained directed at the insufficiencies of liberal theology.[22]

Bultmann first met Barth through the mutual acquaintance of Martin Rade, Marburg professor and publisher of *Die Christliche Welt*, and correspondence between he and Barth is available from as early as 1911.[23] Having not met previously, he and Gogarten were both in attendance at Barth's Tambach lecture in September 1919. One year later, in October 1920, Bultmann delivered his lecture 'Ethische und mystische Religion im Urchristentum' [Ethical and mystical religion in early Christianity].[24] This lecture was the opening address to the very same '*Freunde der Christlichen Welt*' assembly at which Gogarten delivered his 'The Crisis of Culture.' Bultmann's essay built its exegetical arguments on his criticism of liberal theology, especially its efforts to uncover the 'historical Jesus.' David Congdon has shown that the lecture evidenced engagement with Barth and Gogarten: 'Bultmann expresses appreciation for the "cultural critique" [*Kulturkritik*] that Barth's *Romans* I provides,' even though he did not find constructive assistance in Barth.[25] Bultmann was critical of the liberal tradition for allowing historicism to consume the 'spiritual content' of religion and equally critical of

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[21] See: Hammann, *Rudolf Bultmann,* p. 140; also: David W. Congdon, *The Mission of Demythologizing: Rudolf Bultmann's Dialectical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), pp. 86-87; and David Fergusson, *Bultmann* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1992), p. 23.

[22] Bultmann was the first to use the precise term 'liberal theology' in identifying the theological opponent of the dialectical movement. – Bultmann, 'Liberal Theology and the Latest Theological Movement,' in *Faith and Understanding*, V.I, p. 28.

[23] Hamman, *Rudolf Bultmann,* p. 78.; see also: Christoph Schwöbel, *Martin Rade: Das Verhaltnis von Geschichte, Religion und Moral als Grundproblem seiner Theologie* (G. Mohn, 1980). esp. pp.120-131 and 220-244.

[24] Congdon, *The Mission of Demythologizing,* p. 94.

[25] Ibid, p. 96.

Barth for attempting to 'break the connection with historical forces and reinterpret the history entirely in terms of myth.'[26]

In contrast to his reception of Barth, Bultmann found helpful contributions in Gogarten, especially his *Religion from Afar* (1917), which he subsequently praised in the footnotes of the published lecture.[27] Congdon argues that Bultmann was drawn to Gogarten because 'he captured the eschatological character of dialectical theology in his forceful presentation of faith and revelation as a divine event decisive for human existence.'[28] Therein, Gogarten was credited for drawing Bultmann into the dialectical movement. His continued engagement with Barth and Gogarten was fueled, at least in part, by the interests of his students and a much more favorable reception of *Romans* II. Writing to a friend in March of 1922, he remarked:

> The books most read among the theology students here are probably Gogarten's *Religiöse Entscheidung* [*Religious Decision*] (in my opinion an excellent essay on mysticism and revelation) and Barth's *Epistle to the Romans* (second edition) … I mean… here to say only that the second edition has made a very strong impression on me and is a great improvement on the first edition. Also, Barth made a personally agreeable impression during a Saturday and Sunday visit here. He was invited by a student group that had read his book and wished to have a discussion with him… Gogarten, too, was here in February [1922], having been asked by the student body, and he gave a lecture, "Time and Revelation."[29]

Barth and Gogarten each proved to have an important influence on Bultmann's early thought as he sought a way forward. However, unlike his dialectical companions, Bultmann self-consciously perceived lingering continuity between his theological

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[26] Bultmann, 'Ethische und mystische Religion im Urchristentum.' quoted in: Congdon, *The Mission of Demythologizing,* p. 96.

[27] Ibid. p. 97.

[28] Ibid, p. 98.

[29] Bultmann to Hans von Soden, 19 March 1922, quoted in Hammann, *Rudolf Bultmann,* p. 136.

foundations and these new frontiers. Bultmann understood the new direction not as a clean break with earlier traditions but as a development of what he had received from Wilhelm Herrmann.[30]

Here, the inherent diversity of the tradition is seen once more. Nevertheless, Bultmann's shared criticism of the liberal tradition, his numerous contributions to *Zwischen den Zeiten,*[31] his reception of Barth and Gogarten, and personal relationships with the same brought him near to the inner sphere of dialectical theology. Due to his prominence subsequently and at the time, Bultmann must be counted as a central figure and leader in this movement. If anything, the splintering of this group and the ending of *Zwischen den Zeiten* solidified the plurality of the tradition allowing Bultmann to differentiate himself as a leading dialectical thinker.

c. Emil Brunner

Turning to Emil Brunner, we remain on the periphery of early dialectical theology but also arrive at the very center of the present study. What has been offered thus far is a backdrop to Brunner's dialectical origins. Because scholarship on Brunner is sparse, especially compared with what is available on Bultmann and Barth, it is worth noting a few sources to which this assessment is indebted. Four sources are preeminent in the biographical and historical study of Brunner. Two works come from Brunner himself. In 1955, he published 'A Spiritual Autobiography' in *Japan Christian Quarterly,* and in 1962, he provided an 'Intellectual Autobiography' for an edited volume on his theology.[32] In the first of these essays, Brunner briefly traces his spiritual roots and developmental milestones throughout his career. The second 'Autobiography' is a slightly extended

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[30] Fergusson, *Bultmann,* p. 24.

[31] Bultmann published in each volume of *Zwischen den Zeiten* between 1925-1929.

[32] Respectively: Emil Brunner, 'A Spiritual Autobiography', *Japan Christian Quarterly*, 1955, pp. 238–242. and Brunner, 'Intellectual Autobiography', in *The Theology of Emil Brunner*, ed. by Kegley (London: The MacMillan Company, 1962), pp. 3-20.

version of the first, giving more attention to his scholarly interests. Beyond Brunner's own writing, Frank Jehle's biography of Brunner is an invaluable source. Jehle's is the only full-length biography and is a work to which all subsequent scholarship is indebted.[33] Finally, Alister McGrath's *Emil Brunner: A Reappraisal* (2014) is an important evaluation of Brunner's development that paves the way for any renewed interest in Brunner.[34]

Brunner's first appointment in the Swiss Reformed Church was as an interim minister in Leutwil between September 1912 and April 1913. He was succeeded in Leutwil by Eduard Thurneysen, with whom he had established a close friendship during his time as a student in Zürich.[35] From Leutwil, Thurneysen fostered his enduring and impactful friendship with Barth, with whom he had studied in Marburg. Barth served as pastor to the neighboring village of Safenwil from 1911 to 1921.[36] Although the name Karl Barth was known from the beginning of Brunner and Thurneysen's correspondence, Brunner reports having met Barth for the first time at the Leutwil home of Thurneysen before their written correspondence which began in April 1916.[37] Despite these associations, Brunner always perceived some distance between himself and those at the center of the dialectical movement.[38]

Brunner stood apart from Barth and Thurneysen, as well as Gogarten and Bultmann in a few respects. Unlike these others, Brunner spent no significant period of his education at German universities. A brief stay in Berlin in 1911 was his only semester away from Zurich. About this experience he later wrote, 'neither the theology

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[33] Frank Jehle, *Emil Brunner: Theologe Im 20. Jahrhudert* (Zurich:Theologischer Verlag Zurich, 2006).

[34] Alister McGrath, *Emil Brunner: A Reappraisal* (Chester: Wiley Blackwell, 2014).

[35] Thurneysen worked in Zurich from 1911 to 1913 as assistant Secretary of the YMCA and likely met Brunner through attending courses by Leonhard Ragaz. – Jehle, *Emil Brunner,* pp. 108-109.

[36] Although Barth and Thurneysen were first acquainted in Marburg, their families were already close friends. Thurneysen's father was the best man at the wedding of Barth's parents. – McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic,* p. 38.

[37] Jehle, *Emil Brunner,* pp. 114-115

[38] Brunner, 'Intellectual Autobiography', p. 9.

of Harnack nor the atmosphere of the great metropolis nor the state of Wilhelm II had made much of an impression on me.'[39] Brunner never felt the direct influence of the great German scholars such as is seen in Barth and Bultmann's reception of Wilhelm Herrmann.[40] His historical consciousness, unlike that of Gogarten, was not so acutely attuned to Germany's political and cultural identity crisis. Furthermore, Brunner never had any apparent relationship with Martin Rade or his influential *Die Christliche Welt*, a relationship which arguably gave Gogarten, Barth, and Bultmann their seat at the center table of German theology. Like his contemporaries, Brunner was deeply influenced by the intellectual traditions of the nineteenth century. McGrath writes that Brunner's earliest publication of note, *Das Symbolische in der religiönsen Erkenntnis* [*The Symbolic in Religious Knowledge*, 1914], 'reveals someone who is at home in the ideas of Schleiermacher, Ritschl, and Harnack.'[41] Nevertheless, the most enduring impressions on Brunner's early thought came from outside of the great German institutions.

Despite an early kinship with the prevailing liberal theology, Brunner attributed much greater importance to the influence of Leonard Ragaz and Herman Kutter, leaders of the religious socialist movement, as well as to the ministry of Christoph Blumhardt and his father, Johann Christoph. Brunner is unparalleled in the dignity and prominence he affords to Kutter and the Blumhardts. In 'A Spiritual Autobiography' he writes effusively of Kutter:

> I still think he is the greatest man whom I came in contact with. He is known – or rather *was known* – to the world in a double capacity. First, he was a powerful author. Some of his many books have made a big stir in their time, being translated into many languages.

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[39] Brunner, 'Intellectual Autobiography,' p. 6.; See also Jehle's assessment of Brunner's semester in Berlin – Jehle, *Emil Brunner,* pp. 40-42.

[40] McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic,* pp. 37-38. and Congdon, *The Mission of Demythologizing,* p. 46.

[41] McGrath, *Emil Brunner,* p. 4.

> Second Kutter is known as the founder and head of the so-called religious socialist movement. This name is somehow misleading. Kutter was most of all a preacher and prophet of the living God. I have never heard his equal. The pulpit of Hermann Kutter was a place from which the voice of God unmistakably was heard and his presence felt. I can still feel it now thinking of Kutter's sermons. Kutter was a profound and grand thinker. He was a lover and admirer of Plato and Kant as well as the Church fathers all of whom he read in the Greek and Latin original. At the same time he was a man who was aware of the great social problem of our age and saw the need of a revolutionary change. He had courage, like the prophets of old, to shock his pious contemporaries with his vehement criticism and daring postulates.[42]

Kutter, more than any other, had a lasting influence on Brunner. Kutter was the minister to preside over Brunner's confirmation on Christmas of 1905. In 1915, Brunner served as an assistant in Kutter's Zurich congregation before taking his first permanent appointment as pastor at the villages of Obstalten and Flizbach in February of 1916. It was also Kutter's niece, Margrit Lauterburg, whom Brunner married in 1917.[43]

The cultural awareness and concern of these religious socialist leaders (Kutter, Ragaz, and Blumhardt) undoubtedly stayed with Brunner throughout his career. It was especially Kutter's powerful and charismatic insistence on the work and presence of God that made its impression. Regarding these tides of religious socialism and their influence, Brunner wrote, 'my deepest concern was not so much with the problems of social ethics as with the more fundamental question about God. Since becoming acquainted with Kutter, the certainty of the living God was always a reality for me.'[44] Ultimately, Brunner identifies Christoph Blumhardt as the source and origin of Kutter's kerygmatic force. Following a period of doubts, Brunner claims that 'the biblical realism

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[42] Brunner, 'A Spiritual Autobiography,' pp. 239–240.

[43] Jehle, *Emil Brunner,* pp. 24-25.

[44] Brunner, 'Intellectual Autobiography," p. 6.

and prophetism of Kutter and the one even greater than he who stood in back of him, Christoph Blumhardt, kept my faith alive.'[45]

Brunner identifies not only his own theological foundations but the very foundations of the whole of dialectical theology with the prophetic realism of the Blumhardts received by way of Kutter. Brunner came to question aspects of Kutter's theological framework and philosophical commitments. Ultimately, much of Kutter's thought was discarded in favor of the Reformers and Søren Kierkegaard. Despite these developments, Brunner esteems the Blumhardt-Kutter line as holding a foundational influence for dialectical theology. His 'Spiritual Autobiography' states: 'Kierkegaard has now become almost a household name in philosophy and theology while the name of Kutter is all but forgotten, although, I think his influence on us has been much deeper than that of Søren Kierkegaard.' What is it that was imparted by the Blumhardt-Kutter line? 'It was not their [The Blumhardts] thought, it was the power of the Holy Spirit manifested in their lives and works which attracted so many and which through Kutter impressed us as the reality of God in our midst.'[46]

Brunner may overstate the case for dialectical theology having its origins in the Blumhardt-Kutter line. Or, at least, Brunner's presentation of dialectical theology is more aptly applied to his fellow Swiss citizens, Barth and Thurneysen, than to their German allies. Neither the Blumhardts nor religious socialism had any special influence on Bultmann.[47] Gogarten was more favorable than Bultmann to the Blumhardts and well acquainted with the works of Ragaz and Kutter, but he did not have the personal relation or correspondence with these figures as was enjoyed by his Swiss companions.[48]

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[45] Ibid, p. 6.

[46] Brunner, 'A Spiritual Autobiography,' p. 240.; See also, Jehle's assessment of the Blumhardts' impact on the Brunner family and the relationship with Hermann Kutter. – Jehle, *Emil Brunner,* pp. 25-27; 90-98.

[47] Congdon, *The Mission of Demythologizing,* p. 261.

[48] Collins Winn notes that "In a conversation with Professor Gerhard Sauter it was relayed that Friedrich Gogarten had acknowledged his own indebtedness to the Blumhardts to his students in private

In concert with Thurneysen, Barth was admittedly influenced by the forceful realism of Kutter. Moreover, through Thurneysen, he made the personal acquaintance of Christoph Blumhardt, cherishing the published literature and the holy presence of the prophet at Bad Boll. Barth also looked fondly upon the ministry of Blumhardt's late father, to whom he was introduced through Frederic Zündel's biography of Johann Christoph. However, in the years following the war, Barth's anxiety toward religious socialism grew as he engaged in the disagreements between Kutter and Ragaz. Although more favorable to the position of Kutter, Barth decided, once more with the assistance of Thurneysen, that a 'wholly other' starting point was needed and that such a starting point might be found through learning 'our theological ABCs all over again.'[49] This return to the 'theological ABCs,' of course, occasioned Barth's first edition of *Romans*. Brunner's dissatisfaction with religious socialism was, characteristically, more nuanced, allowing him to perceive greater continuity between the kerygmatic power of Kutter, the prophetic realism of the Blumhardts, and the foundations of his own dialectical thought.

Though acknowledging the impact of the Blumhardts, this particular line of influence has been largely underappreciated by Barth interpreters.[50] Moreover, Barth's anxiety regarding lingering appeals to divine immanence would only escalate throughout the 1920s and 30s. These strong polemics veil his indebtedness to early influencers such as the Blumhardts. Conversely, Brunner is far more constant and explicit in his appreciation for the Blumhardts, and the religious socialism that was a vehicle for their prophetic spirit. Although making certain departures, Brunner's persistent loyalty to his spiritual and theological roots was encouraged by his personal

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conversations (Private Interview, The Center for Theological Inquiry, Princeton Theological Seminary, 12/11/02)." See: Collins Winn, C. T. (2006). *"Jesus is the victor!": The significance of the Blumhardts for the theology of Karl Barth*. (Drew University, unpublished doctoral dissertation, 2006), p. 226.

[49] Karl Barth, 'Nachwort,' in *Schleiermacher-Auswahl*, Siebenstern Taschenbuch 113-14, 1968. Quoted in Busch, *Karl Barth,* pp. 97-98.

[50] Such is the argument put forth by Winn, "Jesus is the Vistor!" pp. 22-106.

relations. Brunner's father, Heinrich Brunner, came to faith through the influences of religious socialism and appointed Fredric Zündel, biographer of the elder Blumhardt, as his son's Godfather. Through Zündel, Heinrich Brunner became a friend of Blumhardt the younger.[51] With Blumhardt and Kutter, Ragaz was also an involved and influential figure in Brunner's life. In the classroom of Ragaz, Brunner was first introduced to the works of Kierkegaard, and it was Ragaz who supervised Brunner's 1913 doctoral work. Perhaps most importantly, Brunner credits Ragaz for encouraging his interests abroad.[52]

With these interests abroad, we arrive at the most significant distinguishing factor in Brunner's narrative. Unlike his contemporaries, Brunner took an early interest in the English-speaking world that would prove fruitful for the remainder of his career. Through the influence of Ragaz, Brunner traveled to England following the completion of his doctoral work. He had visited England once before, attending a youth conference in Oxford in 1909. McGrath paints these experiences as revealing Brunner's 'two most distinctive characteristics, which mark him off from many other Swiss theologians of his age.' These were 'an ability to speak English, and a willingness to engage directly with the ideas and movements of the English-speaking world, crossing the barriers of language, nationality, and denominations.'[53] Brunner spent the academic year of 1913-14 teaching French and Latin, first in Norfolk and then in Yorkshire, until the outbreak of the war when he was recalled into military service, guarding the Swiss borders.[54] This year abroad familiarized Brunner with Britain's social, ecclesial, and political climate. At this time, he also met the future Archbishop of York and Canterbury, William Temple, whom he came to know as a friend.[55]

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[51] Brunner, 'A Spiritual Autobiography,' p. 239.

[52] Ibid, p. 241.

[53] McGrath, *Emil Brunner,* p. 2.

[54] Ibid, pp. 5-6.

[55] Brunner, 'Intellectual Autobiography,' p. 7.

As a result of his experiences in England and his early publications, Brunner traveled further afield in 1919 when he was offered a fellowship to study at New York's Union Theological Seminary. His pregnant wife and the congregation he served in Obstalden granted Brunner leave for the year.[56] The liberal leanings of the faculty at Union had little appeal to Brunner, but he was fascinated by the American social climate. During this time, he laid the foundations for his second attempt at *Habilitation* which was completed and accepted by the faculty of Zurich in 1921.[57] The work produced in this effort, published in 1923 as *Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube* [*Experience, Cognition and Faith*], reveals Brunner's use of American scholarship and especially his interest in American psychology of religion. He studied with George Albert Coe, a pioneer in psychology of religion, at Union Seminary and also took a particular interest in William James. [58]

Brunner's time abroad in 1919 and 1920 was a decisive factor in his peripheral relation to the developing dialectical theology. These were the fateful years in which Barth published his *Epistle to the Romans* and delivered his Tambach lecture, in which Gogarten published the article 'Between the Times,' and in which he and Bultmann addressed the '*Freunde der Christlichen Welt*' with their essays 'The Crisis of Culture' and 'Ethical and mystical religion in early Christianity.' In his 'Intellectual Autobiography' Brunner writes:

> The catastrophe of the First World War indicated clearly that the foundation and aims of religious socialism were due for a thorough reappraisal. In these years it became clear to me that examination would have to begin at the roots, namely, the message of Christ itself. This insight came simultaneously with my first encounter with Karl Barth… [His

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[56] Ibid, pp. 7-8.

[57] David Andrew Gilland, *Law and Gospel in Emil Brunner's Earlier Dialectical Theology* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 4.; His first, unsuccessful, attempt occurred in 1915.

[58] McGrath, *Emil Brunner,* pp. 18-19.; See also, Jehle's '*Vorbereitung für eine neue Habilitationsschrift,*' Jehle, *Emil Brunner,* pp. 135-138.

> *Römerbrief*] I hailed as a forceful confirmation of my own thoughts… While I was trying to state the case for this new theology at Union Seminary, Barth was breaking into the camp of German theology with his famous [Tambach] lecture… Shortly thereafter, the periodical *Zwischen den Zeiten* (Between the Times) was founded, in the columns of which the theological revolution was largely to take place. The result of my absence in America was that I never became an intimate member of the circle publishing this magazine. From the very beginning I had taken a position independent of that of Karl Barth, which in the course of the ensuing years was to receive a more pronounced character.[59]

Following Brunner's assessment, we must affirm McGrath's contention that Brunner's 'theological development was that of independent alignment with the emerging dialectical theology movement, not of being its follower.'[60]

Brunner's alignment is apparent in the preface to the first edition (1921) of *Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube*. He writes that, following the work's submission as *Habilitationschrift*, he gained important insights from reading Barth's *Romans* II and Gogarten's *Religious Decision*. Although Brunner does not gives specifics, he reported that these insights corresponded with a minor revision to the book.[61] *Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube,* dedicated to Hermann Kutter, critiques modernity's subjective reliance on historicism and psychological analysis, chiefly precipitated through the respective impact of Ritschl and Schleiermacher.[62] Brunner's more well-known *Die Mystik und das Wort* [*Mysticism and the Word*, 1924] would significantly sharpen his criticism, particularly of Schleiermacher. Here, one hears the familiar dialectical complaints against anthropologically and subjectively grounded theology:

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[59] Brunner, 'Intellectual Autobiography,' pp. 8-9.

[60] McGrath, *Emil Brunner,* p. 21.

[61] Emil Brunner, *Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube* (Tübigen: Verlag von J.C.B. Mohr, 1923), p. IV.

[62] Brunner, 'Einleitung. Die Situation und unser Kampf' in *Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube*, pp. 1-5.

> It is the single negative thesis of this book, regarding the program of Schleiermacher and of the modern age: That the joining of immanent philosophy (i.e. mysticism) and the Christian faith, amounts to a colossal self-deception, thereby submitting evangelical faith to a general concept of life which, although standing in the sharpest contradiction to faith, is thought to be roughly identical to the basic truths of the gospel, as if a genius were a prophet or a religious hero were the redeemer, as if human culture was the Kingdom of God hoped for by the disciples and the Reformers.[63]

This sharpened criticism undoubtedly helped to solidify Brunner's alignment with dialectical theology. In the same year that *Die Mystik* was published, 1924, Brunner was appointed as Chair of Systematic and Practical Theology at the University of Zurich. It was also in 1924 that he made his first contribution to *Zwischen den Zeiten*, publishing an article titled 'Das Grundproblem der Philosophie bei Kant und Kierkegaard' [The Basic Problem of Philosophy in Kant and Kierkegaard].

In Brunner's first years at Zurich, he began crafting the heavily critical aims of his earlier work into a constructive basis for new theological frontiers, culminating in the publication of *Der Mittler* [*The Mediator*] in 1927. The tensions and disagreements amongst the dialectical allies would only intensify throughout these years. Nevertheless, Brunner's constructive voice proved useful to the marginally cooperative project as he contributed to every edition of *Zwischen den Zeiten* between 1929 and 1933. Although less cordial than in earlier years, he also maintained regular correspondence with Barth and Thurneysen. Accompanying his shared criticism of modern thought, it was Brunner's relation to his fellow Swiss citizens, and especially what he perceived to be shared foundations in the Blumhardt-Kutter line, that represents the basis of his relation to the dialectical movement. Due to his high appraisal of the influence of Swiss-led religious socialism, Brunner understood the origins of dialectical theology to lie with

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[63] Emil Brunner, *Die Mystik und das Wort: Der Gegensatz zwischen moderner Religionsauffassung und christlichem Glauben dargestellt an der Theologie Schleiermachers* (Tübigen: Verlag von J.C.B. Mohr, 1924). p. 11.

Swiss theology. He portrays himself as a proprietor of this movement, sharing basic themes and commitments with those at its center, especially Barth and Thurneysen. However, his acknowledgment of shared kinship should not undermine his insistent independence.

d. Diversification of the Tradition

Much is left out of the historical sketch above. Nevertheless, this presentation briefly highlighted the interpersonal relations, socio-cultural forces, and shared criticism that resulted in the formation of *Zwischen den Zeiten*. While dialectical theology should not be confined to, nor defined by, the agenda of one journal, its origin as a distinctive theological movement owes a great deal to this cooperative platform. As with its coming together, the splintering of the dialectical group was influenced by social and political developments that catalyzed existing theological disputes. By the early 1930s, growing disagreements within the group, especially Barth's dissatisfaction with his companions, were heightened against the backdrop of theological and political concerns found in the emergence of Nazism and the 'German Christians.' It was not only the theological claims being made but also the political implications of such claims that caused concern for Barth. Writing to George Merz in September of 1933, Barth expressed his desire to withdraw from participation in *Zwischen den Zeiten*, citing Gogarten's involvement with German Christians as a primary cause. One month later, the final issue of *Zwischen den Zeiten* was published, and Barth utilized his 'Abschied' ['Farewell'] to distance himself from Brunner and Gogarten.[64]

The dismantling of *Zwischen den Zeiten* and the publication of Barth and Brunner's infamous debate one year later have been described as the 'break-up' of

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[64] John W. Hart, *Karl Barth vs. Emil Brunner: The Formation and Dissolution of a Theological Alliance, 1916-1936* (Peter Lang, 2001), p. 147.

dialectical theology.[65] Although the descriptor 'break-up' accurately captures the interpersonal tensions of these events and Barth's insistence on irreconcilable differences, it may also be misleading. Such a description tends to undervalue both the diversity existing prior to this period and the shared commitments that persisted afterward. Moreover, the 'break-up' description fits best with an assumption that dialectical theology is primarily a Barthian tradition, controlled by Barth's relation to it. The present assessment does not refute that Barth stood at the center of this movement nor that subsequent reception should accept Barth as its foremost proponent. Rather, in light of understanding the dialectical tradition from its periphery, especially from Brunner's position, I suggest understanding the events of 1933 and 934 as a diversification of the tradition. Although diversity of opinion and approach was always a part of the dialectical movement, the group was united most closely in their early critical agenda. By the early 1930s, longstanding disagreements within the group grew more pronounced as they each began to find divergent ways forward in their respective theological projects.

With this modest sketch of social and historical origins, dialectical theology remains largely undefined. A merely historical sketch would find the moniker 'theology of crisis' to be a more apt description of the movement's historical bearing, capturing its contextual formation in the post-war era. In the broadest sense, dialectical theology was a reevaluation of the modern world's cultural, political, and (primarily) theological traditions. The crisis which followed the first world war was a crumbling of the modern zeitgeist itself. The project of dialectical theology was firstly critical of the hubris, complacency, and insufficiency of former traditions. Secondly, dialectical theology aimed to establish renewed and solidified theological foundations for the Church. The following section will look to define the theological distinctions of the emergent dialectical movement more clearly.

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[65] This is the language used by John Hart in what is likely the most well-known assessment of these events in English. See: Hart, *Karl Barth vs Emil Brunner,* p. 141.

II. Theological Distinctions

If 'dialectical' is to be a meaningful theological descriptor, it is necessary to specify the content and conceptual commitments of such a theology. Towards this end, the following section will trace the meaning of dialectical in the understanding of its adherents and in its relation to the moniker theology of crisis. Privileging Brunner's view of the movement, the theological distinctions of dialectical theology will be distilled into four common themes. The outcome is an understanding of dialectical theology as paradoxical, critical, retrievalist, and kerygmatic. These sensibilities collectively represent a way of redressing the relationship between immanence and transcendence in a specific social and intellectual setting. Finally, these themes will be accented based on dialectical theology's departure from the liberal tradition and fundamental disharmony within the movement itself.

What then is the meaning of dialectical theology? What are its chief characteristics, and in what sense is it distinctively dialectical? The descriptor 'dialectical' is at least as problematic as it is helpful. Aaron Edwards has articulated the predicament of the term itself:

> Dialectic undoubtedly has a rich and by no means uncontroversial biography in modern theological and philosophical history. It is because of its obfuscated legacy that contemporary theology no longer seems particularly interested in its particularity… It is not that the term itself has simply disappeared, but more that its clarity may have been diminished by something of multivalent and chameleonic overuse across various disciplines.[66]

[66] Aaron Edwards, 'The Paradox of Dialectic: Clarifying the Use and Scope of Dialectic in Theology', *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology*, 77.4–5 (2016), p. 274.

The following does not attempt to produce a renewed and clarified definition of 'dialectic' in its more general usage. The interest of the following section is specifically in the theological tradition known as 'dialectical theology' and its formulation by those discussed above before 1934. Rather than a singular definition, a shared commitment to certain central themes will be identified. I will show that the dialectical school is identifiable based on its shared commitments. In this way, the common ground shared by these figures is elucidated without discounting their inherent diversity and the essential flexibility of the term 'dialectic.' An interest in the development of common themes prior to 1934 restricts the present assessment to the historical boundaries addressed above. Nevertheless, the themes identified here retain pertinence for the later thought of these figures.

It is difficult to say when the classification of 'dialectical theology' was first ascribed to Barth or any of his companions. Barth and Brunner both claim that the title was given by outside commentators rather than being conferred by anyone within the movement. Brunner's published essays of 1931 entitled *The Word and the World* were, in part, intended to address potential misunderstandings regarding dialectical theology. He writes that neither he nor Barth nor any other member of the group attributed the title 'dialectical theology' or 'the theology of crisis' to themselves.[67] In a strict sense, Barth and Brunner are surely correct. However, James Robinson suggests that they overstate their case. Robinson writes that 'the designation "dialectical theology" was not simply a tag hung onto the movement in 1922 by some spectator.' Rather, the preface to Barth's *Romans* II 'clearly invited such a designation.' Robinson has in mind Barth's prefatory comments on the '*inner dialectic of the subject matter*.'[68]

In what is arguably the most well-known and most often quoted line from Barth's *Roman's* II, he remarks in the prologue:

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[67] Emil Brunner, *The Word and the World* (London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1931), p. 6.

[68] Robinson, *The Beginnings of Dialectical Theology,* p. 24.

> If I have a system, it is limited to a recognition of what Kierkegaard called the "infinite qualitative distinction" between time and eternity, and to my regarding this as possessing negative as well as positive significance: "God is in heaven, and thou art on earth." The relation between such a God and such a man, and the relation between such a man and such a God, is for me the theme of the Bible and the essence of philosophy.

The infinite distance between God and humanity is both an ontological and an epistemological gap. The absolute divinity of God is something entirely other than the finite nature of creation and, therefore, entirely beyond the limits of human reason. Barth describes the infinite distance between God and creation as the essential '*Krisis*' of the Bible and philosophy. However, it is also at the paradoxical 'cross-roads' of time and eternity that we are confronted by 'the figure of Jesus Christ,' and it is in his incarnation that both the infinite gap and the only means of its reconciliation are finally disclosed.[69] Barth describes this situation, with its apposition of time and eternity, as the 'inner dialectic of the matter.'[70] Dialectic, in the first instance, refers to the polarity of time and eternity as the contradictory and yet indispensable reference points for the event of revelation. Moreover, Barth's endorsement of both the language of 'crisis' and a paradoxical dialectic is already available in this preface. Such categories are also apparent throughout the text, where these themes are carried by his unwavering insistence that God remains hidden in his revelation, that God's 'No' is contained in God's 'Yes.'[71]

As early as 1923, Paul Tillich contributed an article to the journal *Theologische Blätter* which was published under the title 'Critical and Positive Paradox: A discussion with Karl Barth and Friedrich Gogarten.' Tillich gives his perception of Barth and Gogarten's theological project. As his title suggests, he focused on their use of

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[69] Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans,* trans. by Edwyn C. Hoskyns (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), pp.10-11.

[70] Robinson, *The Beginnings of Dialectical Theology,* p. 24.

[71] Barth's explicit expression of the 'No-Yes' dialectic can be seen in his treatment of Rom 1:16-17: 'The Theme of the Epistle,' Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans,* pp. 35-42.

dialectics to present both the critical and the positive paradox of revelation, standing under the unity of God's 'Yes' and 'No,' i.e. 'under the unity of judgment and grace.'[72] Along with a few lingering criticisms, Tillich expresses general agreement with and appreciation for Barth and Gogarten's opposition to 'every unparadoxical, immediate, objective understanding of the unconditional.'[73] In his assessment, Tillich uses the moniker 'theology of crisis' for Barth and Gogarten's project and labels the proponent of such a system as a 'dialectician.' Barth and Gogarten's responses to Tillich address aspects of his description and lingering criticisms but appear untroubled by the designations 'theology of crisis' and 'dialectician.'[74] By 1923, 'dialectical' appears to be an accepted descriptor of the emergent movement.

a. Dialectical Theology: Barth and Bultmann's response to Erik Peterson

The recognition of a particular 'dialectical school,' although predating these events, was undoubtedly reinforced by the published dialogues between Barth, Bultmann, and Erik Peterson in 1925 and 1926.[75] Peterson, a colleague of Barth's at Göttingen and a contributor to *Zwischen den Zeiten*, published the pamphlet *Was ist Theologie?* in 1925. The pamphlet leveled criticism against dialectical theology, taking particular aim at Barth's 1922 Elgersburg lecture 'The Word of God as the Task of Theology' and Bultmann's more recent article 'What does it mean to speak of God?'.

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[72] Paul Tillich, 'Critical and Positive Paradox: A discussion with Karl Barth and Friedrich Gogarten' in Robinson, *The Beginnings of Dialectical Theology,* pp. 134-135.

[73] Ibid, p. 141.

[74] Robinson, *The Beginnings of Dialectical Theology,* pp. 142-162.

[75] The best assessment of these dialogues is given by Christophe Chalamet in *Dialectical Theologians: Wilhelm Herrmann, Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann* (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag Zurich, 2005), pp. 177-178.; shorter engagement is found in McCormack, *Karl Bart's Critically Realistic,* pp. 367-371; and Congdon, *The Mission of Demythologizing,* pp. 119-120.; Chalamet and McCormack both pay special attention to the assessment of Eberhard Jüngel: 'Von der Dialektik zur Analogie' in *Barth-Studien* (Benziger: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1982), pp. 127-179.

Barth's response to Peterson, 'Church and Theology,' was first given as a conference address and later published alongside Bultmann's, 'The Question of "Dialectical" Theology,' in the 1926 edition of *Zwischen den Zeiten*.[76] Peterson challenged the sufficiency of the paradoxical dialectic employed by Barth and Bultmann to address the nature of revelation and the task of theology. His primary criticism was that the dialectician cannot take the concrete truth and reality of God seriously.[77] According to Peterson, dialectical theology only takes seriously its talk about God but never God as Godself.

Christophe Chalamet writes that Peterson's critique 'focused on the core beliefs of the new theological movement, namely on their program of a theology of the Word, understood as judgment and grace, Law and Gospel, veiling and unveiling.' Peterson argued that, by applying such dialectics to the Word of God, dialectical theology was inherently disobedient to the objectivity of revelation. Peterson preferred that theology locate its foundation in the authority of dogma rather than in such paradoxical descriptions of the Word of God. [78] Our interest in the debate with Peterson is that he focuses precisely on the nature of dialectical thought and its use in theology. His description of the theological movement to which Barth and Bultmann belonged is dominated by his understanding of their dialectical method. Peterson is worth noting because *Was ist Theologie?* provides a characterization of '*Theologie in Form der Dialektik*' [theology in the form of dialectics].[79] More importantly, Peterson generated

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[76] Barth's 'Church and Theology' was delivered twice before publication: first, at the Göttingen Autumn Conference on 7 Oct 1925 and, second, at the Theological week at Eberfield on 23 Oct. For English translation see: Barth, 'Church and Theology' in Barth, *Theology and Church: Shorter Writings 1920-1928,* trans. by Louise Pettibone Smith (London: SCM Press LTD, 1962), pp. 286-306.; The English translation of Bultmann's response is included in Robinson, *The Beginnings of Dialectical Theology,* pp. 257-273.

[77] Erik Peterson, Was Ist Theologie? (Bonn: Friedrich Cohen, 1926), p. 7.

[78] Chalamet, *Dialectical Theologians,* pp. 178-180.

[79] Peterson, *Was ist Theologie,* p. 9.

responses in which both Barth and Bultmann venture to clarify the nature of dialectical theology from their own point of view.

Bultmann, in his response, distinguishes dialectical theology from dialectics in general. In its classical form, as is seen in the Socratic dialogues, dialectics understand truth 'as something immanent in the entire process of dialogue.' In this sense, truth does not stand objectively outside human inquiry; instead, truth is an 'act of knowledge,' a continual questioning and answering that advances what was merely hidden.[80] Dialectical theology is indeed a dialogue, but it is distinct from every other form of dialectic in that it is neither directed by human inquiry nor does its knowledge participate in any 'advance.' Dialectical theology is directed by the question and answer God has posed in God's revelation. For Bultmann, the singular question posed by God is: What is the human in its existence? The moment that this question is understood as asked by God rather than springing from human inquiry is the exact moment in which the answer becomes apparent: the human is the sinner who is justified.[81] As with the classical form, in dialectical theology the question contains the answer and the answer contains the question. Unlike the classical dialectic, the human does not pose the question and, therefore, determines neither the truth nor the presuppositions that this dialogue holds.[82] The discourse that dialectical theology is concerned with is that event in which the Word of God, through the activity of the Holy Spirit, speaks itself to 'concrete man… in the specificity of his temporal being.'[83]

Bultmann clarifies that dialectical theology's countermanding paradox is not a paradox in the content of revelation – i.e., God is not a paradox. Likewise, the statement is not a paradox itself when one speaks of 'God's grace for the sinner.' Nevertheless, dialectical theology insists that the *event* in which 'God is gracious to the sinner,' in

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[80] Bultmann, 'The Question of "Dialectic" Theology: A Discussion with Erik Peterson' in Robinson, *The Beginnings of Dialectical Theology,* pp. 257-258.

[81] Ibid, p. 259.

[82] Ibid, p. 260.

[83] Ibid, p. 265.

which the absolute Creator speaks truth to the finite creature, is an *event* that can only be understood as a paradox.[84] To think otherwise of the event of revelation is to assume an unbroken continuity between the Word of God and the word of man. Bultmann accuses Peterson of this transgression because, in Peterson's argument, dogma shares in the authority of the Word of God rather than standing under it.[85] Dialectical theology takes God seriously precisely because of the radical dissimilarity between the Word of God and every human word about God. Bultmann holds that the Word of God in itself is not a paradox and Peterson is right to suggest that if it were, all valid ground for theology would be lost. Nevertheless, Bultmann is insistent that if one fails to see the *event* of revelation as paradoxical, 'then there is no revelation and no theology, but only science of the world and cosmological speculation.' In dialectical theology, he writes, 'we assert that *real* speaking of God, whether in Christ's speaking or in our speaking, exists only as the Word of God itself, only insofar as it is the result of the Spirit's activity.'[86]

As for Barth, the bulk of his response focused on what he saw as flaws in Peterson's understanding of the task of theology and its relation to sources of authority. Peterson understood the task of theology as arguing on the basis of dogma as its concrete authority.[87] Barth shows that this presentation of dogma is problematic. When anyone speaks of dogma and authority, what they really mean is dogma or authority as defined by their particular ecclesial tradition. Herein, Barth points particularly to Peterson's Catholic sympathies. Peterson failed to acknowledge that dogma is defined and constructed differently in diverse traditions and that within these traditions, determination of the canon of Scripture, interpretation of the Church Fathers, as well as the proclamation and teaching of the Church will, in some combination, join dogma as a

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[84] Ibid, p. 266.

[85] Ibid, pp. 263 and 271-272.

[86] Ibid, pp. 267-268.

[87] Karl Barth, 'Church and Theology', in Barth, *Theology and the Church,* trans by Louise P. Smith (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1962), pp. 288–306.

concrete authority.[88] Therefore, the authority of the Church, in a broader sense, is not as 'concrete' as Peterson imagines. Moreover, Barth insists that the Church's authority is always temporal, relative, and lower than the authority of revelation itself.[89] The Church and its various sources of authority, dogma included, mediate the authority of Christ rather than sharing its absoluteness.

Based on these distinctions, Barth makes a case for theology as essentially dialectical. As with Bultmann, he affirms that although the Word of God in itself is not paradoxical, our relationship to the Word of God is. The Word and the Holy Spirit have immediate authority, but the authority of human words is only ever secondary and derivative. For this reason, the primary task of theology is to offer a witness to God's Word rather than repeating it as such. Therefore, theology must speak in certain irreconcilable antitheses 'because in different ways they all express the infinite qualitative difference between God and man with which a theology of sinners (and that is *all* theology), however theocentric or Christocentric it may be or may wish to appear, has to deal in presenting the communion of God and man.'[90] The concreteness of dialectical theology lies in its emphasis on the particularity of the Church's activity – i.e., the Church only ever acts in the 'here and now.'[91] The obedience of theology is exercised by its absolute dependence upon the universality of God's Word in Christ. God and the theologian, however, have fundamentally different relations to time and eternity. In theology, the universal Word is spoken of in the particular (limited) idiom of humanity without indulging a synthesis of the two. 'So to leave empty the place where the decisive Word would be spoken,' writes Barth, 'is the meaning of dialectic in theology.'[92]

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[88] Ibid, pp. 290-291.

[89] Ibid, pp. 294-295.

[90] Ibid, pp. 300-301.

[91] Ibid, p. 298.

[92] Ibid, p. 302.

Bultmann and Barth's responses to Peterson are evidence of consensus regarding the meaning of dialectical theology. Their agreement is also strengthened by their references to one another. In speaking of the nature of dialectical theology, Bultmann includes numerous references to Barth's 'The Word of God as the task of Theology.'[93] Likewise, Barth cites both Bultmann and Gogarten's definition of theology as standing alongside his own in opposition to Peterson.[94] In its broadest sense, then, dialectical theology shared a collective commitment to at least these central themes: a radical and unwavering distinction between the transcendent Word of God and every human witness to it, a commitment to locate theological objectivity in God's own self and the testimony of the Holy Spirit rather than in any natural capacity of creation, and interpreting this revelation as cause for existential decision rather than epistemic synthesis.

b. Dialectical Theology as Theology of Crisis

Bultmann and Barth's engagement with Peterson is helpful for clarifying what is meant by their use of 'dialectic' in theology. Something further, however, should be said about this term in its relation to the moniker 'theology of crisis.' Both titles can be applied to the tradition and, in common usage, exist comfortably as synonyms. Nevertheless, each descriptor illuminates the tradition slightly differently. Brunner's *The Word and The World* was a collection of essays presented during a 1931 tour of Great Britain. These essays were intended to present dialectical theology to the English-speaking world and to remove misunderstandings around it.[95] In the preface, he writes that although the titles 'Dialectical Theology' and 'the Theology of Crisis' were not chosen by any member of the group, these names 'are not unfitted to bring out what it

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[93] Bultmann, 'The Question of "Dialectic" Theology', pp. 259-260.

[94] Barth, 'Church and Theology', p. 289.

[95] The lectures were delivered in full at King's College London and repeated in part at Trinity College, Glasgow and New College, Edinburgh during 1931.[95] – Brunner, *The Word and the World,* pp. 5-6.

[dialectical theology] stands for.' Regarding the meaning of 'Dialectical Theology,' Brunner wrote:

> The word 'dialectic' – used in Kierkegaard's sense, not Hegel's – points to something which Luther frequently indicates by the simple statement that in His revelation God is hidden *sub contraria specie.* 'The proposition that God can be known directly,' writes Kierkegaard, 'is heathenism'… All speech concerning God, if in the sense of this revelation, is necessarily 'paradoxical.' It is only by means of contradiction between two ideas – God and man, grace and responsibility, holiness and love – that we can apprehend the contradictory truth that the eternal God enters time, or that the sinful man is declared just. Dialectical Theology is the mode of thinking which defends this paradoxical character[96]

Brunner's statement highlights the idea of paradox, which featured prominently in both the critiques and the defenses of dialectical theology during the 1920s. The dialectical group was allied most closely in their opposition to 'every unparadoxical, immediate, objective understanding of the unconditional.'[97]

Brunner explains that the title 'Theology of Crisis' builds on the paradoxical dialectic of time and eternity. Regarding the notion of *crisis*, He writes:

> What the word of God does is to expose the contradiction of human existence, then in grace to cover it. Man is placed in the critical position of having to *decide*; and such a situation, just because it is critical, cannot be apprehended by means of any *single* theoretical idea. Theoretical thought seeks the unity of a system; the Theology of Faith insists on the reality of existential decision.[98]

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[96] Ibid, pp. 6-7.

[97] Ibid, p. 141.

[98] Brunner, *The Word and the World*, pp. 6-7.

In the understanding of dialectical theology, the Word of God does not deliver conceptual terms that neatly synthesize the paradox of revelation within a coherent set of doctrine. Instead, the Word of God confronts those who receive it with an existential decision, for or against the will of God. The *crisis* of theology, therefore, implicates the critical moment of personal and existential decision. This emphasis has been described elsewhere as dialectical theology's kerygmatic and ethical dimension.[99]

Congdon argues that a kerygmatic interest is a crucial distinctive of Barth and Bultmann's dialectical theology. He identifies an 'eschatological soteriology' as separating Barth and Bultmann from the dialectic of Hermann. 'Dialectic, as displayed in the work of the dialectical theologians, is not merely a formal literary or philosophical device; it instead has to be defined in concrete material terms as a definite theological message, what Bultmann in 1920 calls the "spiritual content" of religion. Dialectical theology is ultimately kerygmatic theology.'[100] The moniker 'theology of crisis' emphasizes the kerygmatic nature of dialectical theology, taking special interest in proclamation and the call for existential decision. Brunner expresses this sensibility in the concluding remarks of *The Mediator* (1927). He distinguishes dogma from 'the proclamation of the Divine world itself' and adds that 'Dogma and theology exist for the sake of the Christian message, not *vice versa*.'[101] Dogmatic theology is kerygmatic in that it orders its priorities around support and defense of the Church's proclamation. Barth's kerygmatic orientation is seen in his articulation of the three-fold Word of God,

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[99] For a discussion of the kerygmatic dimension see: Congdon, *The Mission of Demythologizing,* p. 101; and for the understanding of ethics in early dialectical theology see: John McConnachie, 'Ethics of the Word' in *The Barthian Theology and the Man of To-Day* (London: Hodder & Stoughton Ltd, 1933), pp. 254-285.

[100] Congdon, *The Mission of Demythologizing,* p. 101.

[101] Emil Brunner, *The Mediator: A Study of the Central Doctrine of the Christian Faith*, Seventh Im (London: Lutterworth Press, 1934), p. 595.

wherein proclamation joins revelation and Scripture as the unity of forms in which the Word of God is given.[102]

Prior to *The Word and the World*, Brunner published another series of lectures under the title *The Theology of Crisis*, which he delivered during a 1928 U.S. lecture tour.[103] In these earlier lectures, Brunner juxtaposed the cultural crisis with the crisis of theology. The post-war crisis of Western culture, far more palpable in Europe than in the U.S., challenged central tenets of the Christian faith. Brunner argued that the prevailing ideological tendencies of idealism and naturalism – respectively manifested as liberalism and fundamentalism within Christian theology – failed to account for and overcome the cultural and political crises. Brunner viewed contemporary social unrest as the result of contradictions in human nature, ascribing such contradictions to finitude and sinfulness. In this light, and as a reaffirmation of *sola fide* and *sola gratia*, both the crisis of culture and the crisis of existential decision were deemed irreconcilable other than by faith alone through Christ alone. As much as Brunner insisted that the world demands ethical decisions, he also insisted that 'the only real sources of ethical renewal' are found in 'the *sola gratia, sola fide, soli Deo gloria* of the Christian faith.'[104]

Dialectical theology, as a theology of crisis, viewed the proclamation of faith as a concrete response to the pressing ethical questions of the day and, in this way, tied kerygma and ethics closely together. Cultural criticism is inherent to this tactic as the explicit insistence on restoration through Christ alone disparages the final efficacy of all worldly social and political action. The *sola fide* ethic of dialectical theology was succinctly elucidated as early as 1920 in Gogarten's 'The Crisis of Culture.' Here, Gogarten expresses that from the religious point of view – the point of view of the person confronted by the grace and judgment of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ –

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[102] Karl Barth, *The Church Dogmatics Volume I, 1* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975), pp. 89-124.

[103] Most notably, Brunner delivered a version of these lectures at Lancaster Theological Seminary, Princeton Theological Seminary, the Divinity School at Harvard University and Union Theological Seminary. – Emil Brunner, *The Theology of Crisis* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929), pp. ix-x.

[104] Ibid, pp. 68-69.

the crisis of religion and culture are one and the same. As with the person of faith who God confronts, culture stands under 'the annihilating, creating act of God.' How should one respond in a time of crisis? Gogarten's only response is to suggest that 'Jesus speaks today, just as he spoke two thousand years ago: Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand.'[105] Similarly, Brunner's *The Theology of Crisis* claims to 'not support any theory.' These lectures do not give any particular answer to the questions: 'What must be done? What ought I to do?'[106] Rather, they were 'an attempt to distinguish sharply between the Christian and the idealistic or naturalistic understanding of life and at the same time to point out again the true meaning of Christianity.'[107] Herein, the 'theology of crisis' ascription draws out the kerygmatic nature of dialectical theology.

c. The Brunnerian Scope: Four Markers of Dialectical Theology

In Bultmann and Barth's debate with Peterson, the following shared commitments were observed: a radical and unwavering distinction between the transcendent Word of God and every human witness to it, a commitment to locate the immanence of God in the work of the Holy Spirit rather than any natural capacity of creation, and interpreting this revelation as cause for existential decision rather than epistemic synthesis. The moniker 'theology of crisis' highlights the third of these commitments and the implicit criticism carried by these themes. Three further elaborations given by Brunner will round out this presentation of dialectical theology. Finally, these ranging descriptions will be distilled into four markers of the dialectical movement. Brunner's most constructive and substantial work from this period was *The Mediator*. Nevertheless, *The Word and the World* offers the best view of his representation of dialectical theology due to its 'subordinate purpose,' which is 'to remove misunderstandings which confront the Dialectical Theology, not on the

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[105] Gogarten, 'The Crisis of Culture,' in Robinson, *The Beginnings of Dialectical Theology,* p. 300.

[106] Ibid, p. xiii.

[107] Ibid, p. xxiii.

Continent merely, but in Great Britain and America.'[108] For this reason, Brunner's 1930 lectures best complete the present exposition.

First, Brunner draws attention to the dialectical movement's re-articulation of central Reformation themes, especially those found in Martin Luther.[109] Although the claim must be qualified, dialectical theology can be understood as a retrievalist movement. The scandal of dialectical theology was partly its insistence that theology could be conducted without reliance on the nineteenth century's historical, psychological, and philosophical findings. It is at this point that a qualification is needed. At no point did Brunner, Barth, or any of their companions attempt to step outside themselves and into a premodern intellectual context. The purveyors of dialectical theology were critical of but also indebted to the liberal theology of the previous era. Their critique was not that the findings of the nineteenth century held no truth or value but that liberalism's accommodation of modern thought threatened to put anthropology in the place of theology. For this reason, there was an interest to retrieve a proclamation of faith that preexisted modern thought and yet remained critical of human faculties and institutions.

The thing to be retrieved was not any particular premodern voice, although a renewed interest in Luther and Barth's turn to Anslem in the early 1930s evidenced the broader trend. Dialectical theology intended to retrieve theology as 'Theology of the Word of God.' Brunner wrote that when asked 'what the "Dialectical Theology" is really driving at?', he answered: 'It is seeking to declare the Word of the Bible to the world.'[110] Hence, the title of his lectures, *The Word and the World*. The first edition of Barth's Romans commentary revealed an exceptional disinterest in modern historical criticism, and the second edition provided an even more explicit criticism of any biblical positivism.[111] Similarly, Bultmann's early preference for the proclamation of Jesus over

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[108] Ibid, p. 6.

[109] Brunner, *The Word and the World,* p. 6.

[110] Ibid, p. 6.

[111] Busch, *Karl Barth,* pp. 98-100 and 119.

and above the historical life of Jesus attempts to recover a truth that cannot be grasped by mere historicism.[112] Gogarten, although more engaged in the philosophy of religion than in biblical criticism, also advocated for a turn to the 'living Word' as proclaimed in Scripture and the pulpit.[113] In all these efforts, the Word of God itself, especially in the person of Jesus Christ – and not history, ethics, or psychology – is meant to be retrieved as the subject of Christian theology.

Brunner described dialectical theology as a return to a theology of the Word of God:

> Everything which the apostles, who speak to us in the New Testament, the great Church fathers, or the creeds of the Churches from the Apostle's Creed down in the Thirty-Nine Articles and the Westminster Confession, wanted to express is this one thing: that into the world of men with their ethics, their metaphysics and their religions, there has entered something different, something which is distinguished not gradually or quantitatively, but qualitatively and fundamentally, from everything which man can know from himself outward. And that something is the Word of God. If it could be shown that this opinion was an illusion, that Christian faith is only a modification of general religious or metaphysical knowledge (as modern philosophy since Kant, Hegel and Schleiermacher took it to be, and as the most important teachers like Ritschl, Herrmann, Troeltsch and Otto have taught), if it really were as these scholarly and devout men said, this would mean nothing less than that the Christian faith is an illusion; for the central thesis of Christian faith would be destroyed. Christian belief stands or falls with the assertion that the Word of God is something other than ethics, metaphysics, or religion, something different in its source as well as in its content.[114]

While 'Dialectical Theology' and 'Theology of Crisis' are both helpful descriptors, it is likely that the members of the movement, had they been pressed to give a singular

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[112] Chalamet, *The Dialectical Theologians,* pp. 191-194.

[113] Shiner, *The Secularization of History,* p. 202.

[114] Brunner, *The Word and the World*, pp. 17-18.

designation for themselves, would have preferred 'Theology of the Word of God.' This moniker expresses the reorientation away from the human's experience of revelation and towards revelation as such. As with Brunner's *The Word and the World*, this is also reflected in the 1928 publication of a collection of Barth's addresses under the strikingly similar title of *Das Wort Gottes and die Theologie*, later translated into English as *The Word of God and the Word of Man*.[115]

Secondly, along with its return to the proper subject of theology, Brunner highlights that dialectical theology is not essentially systematic. This claim does not suggest that dogmatics performed in this style are devoid of order or logic. It does mean that offering a faithful witness to the Word of God decisively outweighs, although it does not eliminate, any prior commitments to logical consistency, systematic unity, or philosophical cogency. This feature of dialectical theology is most evident in Brunner's treatment of the relation between theology and metaphysics. He avoids judgment regarding the general truth or falsity of metaphysics apart from admitting a personal interest in the 'debate of metaphysicians.' Nevertheless, observing that such debates 'lie within the sphere of human reason,' Brunner holds that Christian faith is built on a different source of knowledge altogether and therefore maintains an 'air of detachment' from such logic. Metaphysics is vital due to what it has to say about human nature, but not for what it might claim about the nature of God.[116] A general weariness about prior philosophical commitments is on display here.

Third, Brunner suggests that dialectical theology is not categorically opposed to immanence. He intended to clear up any 'nonsense' that 'has been talked about the "Barthian Theology" having perception only for the transcendence of God, not for His immanence.'[117] Spectators might be forgiven for such accusations in light of the explicit

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[115] Barth, Karl, *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, trans. by Douglas Horton (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1956)

[116] See section I of Brunner's lecture, 'The Word of God and Reason.' – *The Word and the World,* pp. 12-18.

[117] Ibid, p. 7.

criticisms that dialectical theology, especially in its early years, levied against all immediate or natural perception of the absolute. Nevertheless, Brunner reiterates that criticism of human capacities does not belittle the ontological objectivity of God in Godself nor the real presence of the Word in the event of revelation. The ontological claim of this position is best captured in McCormack's description of Barth's starting point as 'critically realistic.'[118] Brunner's realism is most evident in the third lecture of *The Word and the World*, 'The Word of the Spirit and Psychology.' Herein, Brunner's treatment is more indicative of an existential claim than Barth's ontological objectivity.

Upon what foundations does dialectical theology base its claims? Brunner writes, 'It is God Himself who tells you that the Gospel Word, which comes to you from outside, is His Word. He testifies to the truth of the Gospel through the Holy Spirit. This the old theologians called the *testimonium spiritus sancti internum*.'[119] Due to its polemical force and a lack of any fully developed pneumatology, further undermined by radical Christocentrism, dialectical theology was easily caricatured as taking a preference towards transcendence. Nevertheless, attempts to affirm both the *criticism* and the *realism* of the dialectical method are apparent within the tradition.

With these further elaborations, we mean to observe Brunner's take on the continuity and scope of the dialectical school. Adding these to the descriptions given above, four markers of dialectical theology can be distilled. Dialectical theology was paradoxical, critical, retrievalist, and kerygmatic. It was *paradoxical* in its insistence on the radical distinction between the Word of God and every human witness to it. Also, in its willingness to leave such tensions unresolved rather than seeking any theoretical synthesis or systematizing metaphysic. By placing theological objectivity in God's

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[118] McCormack describes Barth's *realism* as 'a turn to theological objectivity' insofar as theology affirms the objectivity of God as 'a Reality which is complete and whole in itself apart from and prior to the knowing activity of human individuals.' Barth's critical foundation maintained that this theological objectivity could not be known empirically but only through the self-revelation of God. - McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic,* pp. 129-130.

[119] Brunner, *The Word and the World*, p. 63.

immanent self and denying such absolute truth to all human perceptions and capacities, the dialectical school was *critical* of human reason, the prevailing theological traditions, and culture itself. The tradition was *retrievalist* in that, and by way of its critique of anthropocentric theological reflection, it sought to return to God in Godself as the subject of theology as mediated through the revelation of the Word. Finally, dialectical theology was kerygmatic in its deference towards the Church's proclamation and eschatological decision.

It should be recognized that these themes are relative in character. The paradoxical, critical, retrievalist, and kerygmatic sensibilities of dialectical theology collectively represent a way of redressing the relationship between immanence and transcendence in a specific social and intellectual setting – emphasizing the enduring hiddenness of God in the very midst of God's self-revelation. Although matters of immanence and transcendence were brought into particular focus in the early twentieth century, they are, nonetheless, unavoidable aspects of all theological reflection and not at all unique concerns of the dialectical group.[120] Finally, what is gained by the breadth of this definition may be lost in its inability to sufficiently characterize any single figure from within the movement. Within a shared commitment to these themes, a great deal of disagreement existed from the very beginning. Some further clarity may be achieved through observation of dialectical theology's departure from the liberal tradition as well as primary disputes within the movement itself.

d. Departures and Disagreements

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[120] Roger Olson and Stanley Grenz have presented the primary characteristic of twentieth century theology to be its concern for the balance between divine transcendence and divine immanence, i.e. concern for the God who 'is self-sufficient apart from the world,' and yet, is also 'involved with the processes of the world and of human history.' - Stanley Grenz and Roger Olson, *20th Century Theology: God & the World in a Transitional Age* (Dowers Grove, Il: InterVarsity Press, 1992). p. 11.

Chalamet has identified Herrmann as the origin of Barth and Bultmann's dialectical thought. Observing their respective departures from Herrmann will be useful for characterizing their broader break with the liberal tradition. First, however, it is not altogether clear that Herrmann fits neatly into a category called 'liberal theology.' The label itself is something of a caricature and deserves its own more specified treatment, which does not meet the focus of the current project.[121] Nevertheless, Barth and Bultmann's departure from the traditions in which they were educated, whether they be identified as liberal or otherwise, is significant. Chalamet identifies six dialectics employed in Herrmann's theology, a theology that 'has nothing to do with a desire to harmonize or mediate dialectical tensions.'[122] These six categories are law and gospel, God's transcendence and revelation, miracles as a dialectical reality, God's absolute and personal being, opposition to psychologism and historicism, and reflection on liberalism and orthodoxy.[123] Both Barth and Bultmann were deeply influenced by their time in Marburg and developed a special affinity for Herrmann's theology. Barth's break with Herrmann came in the early years of the first world war when Herrmann's name appeared alongside his Marburg colleagues in support of the German war agenda. Disappointment in the response of his beloved professor to the war and the added influence of Christoph Blumhardt resulted in the development of a new dialectical emphasis for Barth. Bultmann's progression was less of a break from his origins and, more accurately, a development of, and in some sense beyond, what he had learned from Herrmann. In either case, Bultmann remained more indebted to his 'Herrmannian' foundations.

From 1914 onwards, Barth began to distinguish himself from the traditions he was educated in. Chalamet highlights the 'reorientations' that show his departure. First, Barth began to question all theology based on human experience. Rather than focusing

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[121] A more extended assessment would also need to address Barth's correspondence with Adolf von Harnack which has gone wholly unmentioned here.

[122] Chalamet, *The Dialectical Theologians,* p. 12.

[123] Ibid, pp. 31-81.

on the dialectical tensions present in 'the experience of revelation,' as was the style of Herrmann, Barth took his theological basis from the 'knowledge of God' itself. This movement was further developed as Barth, through the influence of Blumhardt, exchanged Herrmann's unresolved 'dialectical tensions' for 'unambiguous [*unzweideutig*] ideas.'[124] Barth no longer allowed the 'not yet' of the believer's inability to win victory over the world to hinder objective affirmation of God's victory 'already' in Jesus Christ. His dialectical interest was no longer with the ambiguous tensions of human experience but with the ontological divide between 'God's world' and 'our world.'[125] Bultmann's developments came later, in the years following the war. His trajectory was directed by the incorporation of two theological themes that Hermann had largely overlooked. He turned towards an emphasis on 'the event of the cross' as decisive for the 'mystery of revelation' and towards 'deep interest for the "eschatological consciousness" within the early Church.' The second of these developments is most telling. Bultmann felt that the concept of eschatology avoided Hellenic objectifications of God because eschatological expressions maintained 'the "pure distinction" in Jesus' message between "the things which belong to the world and those which belong to God".' While Bultmann remained loyal to the theology of Herrmann, he gave the themes of the cross and eschatology a centrality that they lacked formerly.[126]

For Barth and Bultmann, their ties to and departures from Herrmann are apparent. It is astonishing that Brunner, despite his considerable interest in many of the same dialectical tensions developed by Herrmann, exhibits no significant interaction with or interest in the Marburg professor. The best assessment of Brunner's early theology (up to 1934) is available in David A. Gilland's *Law and Gospel in Emil Brunner's Earlier Dialectical Theology*. Gilland's study reveals the dialectic of *law and gospel* to be foundational in Brunner's mature work and the decisive theme in his early thought. Similarly, Chalamet holds that 'Herrman's theology is founded on the Law and

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[124] Ibid, pp. 89-92.

[125] Ibid, pp. 93-94.

[126] Ibid, pp. 103-105.

Gospel dialectic.'[127] Despite this commonality, it appears that Brunner's interest in the central Lutheran dialectic came from elsewhere, most likely from his own engagement with the tradition. Although Brunner was steeped in the heritage of the Swiss Reformed church, his scholarship reflects the Reformation tradition more broadly. Engagement with Luther had a profound influence on Brunner's thought, arguably more so than his reading of any other figure. In *The Mediator*, a quick review of the index reveals that citations of Luther nearly double the mentions of anyone else, including Calvin.[128]

Brunner's progress as a dialectical theologian was more akin to the journey of Gogarten than Barth and Bultmann's. Despite studying in Berlin with Adolf von Harnack and later at Heidelberg with Ernst Troeltsch, the young Gogarten was drawn to earlier German Idealism more so than to the systems of his esteemed professors.[129] According to Larry Shiner, Gogarten's continued engagement with Luther and Kierkegaard, whom he had begun to read as early as 1911, caused discontent with both his nationalist and his theological sympathies.[130] Gogarten's eventual renouncement of liberal theology inspired comparisons to Luther's reforming actions. The poet Wilhelm Schäfer described Gogarten's delivery of 'The Crisis of Culture' in 1920: 'With Gogarten there stepped into the banqueting hall of Wartburg Martin Luther… ready to fling his ink bottle at the head of the Devil. The man who there made his confession was done with modern theology. "The Friends of the Christian World" had experienced the whip of God.'[131] Moreover, Brunner and Gogarten both found assistance in the I-Thou

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[127] Ibid, p. 31.

[128] Brunner, *The Mediator,* pp. 620-624.

[129] Troeltsch assesses the disagreements between he and Gogarten in, Ernst Troeltsch, 'An Apple from the Tree of Kierkegaard,' in Robinson, *The Beginnings of Dialectical Theology*, pp. 311-316.

[130] Shiner, *The Secularization of History,* pp. 194-195.

[131] Quoted in Shiner, *The Secularization of History,* p. 195.

philosophy of Ferdinand Ebner, a move which Barth opposed, that helped them begin to reconstruct a doctrine of revelation during the 1920s.[132]

For Barth, Gogarten, and Brunner, the voices of religious socialism – especially Kutter, Ragaz, and the adjacently related Blumhardts – proved influential during the years that discontentment grew towards the liberal tradition. However, for Brunner the influence of these voices was arguably earlier, more profound, and more personal than for his contemporaries. Gilland identifies a critical 'cultural commentary' as learned from religious socialism and a traditional dialectical method – i.e., 'the Socratic contrast of opposing viewpoints, concluding with a synthesis of contrasting perspectives,' likely learned from Brunner's 'training at Gymnasium and the University of Zurich.' Gilland argues that both of these tendencies are apparent in Brunner's earliest work and remain 'strikingly consistent' in 'the overall form of his intellectual methodology.'[133] These methods were already evident in Brunner's doctoral thesis of 1913, *Das Symbolische in der religiösen Erkenntnis*, where he employed a dialectical criticism of both Protestant and Catholic scholasticism on one side and an admixture of liberal theology, philosophy, and politics on the other.[134] Brunner's social and familial embeddedness within religious socialism provided a critical outlook toward culture, politics, and theology, whereby he was perpetually engaged in a degree of disassociation from the prevailing trends around him.

Nevertheless, Brunner was not immune to growing discontent with religious socialism. The departure that had developed over the previous years was clearly expressed in his 1932 volume on theological ethics, *The Divine Imperative*. He wrote that although religious socialism had a theological basis, it remained 'unable to combine

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[132] For Brunner's use of Ebner see: McGrath, *Emil Brunner,* pp. 26-27; For Gogarten's use see: Shiner, *The Secularization of History,* pp. 199-200; For Barth's opposition see: Busch, *Karl Barth,* pp. 151-152 and McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic,* pp. 361 and 393-394.; I will return to the influence of I-Thou philosophy in Chapter 4, showing dialogical foundations of Brunner's epistemology.

[133] Gilland, *Law and Gospel,* pp. 20-21.

[134] Ibid, pp. 22-23.

realism with Scriptural thought; their ethic was either a sectarian ethic combined with rationalism or – as in the group led by Tillich – it is only Hegelianism with a veneer of Christianity.'[135] As regards a sectarian tendency, Brunner likely had in mind the pronounced opposition between Ragaz and Kutter that emerged after the start of the first world war. Ragaz, traditionally a pacifist, cast his lot with the Triple-Entente, and Kutter, previously accused of political and ethical quietism, now expressed clear support for the German efforts.[136]

Brunner's comment on Hegelianism reduces religious socialism to its lowest common denominator where it shares certain aims and deficiencies with Tillich's social ethics and the American 'Social Gospel' project.[137] Out of dissatisfaction with the political activism of these movements – activism that skewed theological realism towards a realized eschatology – and based on its radical distinction between time and eternity, the dialectical school departed from religious socialism. As with Bultmann's relation to Herrmann, Brunner never entirely departed from these roots. He became critical of the political entanglements and the philosophical commitments that religious socialism implicated. Nevertheless, he continually professed his indebtedness to the kerygmatic and eschatological realism (i.e., proclamation of the redemptive reality of God in our midst) which he understood the Blumhardts and Kutter to have introduced into the tradition.

Dialectical theology was a post-war movement in the German langue world that sought to redress the nature of revelation, having special concern for theology's socio-cultural applications. While the group united most closely in their early critical agenda, their growing apart was largely due to disagreements about the way forward. Standing under the infinite qualitative distinction and defending the paradoxical character of revelation lends itself to apophaticism. The objective and constructive content of

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[135] Emil Brunner, *The Divine Imperative: A Study in Christian Ethics* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1937), p. 614.

[136] McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic,* pp. 117-121.

[137] Brunner, *The Divine Imperative*, p. 614.

theology is less explicit. It was necessary to explain the countermanding paradox of dialectical theology by distinguishing between the event of revelation and its content. The constructive movement to identify the objective content of revelation and to express this content with appropriate deference to the dialectic of time and eternity led to the splintering and diversification of the dialectical group. There was no consensus, ultimately, on how to strike this balance.

Brunner tends to situate himself as a moderating figure within this paradigm. He sees himself as properly moderating between immanence and transcendence where others revert to emphasizing one side at the expense of the other. In *The Divine Imperative,* Brunner located his moral theology between Barth and Gogarten. He wrote, 'I intend to show how my own view differs from that of my theological friends, K. Barth on the one hand and F. Gogarten on the other.' He summarizes that 'in Barth Creation comes off badly compared with Redemption, and in Gogarten Redemption comes off badly compared with Creation.'[138] Brunner's specialized use of the orders of creation emphasized Creation's need for redemption as well as its inescapability as a point of theological reflection.[139] In light of redemption, creation must be both critiqued and embraced. 'Practical moral decisions of far-reaching significance depend on the right relation between the Ethos of Creation and Redemption.'[140]

This pattern, wherein Brunner positions his theology as the proper balance point between prevailing oppositional tendencies, remained constant throughout his career. In the second edition of *Truth as Encounter* (1962), he portrays his epistemic project as 'Theology beyond Barth and Bultmann.' Brunner positions his notion of encounter against what he views as the opposing objectivism of Barth and subjectivism of

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[138] Brunner, The Divine Imperative, pp. 615.

[139] I will address Brunner's use of the orders of creation in more depth in Chapter 3; see also my prior work: Taylor Holleyman, 'The Orders of Vocation: A Brunnerian Proposal,' in *International Journal of Systematic Theology*. 2022; 00: 1– 20.

[140] Ibid. p. 616.

Bultmann.[141] In the following chapters, several more examples of this dynamic will become apparent – especially Brunner's dialectical treatment of law and gospel, revelation and reason, idealism and naturalism, and objectivism and subjectivism. As will become clearer, Brunner combines dialectical theology's countermanding arrangement of time and eternity with a more traditionally Socratic dialectical method, always proceeding from the contrast of two opposing viewpoints.[142]

Conclusion

This opening chapter set Brunner within an intellectual and historical context by clarifying the movement known as 'dialectical theology.' Dialectical theology has been examined for its historical origins and theological commitments. As a loosely cooperative project, the tradition centered around the journal *Zwischen den Zeiten*. It developed most directly and prominently out of shared critiques and associations between Barth, Gogarten, Bultmann, and Brunner. Because of the focus of this study, Brunner's relation to the tradition and his presentation of the movement's theological commitments were given precedence. With help from Brunner's description of dialectical theology, four thematic commitments have been identified: dialectical theology was paradoxical, critical, retrievalist, and kerygmatic in its emphases. The figures discussed here share a commitment to these themes despite numerous other disagreements. The doctrine of revelation and its precarious balancing of divine transcendence and immanence was most foundational to the dialectical movement's departure from earlier traditions and, along with emerging political implications in the 1930s, which proved decisive for the group's internal strife. To speak of Brunner's 'dialectical framework' not only implicates an enduring commitment to the themes presented in this chapter but also his usual method of exposition. Chapter 3 will

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[141] Brunner, 'Theology Beyond Barth and Bultmann,' in *Truth as Encounter*. pp. 41-50.

[142] See Gilland's comments on Brunner's dialectical method and the use of reductionism - Gilland, *Law and Gospel,* p. 21

illuminate the compatibility of Brunner's dialectical and personalist sensibilities within this methodology by showing how his treatment of the personal and impersonal mirrors his arrangement of law and gospel.

Chapter 2

Knowledge of God: from Immediate to Mediated

In this second chapter, it is necessary to refine the present focus on two accounts. First, it is no longer the dialectical tradition in its broader sense that is being considered but, more narrowly, Emil Brunner himself. And second, the principal interest in Brunner's theological epistemology will begin to come to the fore. This chapter highlights Brunner's early epistemic interests, intellectual influences, and ultimate disenchantment with the modernism of his youth.

Brunner's theology is thoroughly dialectical – a claim initiated in the previous chapter – and it is ultimately Brunner's theory of encounter – i.e., his theological epistemology – which determines the distinctive nature of his thought. Put differently, the argument of this chapter is thus: What it means for Brunner's theology to be dialectical is determined by and rightly apprehended only in reference to his understanding of theological epistemology. Here we hit upon the crux of the matter insofar as it stands with the present project, to explore Brunner's theological epistemology, its development, and its character. This chapter not only explores Brunner's early theological development, but also shows the epistemic preoccupation that persists throughout his career. Brunner aims for his epistemology of encounter to be 'the guiding norm for all theological doctrine,' a claim that was principally developed

in the third and final volume of his *Dogmatics* (1960).[143] It will be seen below that making contributions to the field of epistemology was already an explicitly stated goal in his student thesis of 1914.

In the first chapter, the early development of a broader dialectical tradition was examined, being limited to outcomes prior to 1934 and giving special attention to Brunner. This chapter now turns exclusively to the development of Brunner's own thought. The present chapter's scope is limited to Brunner's writings up to 1924, tracing the development that takes place between Brunner's student thesis in 1914 and his 1924 *Die Mystik und das Wort*. This chapter is organized into two sections, the first of which explores influences (personal and intellectual) in Brunner's early life, and the second which shows how his early developments culminate in pointed criticism of modern thought. In his earliest thought, he envisioned religious experience as immediate and yet distinguishable from other epistemic modes. Brunner's emergence as a dialectical theologian hinged on refracting his earlier epistemic concerns through renewed theological foundations which emphasized God's own self as uniquely mediated, i.e. a theology of the Word of God. This transition into dialectical theology was accompanied by a protracted critique of modernity's tendency towards religious immanence.

I. Development – Emil Brunner's Coming of Age

a. Das Symbolische

Brunner's time as a student in Zurich was marked by much success. He was one of only three students who were promoted to licentiate (the equivalent of a doctorate) in theology at the University of Zurich between 1833 and 1922. His thesis, *Das Symbolische in der religiösen Erkenntnis: Beiträge zu einer Theorie der religiösen*

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[143] Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of the Church, Faith, and the Consummation: Dogmatics Volume III* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 1960). p. x.

Erkenntnis, was submitted to the theology faculty in 1913 and published a year later. Brunner passed his oral examination on July 7th, 1913 and was awarded the highest rating: *summa cum laude*. The title of his thesis and first monograph is already instructive. Brunner sought to make *Beiträge zu einer Theorie des religiösen Erkenntnis* [Contributions to a theory of religious knowledge].[144] The following excerpt, taken from the preface to the published edition, further demonstrates the aim of Brunner's earliest work:

> The basic principle of intellectualism, that the mind [*Verstand*] is the sole and sufficient means of the cognition [*Erkenntnis*] of reality, is a fatal error in the history of human thought; and the meaning of the philosophical and theological activity of the recent past and present, from Kant to Bergson, may be best understood as the carving out of a new, comprehensive conception of truth. The intellectual schematism that has such a harmful effect spiritually cannot be nullified through the contempt of knowledge [*Erkenntnis*], but only through reference to the evidence of a deeper knowledge [*Erkenntnis*]. With the present work, we want to join in this liberation movement [*Freiheitsbewegung*] and to serve it, albeit modestly, by looking at the new insights which our great masterminds have given to us, concentrating on a single point. It is neither accidental nor arbitrary that symbol was chosen as just such [a point of concentration]; rather it is one of the phenomena in which the insufficiency of intellectualism is particularly evident and, at the same time, a key to the cognition [*Erkenntnis*] of the religious idea-formation.[145]

Already, in this brief passage, Brunner evidences several proclivities that remained with him for the duration of his career. Most obvious is his critique of intellectualism [*Intellektualismus*]. This aspect of Brunner's thought needs to be qualified and further elucidated. He is not dismissing or belittling the demand for rigorous scholarship, rather

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[144] The semantic range of *Erkenntnis* and its breadth in Brunner's usage means that the term can comfortably be rendered as 'knowledge' or 'cognition' depending its context in Brunner's exposition.
[145] Emil Brunner, *Das Symbolische in Der Religiösen Erkenntnis* (Tübingen: Verlage von J.C.B. Mohr, 1914). p. III-IV.

he means to impose something akin to Kantian critical boundaries. At this juncture, it is sufficient, although not exhaustive, to characterize his polemic against intellectualism as an 'anti-metaphysical approach to theology.'[146] Also, this passage introduces Brunner's epistemic preoccupation. *Das Symbolische* explores the precise character of religious knowledge, drawing out this particularity through an examination of the nature and function of symbolic language.

With *Das Symbolische,* Brunner aimed to contribute to the conversation on religious epistemology as it had taken place within the modern tradition of philosophy of religion. He understood himself as continuing and developing a project that was initiated in the works of Kant and Schleiermacher. Jehle, Brunner's biographer, makes it a special point to note that Brunner's 'dissertation is not something constructed historically but, rather, systematically.' By this statement, Jehle means to say that Brunner's work was remarkably constructive. 'Brunner did not simply report the positions of others but developed, in his own words, his personal ideas.'[147] He aimed to contribute to the development of a modern religious epistemology [*religiöse Erkenntnistheorie*]. In this endeavor, the focus of *Das Symbolische* was given to the nature of religious language itself, to 'what is actually taking place when one speaks of God.' Religious language, Brunner argues, is uniquely symbolic. 'Brunner maintains the concept of symbol as a midpoint between two extremes: Symbol is neither completely identical with that which one wishes to express, nor is it absolutely different, rather it is similar or analogous. He calls symbol the 'Sprache des Unaussprechlichen' [language of the unspeakable].'[148]

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[146] McGrath, *Emil Brunner,* p. 3. McGrath notes that Brunner follows Kant and Schleiermacher in turning from an 'objective' theological focus and towards a more 'subjective' religious experience. Also, In the same vein as von Harnack and Ritschl, Brunner appears more interested in the moral content of religion, Jesus as moral exemplar, than in objective metaphysical claims.

[147] "Die Dissertation ist nicht etwa historisch, sondern systematisch aufgebaut. Brunner referiert auch nicht einfach die Positionen anderer, sondern entwickelt in eigenen Worten seine persönlichen Gedanken." – Frank Jehle, *Emil Brunner*, p. 50.

[148] "… was eigentlich geschieht, wenn mann von Gott spricht." – "Hier führt Brunner den Symbolbegriff ein als Mitte Zwischen zwei Extremen: Das Symbol sei weder völlig identisch mit dem, was man aussagen

In one sense, *Das Symbolische* should be considered an epistemology of language, probing the particularity of religious language as such. Jehle remarks that 'In the philosophical jargon of the time… Brunner anticipated that which, today, analytical philosophy in the footsteps of Wittgenstein attempts to solve, a description of the religious 'language game.'[149] However, Brunner's linguistic approach consciously pursued the essence of religion itself and inquired about its truth criteria.[150] Moreover, as Jehle notes, 'Brunner was interested in working out a new, comprehensive conception of truth, which he clarified in his later books *Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube* and *Truth as Encounter.*'[151] With this statement, Jehle calls attention to a programmatic continuity in Brunner's thought. One possible metanarrative of Brunner's theological career is the pursuit of an adequate theological epistemology and, subsequently, the exposition of Christian doctrine on the basis of such a foundation. This is, in any case, the narrative traced here.

The era of the Enlightenment left theology with two options: to revert to the unexamined biblical and ecclesial authority of the former orthodoxy, or 'to follow modern skeptical rationalism.' Refusing both options, the project initiated by Kant and taken up by Schleiermacher 'sought to carve out a special domain for the religious component of life,' a domain which would overcome rational skepticism without returning to the naïve foundationalism of the pre-Enlightenment world.[152] Brunner observed that Kant and

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wolle, noch sei es absolut davon verschieden, nicht gleich, sondern ähnlich bzw. analog. Er nennt das Symbol die Sprache des Unaussprechlichen'." – Ibid. p. 50.

[149] "In der philosophischen Frachsprache der Zeit… nahm Brunner vorweg, was heute die analytische Philosophie in den Spuren Wittgensteins zu lösen versucht, eine Beschreibung des religiösen 'Sprachspiels'." – Ibid. p. 51.

[150] Brunner, *Das Symbolische*. pp. 6-7.

[151] Es ging Brunner um das 'Herausarbeiten eines neuen, unfassenderen Wahrheitsbegriffs', den er in seinen späteren Büchern 'Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube' und 'Wahrheit als Begegnug' verdeutlichete.' – Jehle, *Emil Brunner*. p. 52.

[152] Stanley Grenz and Roger Olson, *20th Century Theology: God & the World in a Transitional Age* (Dowers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992). p. 24-25.

Schleiermacher, although through very different means, both worked to establish religious perception as independent from the strict rationalism of the Enlightenment. The task of *Das Symbolische* was to assess and extend this post-Enlightenment inquiry into the essence and particularity of religion. Brunner expressed the task as follows, 'What is to be understood as the phenomenon of religion, how does the human spirit come to religious behavior?'[153]

Framing his project in light of Kant and Schleiermacher's influence, Brunner observes the difficulties of constructing a religious epistemology. First, Kant's critique invalidated the possibility of basing the truth and justification of religion in any speculative metaphysics, especially ontological and cosmological arguments.[154] However, one cannot merely follow Kant's way. For all that Kant achieved in separating theoretical and practical reason – containing religion within practical reason and thereby liberating it from skeptical rationalism – he also relegated religion to being little more than an appendage to morality, perhaps sacrificing the true heart of religion itself. Brunner observes that 'the strict Kantian religious *epistemology* can bear actually only so much religion, as Kant himself has put in his concept of religion, maybe not even that much.'[155] Schleiermacher, however, more fully secured the independence of religious perception from all other mental phenomena [*seelischen Erscheinungen*], including morality.[156] With Schleiermacher, however, one must always warn against the confusion of psychology and epistemology. Furthermore, Brunner expresses concern that Schleiermacher provides no truth criteria for assessing the normative validity of religious perception. He remarks: 'The exchange of ideas and the particular development, but above all the study of the history of religion, must lead to the understanding that not

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[153] "Wie ist das Phänomen Religion zu verstehen, wie kommt der Menschengeist zu religiösem Verhalten?" – Brunner, *Das Symbolische*. p. 12.

[154] Ibid. p. 2.

[155] "Die strenge Kantsche religiöse Erkenntnistheorie vermag wirklich nur so viel Religion zu tragen, als Kant selbst in seinen Religionsbegriff hineingelegt hat, ja vielleicht nicht einmal ganz soviel." Ibid. p. 6.

[156] Ibid. p. 3.

everything which the religious consciousness produces as existence-statements can be valid, i.e. can be true.'[157] For Brunner, Schleiermacher has not given us the tools to adequately mediate between the plurality of claims which arise from religious perception.

Nonetheless, a viable religious epistemology should aspire to certain standards achieved by Kant and Schleiermacher. There are, after all, good reasons for the enduring influence of these two figures. One should aspire to the normative validity of religion as offered by Kant and also to the independent and experiential dimension of Schleiermacher's *feeling of absolute dependence.*[158] These standards should be reached for, but without, capitulating to the shortcoming of either project, e.g. relegating the normative validity of religion to moral norms or forgoing vigorous truth criteria. In this way, Brunner's project is deeply indebted to the influence of Kant and Schleiermacher but rejects any mere synthesis of the two. Due to inherent disparities, one cannot simply derive 'from Schleiermacher the "essence" of religion and from Kant its normative rationale, as tempting as this association would be.'[159] Brunner does not claim to neatly reconcile these disparities in his own assessment. Rather, he means to acknowledge the challenges faced by a religious epistemology and to give some account of the relevant work that had taken place over the previous century, illuminating the possibility for a positive and independent religious epistemology. Along with its engagement of such figures as William James, Jakob Friedrich Fries and Ernst Troeltsch, *Das Symbolische* reveals a particular association with the phenomenological method of Edmund Husserl and the early work of Henri Bergson.

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[157] "Der Gedankenaustausch und die eigene Entwicklung, vor allem aber das Studium der Religionsgeschichte, müssen zu der Erkenntnis führen, daß nicht alles, was das religiöse Bewußtsein an Seinsaussagen hervorbringt, gültig, d.h. wahr sein kann." Ibid. 5.

[158] Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* (London: T&T Clark, 1999). pp. 12-18 [§4].

[159] "daß man von Schleiermacher das 'Wesen' der Religion und von Kant ihre normative Begründung sich zeigen läßt, so verlockend auch diese Vereinigung wäre." Ibid. p. 6.

Husserl's presence in *Das Symbolische* is subtle, being disclosed primarily in Brunner's own phenomenological approach rather than through direct references. Nevertheless, the following comment from Brunner's 'Intellectual Autobiography' is revealing: 'A thorough understanding of Husserl is evident in my first writing, *Das Symbolische*… I am still a little proud of the fact that Husserl then wrote to me, saying that I had understood him better than most of his contemporaries.'[160] Brunner's affinity for Bergson is more apparent but the depth of his interest is only fully appreciated in light of his first attempt at *Habilitation* (1915). Brunner's submission to the Zurich faculty, withdrawn due to suspicion of its impending rejection, was titled 'Die Bedeutung H. Bergsons für die Religionsphilosophie' [The Importance of H. Bergson for Philosophy of Religion]. Jehle notes that one of the major concerns with Brunner's first *Habilitationsschrift* was that 'he identified himself too strongly with the French thinker, was too enthusiastic about him and had no critical distance from him.'[161] Although *Das Symbolische* interacts with an impressive range of modern philosophical and theological thought, Husserl and Bergson are of particular interest due to Brunner's adaptation of transcendental phenomenology and his dependence on Bergson's concept of intuition. Moreover, these two figures are especially helpful for making sense of Brunner's anti-intellectualist program.

In the preface to *Das Symbolische* Brunner describes his project as participating in a 'liberation movement,' i.e., a philosophical trajectory 'from Kant to Bergson' which 'can best be understood as the carving out of a new comprehensive understanding of truth.'[162] Without foregoing the crucial complexities and disagreements amongst these

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[160] Brunner, 'Intellectual Autobiography.' p.5.

[161] "Er identifizierte sich zu stark mit dem französischen Denker, war von ihm zu sehr begeistert und hatte keine kritische Distanz zu ihm." – Jehle, *Emil Brunner,* p. 67.

[162] "Der Sinn der philosophischen und theologischen Bewegnung der jüngsten Vergangenheit und der Gegenwart, von Kant bis Bergson, kann am besten verstanden werden als Herausarbeitung eines neuen, umfassenderen Wahrheitsbegriffs…. Dieser Freiheitsbewegung möchten wir un smit der vorliegenden Arbeit anschließen." – Brunner, *Das Symbolische*, p. III.

figures, according to Brunner, a certain harmony of interests can be identified in the work undertaken by Kant, Schleiermacher, Husserl and Bergson. It is within this harmony that we find what Brunner broadly identifies as anti-intellectualism. He writes that 'scholasticism is a phenomenon which does not belong only to the medieval period; but to all times, even in the present.' Speaking of scholasticism, what Brunner has in mind is a 'natural tendency' towards dogmatism, wherein 'unchecked opinions' are combined with 'axiomatic truths,' supplying irrevocable foundations to a given ideology.[163] Kant, Schleiermacher, Husserl and Bergson can, each in their own way, be understood as responding to dogmatic forms of rational or empirical foundationalism. This is seen in Kant's critical agenda,[164] Schleiermacher's romantic predisposition, Husserl's objection to historicism and psychologism,[165] and Bergson's attack on mechanistic determinism.[166]

Bertrand Russell described Bergson's thought as a kind of 'irrationalism' that 'exemplifies admirably the revolt against reason which, beginning with Rousseau, has gradually dominated larger and larger areas in the life and thought of the world.'[167] The common narrative that Russell identifies as running from Rousseau to Bergson is a

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[163] "Scholastik ist eine Erscheinung, die nicht bloß dem Mittelalter angehört, zu allen Zeiten, auch in der Gegenwart, ist der Forschritt des Denkens gehemmt worden durch ein geistiges Trägheitsgesetz, durch ein natürliche Tendenz, ungeprüfte Anschauungen als unumstößliche, axiomatische Wahrheiten hinzunehmen und auf sochen Dogmen den Bau einer Weltanschauung aufzurichten." – Ibid. p. III.

[164] See: 'Preface to Second Edition" of Kant's Kritik der reinen Vernunft – "I have therefore found it necessary to deny knowledge, in order to make room for faith. The dogmatism of metaphysics, that is, the preconception that it is possible to make headway in metaphysics without a previous criticism of pure reason, is the source of all that unbelief, always very dogmatic, which wars against morality." – Immanuel Kant, Immanuel Kant's Critique of Pure Reason, trans. by Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan and Co., 1929). p. 29.

[165] Donn Welton, 'The Development of Husserl's Phenomenology', in The Essential Husserl, ed. by Welton Donn (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), p. x.

[166] Suzanne Guerlac, *Thinking in Time: An Introduction to Henri Bergson* (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 2006). pp. 28-31.

167 Bertrand Russell, History of Western Philosophy (London: Routledge, 1946). p. 714.

clear parallel to the program, 'from Kant to Bergson,' which Brunner deems to be a liberating revolt against *Intellektualismus*. Kant and Schleiermacher offered a response to the dogmatic rationalism of the Enlightenment. Husserl and Bergson stood against the positivism and materialism of the new scientific revolution. Brunner employs them somewhat collectively, although not without qualification, as allies in combat against the streams of intellectualism (esp. dogmatic rationalism and empiricism).

Das Symbolische did not formally develop its own epistemology although, as Jehle suggests, many of its insights are remarkably constructive.[168] The work is more modest than this, intending only to make 'contributions to a theory of religious cognition.' As has already been indicated, Brunner aimed to contribute specifically to the anti-intellectualist concepts of religious consciousness. To grasp Brunner's philosophical and theological outlook at this point, it is most helpful to view his determination of the concept of religion and his comparison of symbols and concepts. It is in determining the concept of religion that Brunner is almost certainly following Husserl's phenomenology. He begins with a rejection of historicism and psychologism as adequate means for grasping the essence of religion:

> It is clear that we want to prove neither the historical origin of all religion nor, empirically/psychologically, the individual origin of it… Rather, it [determining the concept of religion] is about an intuition of the human mind and its inner structure, about finding those motives, i.e., inner connections, which lead to the emergence of a religious consciousness.[169]

Brunner's phenomenological determination of religion leads him directly into the realm of Schleiermacher, arguing that religion itself is grounded in an immediate and pre-

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[168] See footnote 6 above.

[169] 'Es ist klar, daß wir damit weder historisch den Anfang aller Religion, noch empirisch-psychologisch die individuelle Entstehung derselben nachweisen wollen… Vielmehr handelt es sich darum, durch eine Intuition des Menschengeistes und seiner inneren Struktur diejenigen Motive, d.h. inneren Zusammenhänge aufzufinden, die zur Entstehung eines religiösen Bewußtseins füren.' – Ibid. pp. 12-13.

conceptual intuition whereby the religious subject becomes aware of a transcendent reality on which they are dependent. Furthermore, this intuition is always accompanied by a feeling of 'awe' [*Ehrfurcht* – also veneration/reverence].[170] Although Brunner is undeniably committed to this phenomenological approach, he expresses familiar concerns that would come to dominate his decidedly less charitable reception of Schleiermacher in the following years. He writes that 'The main difficulty of any epistemology emanating from the subject is that of not remaining stuck in the subject.'[171] That which is given in religious intuition must be a discovery of the trans-subjective self – signaling participation in, awareness of, or dependence upon a universal object outside of the self. This movement of the spiritual consciousness beyond the individual subject is an essential dimension of religious epistemology, indicating, as with Husserl, a transcendental phenomenology.

This approach extends to Brunner's assessment of language which explores the structures of religious consciousness by differentiating between categories of language and their ability to adequately represent religious phenomena. He suggests a distinction between symbolic and conceptual language which has its basis in a prior distinction made between intuitive and conceptual knowledge. It is at this point that Brunner's reliance on Bergson is most crucial. Bergson, most notably in his *Time and Free Will* (1889), juxtaposes the qualitative perception of immediate intuitions (e.g. feelings, sensation, aesthetics) with quantitative representations which are mediated by concepts. Brunner's differentiation between intuitive and conceptual knowledge is built upon the position of Bergson.[172] Suzanne Guerlac has articulated Bergson's concern:

> We can measure things, count them and make predictions about them because they are governed by logical and natural laws – the law of causality for example and the law of

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[170] Ibid. pp. 14-15.

[171] 'Die Hauptschwierigkeit jeder vom Subjekt ausgehenden Erkenntnistheorie ist die, nicht im Subjekt stecken zu bleiben.' – Ibid. p. 40.

[172] Ibid. pp. 78-79.

> the conservation of matter. If, however, we extend scientific modes of thinking to ourselves, Bergson insisted, we would become like things. If we try to measure and count our feelings, to explain and predict our motives and actions, we will be transformed into automatons – without freedom, without beauty, without passion, and without dreams.[173]

Brunner's investigation of the symbolic element in religious cognition is largely an application of Bergson's epistemology to the category of religion. For Bergson, intuition not only gives knowledge of that which is spatially extended but also of realities that resist spatial representation, especially feelings (e.g. pain and pleasure). Intuition is a category of perception that operates prior to and, in some sense, independent of spatial representation or mediating concepts. Such intuitions are immediate, taking place in a particular duration of time after which what remains of their existence is not an object to be measured or weighed, but only the vague impression left on the memory.

As Guerlac's assessment suggests, Bergson was concerned with the limitations of scientific knowledge, i.e. knowledge of the measured, classified, systematized. Moreover, he sought to legitimize intuition's grasp upon reality apart from these scientific processes. It is to this distinction that Brunner applies the categories of concept and symbol. He writes, 'concept is the language of science; symbol is the language of life.'[174] Furthermore:

> That which is grasped in faith, in religious knowledge, is something incomparable to my other content of consciousness. However, I am a being and strive for unity; I also want to share my inner possessions with others. So, I must express the infinite with the finite. I can do this in two ways: either by the concept or by the symbol… As a scientist, I make use of the concept, because in science I am concerned with the general, the system; but

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[173] Guerlac. *Thinking in Time,* p. 42.

[174] Brunner, *Das Symbolische*, p. 87.

> as a religious man, to whom everything depends on life, on the concrete individual, I depend on symbol. In both cases, however, I mean the ultimate by the finite.[175]

Concepts, according to Brunner, are concerned with the sphere of the 'general' and are constructed through abstract reflection upon the relationship between objects. They function as normative measurements and taxonomies and therefore supply a systematic unity.

Concepts are necessary for the sake of coherence and clarity. However, they are a potential distortion of reality in two ways. First, and most importantly, they represent reality as static and determined. This is clearly in conflict with Bergson's process thought wherein the perception of reality does not take place in static moments but as a 'duration,' i.e. 'a qualitative multiplicity, with no likeness to number.'[176] Second, while concepts are natural and necessary when applied to spatially extended objects or objects which invite spatial representation (e.g., a mental image), they are likely to distort the concrete particularity of other mental phenomena such as the consciousness of freedom. It is the opposite case with symbols. Brunner writes, 'what is easily accessible to the viewer will hardly be symbolized, especially to symbolize spatial optical quantities, seems to be senseless.'[177] Symbols are applied to feelings, sensations, unmediated intuitions, etc. which resist spatial representation.

Religious consciousness, being an immediate intuition of this kind, is therefore not comprised of some set of concepts, nor is it reliant on the mediation of these. Rather, religious cognition is an immediate experience of direct consciousness,

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[175] Ibid. p. 131.

176 Henri Bergson, Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness, trans. by F.L. Pogson. (New York: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1910). p. 226.

177 'Was der Anschauung leicht zugänglich ist, wird kaum symbolisiert werden, vor allem räumliche optische Größen zu symbolisieren, kommt uns ohne weitreres sinnlos vor.' – Brunner, Das Symbolische. p. 37.

expressed by symbols.[178] As regards representation and expression of religious consciousness, Brunner states:

> Now there are two main symbols through which I fix myself and others to that which is believed: the (divine) spiritual personality and the (spiritual) overworld. One of them expresses the fact that I recognize the divine as essentially related, a spiritual Being, in which I share; the other states that this divine is something transcendent to everything finite, even to the finite mind, absolutely opposite; something that is not exhausted by the totality of everything finite, a comprehensive, infinite. One leads under the pressure of the need for sensual intuition, to the image of man, the other to the heavenly tower… The reconciliation of the two equal tendencies of religious consciousness takes place in the synthesis God is the "heavenly father."[179]

The nature of symbols is meant to coalesce with the assertion that religious consciousness, as an immediate intuition, is irreducible to concepts and therefore thoroughly independent from 'philosophical speculation.' 'What is accessible to religious knowledge is its own possession, which it does not need to share with anyone else, a sanctuary that does not allow anyone to enter.'[180] It is unclear just how rigid Brunner imagines the boundaries between concepts and symbols to be. There are instances in which the boundaries seem quite porous. The symbol of 'heavenly father' functions as a normative concept within a system of religious beliefs. To not confuse the categories in this way, we must understand symbol and concept as denoting two distinct epistemological categories rather than two different linguistic functions. Both language types function similarly, as all language does, normalizing and making communicable objects of knowledge. However, as Brunner presents it, they apply to different types of objects: symbol as a sign of the immediate and incorporeal, concept as a sign of the

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178 Ibid. p. 45.

179 Ibid. pp. 132-133.

180 'Was der religiösen Erkenntnis zugänglich ist, das ist ihr eigenster Besitz, den sie mit niemand sonst zu teilen braucht, ein Heiligtum, das keinen anderen einläßt.' – Ibid. p. 132.

mediated and measurable. In any case, capturing both the overlap and the distinction between Brunner's understanding of concept and symbol is precarious and subtle.

Das Symbolische does not intend to solve all the questions that it raises, but merely to address the issue of the nature and independence of religious consciousness through reference to the relevant work of the past century. Here, we have drawn particular attention to the reception of Husserl and Bergson. Brunner's assessment places him comfortably within the liberal Protestantism of his day. He is not altogether uncritical of the tradition, highlighting certain deficiencies in Kant and Schleiermacher, and offering passing critiques of Troeltsch.[181] Nevertheless, religion is presented as a general phenomenon, with a multiplicity of expressions and manifestations. Christianity, and the Christian revelation, is not something unique but merely the highest form of a general kind. Likewise, the particularity of venerated 'religious heroes' (e.g., Jesus), and the corresponding particularity of their religious expression (e.g., the teachings of Jesus), are not unique but simply 'much more powerful, pure, and clearer than our own experience.'[182] In this way, Brunner remains in step with much of German Idealism.

As a student thesis published so early in his career, it is advisable to take Brunner's project with a grain of salt. Nevertheless, *Das Symbolische* is valuable as more than just a point of contrast with his later thought. Brunner's treatment of the nineteenth century's quest for the essence of religion as well as his own appropriation of philosophical sources is interesting in its own right. Also, despite the clear departures that take place in Brunner's thought, there are many commitments found in *Das Symbolische* that endure: first, an anti-intellectualism, marked by a critical view of metaphysics; second, – closely related to the first – a commitment to Kantian critical philosophy; third, a distinction between the language of faith and the language of science; fourth, an insistence on the finitude of all theological speaking and; fifth, the independence of religious knowledge.

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[181] Ibid. p. 7.

[182] Ibid. p. 15.

One further way in which *Das Symbolische* sets a tone for Brunner's career is that it stands as a work in philosophy of religion. Formally distinguishing between the disciplines of Christian theology (esp. Christian dogmatics) and philosophy of religion is at least as problematic as it is helpful. Nevertheless, the questions posed by Brunner at this stage fit most aptly within the field of philosophy of religion and the argument can be made that this did not change much until he began work on his dogmatics in the 1940s. The shift that occurs in Brunner's thinking in the coming years was less a change in the questions that he was asking and more a change in the strength and character of the theological lens through which these questions were refracted. The remainder of this chapter will explore these developments and the impact of Brunner's emerging theological trajectory.

b. Theological Reformation

In the years between the completion of his licentiate and his installment as an associate professor at the University of Zurich in 1922, Brunner's theology underwent a reformation. One should recognize the movement that takes place during these years while, at the same time, resisting the convenience of over-simplified historical accounts. That Brunner breaks with the prevailing liberal theology of the nineteenth century during this period and emerges as a proponent and purveyor of the new dialectical theology remains accurate, but only as a generic and approximate portrayal. One weakness of the customary account of dialectical theology is that it lends itself to caricatured representations of both liberal and dialectical theology. Of course, neither of these is a static or homogeneous tradition. In particular, liberal theology represents a remarkably diverse collection of figures and ideas which, despite their shared modernism, differed radically from one another in places. It is also inescapable that dialectical theology remained deeply indebted to the traditions of the nineteenth century, even amid its obvious departures from and criticisms of the same. Further to this end, it is unreasonable, perhaps even impossible, to identify any singular moment or influence as

denoting Brunner's break with liberal theology and his emergence as a dialectical thinker. Instead, we do better to recognize an assorted network of personal and historical factors that coalesced to shape his thinking during the earliest years of his career. Even early on, Brunner was never entirely nor uncritically committed to theological liberalism. He was also, despite many shared commitments and certain feelings of allegiance, never fully in tune with the central figures of dialectical theology, especially Barth and Thurneysen.

Both *Das Symbolische* and Brunner's 1915 *Habilitation* attempt, *Die Bedeutung H. Bergsons für die Religionsphilosophie*, were steeped in the tides of German idealism and, as Jehle notes, they are 'reminiscent of the idealistic belief in the progress of the nineteenth century.'[183] Jehle cites the final lines of *Die Bedeutung H. Bergsons* wherein the themes of German idealism are especially palpable:

> Through the entire world of the living flows the divinely created spirit; what it is, however, first becomes apparent in the human spirit, from the domain of history. It is already obvious there as the principle of ascending development, so it must be here this much more, where the boundaries of matter are open and the degree of freedom and of the spiritual life is achieved. From the contact of the free human spirit with the creative spirit of God, the religious experience and, as the end result, the whole development of the kingdom of God comes to be.[184]

Along with the progress of history, several motifs of Idealism emerge in these few short lines – e.g., a Hegelian notion of spirit (possibly suggesting a kind of organicism) and an emphasis on the immanence of the divine in human life and history – all of this being interpreted under the narrative of *Heilsgeschichte*. However, within Brunner's reception of this tradition, there are already clear attempts to temper the spirit of Idealism.

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[183] 'Die… erinnert an den idealistischen Fortschrittsglauben des 19. Jahrhunderts.' – Jehle, *Emil Brunner,* p. 67.

[184] Brunner, *Die Bedeutung H. Bergsons für die Religionsphilosophie*. p. 87 – quoted in Jehle, *Emil Brunner,* pp. 66-67.

Alongside the above quotation, Jehle offers the following statement from *Das Symbolische*:

> For Jesus the Kingdom of God or Kingdom of Heaven is something that comes from God… "Your kingdom" - it is not a becoming – "it comes"… Therefore, humans cannot generate it, accomplish it, but only expect it, inherit it, have part in it.[185]

Statements such as this soften the more ambitious and humanistic elements of Idealism. They also stand with the anti-intellectualist agenda already identified in *Das Symbolische* – an agenda carried through in *Die Bedeutung H. Bergsons* as a juxtaposition of religious and scientific knowledge.[186] At the very least, one finds a preexisting reticence about the capacities of human reason (*á la* Kant) in the young Brunner.

In the years between 1914 and 1922, this impulse combined with sharpened criticism and renewed theological foundations to produce a distinct shift in Brunner's theology. One of the first sign's that Brunner was turning against his earlier intellectual training came in a 1916 contribution to the Swiss Reformed Church's periodical where he accused historicism (a foundation of his Zurich education) of killing original-creative life.[187] These critical themes would be greatly strengthened in the coming years. To better understand how this comes about it is necessary to observe Brunner's relationship with Swiss religious socialism, his early reception of Barth and Thurneysen, and the post-war setting in which this all took place.

There is no point in Brunner's life at which he could, without qualification, be labeled as politically or theologically liberal. However, the young Brunner could not have

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[185] Brunner, *Das Symbolische.* p. 121 – quoted in Jehle, *Emil Brunner,* p. 67.

[186] Jehle, *Emil Brunner,* p. 65.

[187] 'Im April 1916 diagnostizierte Brunner schraf, dass "Der Historismus, das einseitig geschichtliche Denken", das 'originale, schöpferisch-ursprüngliche Leben' töte.' Jehle. *Emil Brunner,* p. 39 – Quoting from Brunner, Grundsätzliches zum Kapitel 'Die junngen Theologen', in: Kirchenblatt für die reformierte Schweiz 1916, p. 59.

been more closely tied to the center of the religious socialist movement in Switzerland. It is difficult to overstate the lasting influence of religious socialism and its leading figures on him. Brunner's high appraisal of the movement and of its impact on his life shines through in his "Intellectual Autobiography." He credits his mother, the daughter of a Reformed minister, for leading his father to a life of faith and bringing the family into contact with Christoph Blumhardt. Brunner writes:

> Through Blumhardt and his two important pupils, Hermann Kutter and Leonhard Ragaz, our family was drawn into the religious socialist Movement. The church in Europe had just begun to take note of the Industrial Revolution and to understand its meaning. "Religious Socialism" was the *avantgarde* of this church which was just becoming sensitive to the appalling plight of the industrial laborer. Hermann Kutter's book, *Sie müssen* [They Must, 1904] … portrayed the Social Democrats, in spite of their atheistic leanings, as true bearers of the message of the Kingdom of God in our time. Leonard Ragaz and a number of Swiss pastors then joined the Social Democratic party in order to demonstrate their solidarity with the workers, whose predominant concern was the struggle for social justice. To be sure, this religious socialism differed decisively from Marxist "Scientific Socialism," as well as from the American "Social Gospel," in that faith in Jesus Christ always stood at its center. The propelling force of this movement was the hope of the approaching Kingdom of God. During my years of study, this movement drew me into its orbit much more than the theological liberalism that then dominated the scene. As young theologians at the University of Zurich we received solid scientific tools for our later work… We made good use of this historical and critical training. The ideology connected with the religious socialist Movement was, nevertheless, unable to shake the sound Christological foundation which Blumhardt had given it.[188]

Similar refrains about the compelling force of Swiss religious socialism and the lasting influence of Ragaz and, especially, Kutter and the Blumhardts can be found throughout Brunner's writings. As outlined in the previous chapter, Brunner attributed the

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[188] Brunner, 'Intellectual Autobiography.' pp. 4-5.

kerygmatic character of dialectical theology as being an inheritance from Kutter and the Blumhardts.[189] Moreover, his persistent theological concern with the concrete realities of social and political life was undoubtedly a seed planted by Ragaz and company.

Despite Brunner's indebtedness to these figures, his shifting ideas can be seen in confrontations that arose between himself and Kutter and Ragaz during the years between 1916 and 1918. One thing which emerges from Brunner's early correspondence with these figures is that he is quick to blame their debates and conflicts on his own polemical nature. In a letter dated June 8, 1915, to Kutter's son, Brunner stated 'that his "main work" always consisted in "dealing with" Kutter,' suggesting that much of Brunner's intellectual development involved wrestling – often in disagreement – with Kutter's ideas.[190] Similarly, in August 1916 Brunner wrote to Ragaz during the midst of a heated disagreement to apologize and confess his 'fanaticism of thinking.' He contended that his style of thinking was such that he had 'hardly ever written anything without constantly polemicizing against a counter speaker: For me, thinking means polemicizing.'[191] This combative tendency remained with Brunner, being developed as the *eristic* task of theology and identifiable in the substantial critical content of his published works.[192]

Brunner's dissatisfaction with Kutter, which did not diminish his otherwise deep appreciation for him, was primarily due to a perceived moral inadequacy in Kutter's work. 'He accused Kutter of "moral laxity" and "quietism".'[193] In Brunner's assessment,

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[189] See Chapter 1.

[190] 'In einem Brief an Kutters Sohn, Hermann Kutter *junior,* vom 8. Juni 1915, spricht er davon, dass seine "Hauptarbeit" immer noch in der 'Auseinandersetzung' mit Kutter bestehe…' – Jehle, *Emil Brunner,* p. 92.

[191] 'Er "habe noch kaum je etwas geschrieben oder gedacht, ohne dabei beständig gegen einen Gegenredner zu polemisieren": "Denken heißt für mich polemisieren".' in Brunner an Ragaz am 23. August 1916, excerpt from Ibid. 104-105.

[192] See: Emil Brunner, 'Die Andere Aufgabe Der Theologie', *Zwischen Den Zeiten*, 7 (1929), 255–76.

[193] 'Er wirft Kutter "sittliche Laxheit" und "Quietismus"…' – Jehle, quoting from an undated letter fragment to an unnamed recipient found in the 'Nachlass Emil Brunners' housed at the *Staatsarchiv der Kantons*

Kutter taught that if one simply believed in God, moral action would flow naturally from this experience. Moral instruction was neglected on the premise that 'everything comes by itself.' Brunner believed that it was necessary to provide theological guidance for moral and cultural activity, that such things 'should only become superfluous in heaven.'[194] To neglect the need for such instruction was to assume a kind of realized eschatology wherein Christian virtue amounted to trusting one's belief in God and waiting upon the divine work being already fulfilled in the present. At this stage, Brunner appears to be preoccupied with the intellectual curiosity of balancing the relationship between morality and faith. Any deeper political and theological concerns with religious socialism remained passive, eventually being stimulated by the emerging devastation of the war – as Brunner later recounted: 'The catastrophe of the First World War indicated clearly that the foundation and aims of religious socialism were due for a thorough reappraisal.'[195]

Despite Brunner's abiding affection for Kutter and his association with religious socialism, it is not difficult to see why Kutter's position would quickly become untenable. Deeply influenced by the mythos of German Idealism, Kutter had associated the German cultural and national identity far too closely with the unfolding Kingdom of God. The following lines are taken from the 'Author's Address to American Readers' which was an introductory essay included in the English edition (1908) of Kutter's *Sie müssen*. This brief address was intended to introduce American readers to the aims and cultural backdrop of religious socialism:

> At bottom, the question is not of dogma, whether Social Democratic or Christian… but of the fact that the living God Himself is manifesting His Kingdom in the social movement which is to-day permeating the whole world, and which finds its most imposing

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Zürich. Jehle. *Emil Brunner,* p. 93.; Brunner's eristic task will be treated in greater length in the next chapter.

[194] Ibid. p. 93.

[195] Brunner, 'Intellectual Autobiography.' p. 8.

> expression in the German Social Democracy; and that thus it is God Himself who is carrying the Gospel of His Son to victory throughout all the old structures of civilization.[196]

This sanctified portrayal of German social progress was refreshed in Kutter's 1916 *Reden an die deutsche Nation* [*Speeches to the German Nation*]. This book had little critical distance from the German political agenda and was secure in the assumption that Germany would win the Great War. It offered a highly exaggerated appraisal of German culture. Jehle remarks that 'the Germany sung by Kutter was not the actually existing state but an ideal or a utopia:'[197]

> Oh, you daring German – do you know what is at stake? You will find what is greater than German, the really human that God has built into your soul, the deep, inexhaustible inwardness born from eternity, the root and source of all life. – This greatness can be nothing else than that the German spirit in the guise of German culture has more to offer than German, that the German shale can be broken once, so that the delicious core of humanity itself, unhindered by any further patronizing comes to light.[198]

Notwithstanding his polemical tendencies, Brunner's reaction to Kutter's *Reden an die deutsche Nation* was basically positive.[199] These "*Speeches*" were published in 1916 during the height of the war and Brunner's pronounced concern with this kind of theo-political exceptionalism was not yet manifest.[200]

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[196] Hermann Kutter, *They Must; or God and the Social Democracy: A Frank Word to Christian Men and Women* (Chicago: The Co-Operative Printing Company, 1908).

[197] 'dass das von Kutter besungene Deutschland nicht der real existerende Staat, sondern ein Ideal bzw. eine Utopie wa:' – Jehle, *Emil Brunner,* p. 90.

[198] Kutter, *Reden an die deutsche Nation*. (Jena, 1916) p. 21 – excerpt provided in Ibid. p. 90.

[199] Ibid. pp. 91-92.

[200] Brunner would expressly reject the association of the Will of God with any particular political agenda in *The Divine Imperative* (1932) and *Justice and the Social Order* (1943).

From 1916 to 1924 Brunner served as pastor to the mountain villages of Obstalden and Filzbach. In this context, he became invested in the plight of his congregants, most of whom were farmers and laborers. He became a staunch advocate of the trade unions and a vocal supporter of the 1918 national strike in Switzerland. These were Brunner's dominant political and theological concerns at the time and these fit squarely with his religious socialist sympathies. Of course, as the unparalleled destruction of the war became apparent, the Western world grew disenchanted with its modern assumptions about the progress of history and human culture. As a result of the devastating and seemingly unexpected German defeat '*Kulturprotestantismus* [Cultural Protestantism], the identification of Protestant Christianity with (German) culture, lost all credibility.'[201]

An eccentricity of Brunner's relationship to Hermann Kutter in particular, and religious socialism in general, is that his eventual disavowal of religious socialism did not diminish his abiding appreciation for Kutter and the seeds planted by him. One explanation for this could come by positing a juxtaposition between Brunner's personal relationship and his public theology. Kutter was family, the uncle of Brunner's wife Margrit, and affectionately referred to as 'Uncle Herman' by Brunner himself.[202] He was a fixture in Brunner's religious education as a child, including presiding over Brunner's confirmation in 1905. Brunner also served as an assistant to Kutter at the Neumünster in Zurich before being installed as pastor to the villages of Obstalden and Filzbach in 1916. It is entirely natural for the fruits of such personal investment to stand firmly, even alongside ideological differences. However, Brunner's own appraisal suggests that the

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[201] Alasdair I. C. Heron, *A Century of Protestant Theology* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1980). p. 75.; Although Heron's definition of *Kulturprotestantismus* captures the outlook of dialectical theology, it is overly simplistic. Theological interest in social transformation is not limited to an 'ideology of legitimation.' – see: Mark Chapman, 'Theology in 1914,' *Ernst Troeltsch and Liberal Theology: Religion and Cultural Synthesis in Wilhelmine Germany* (Oxford, 2001; online edn, Oxford Academic, 3 Oct. 2011).

[202] Jehle, *Emil Brunner,* p. 92.

situation was not as simple as this. He credits Kutter with far more than a cherished friendship:

> So, when Karl Barth published his first book *Der Römerbrief…* I found in it, as my friend Thurneysen did, first of all a powerful expression of thoughts we had received from Kutter and which were, in some way, the spirit of the Blumhardts, brought into a modern and intellectually brilliant thought-form. True, there were new things too, but in the main it seemed to us a continuation of the Blumhardt-Kutter line which had been familiar to us since our early youth. It was the word of Paul as the Word of God for our times.[203]

As adumbrated in the previous chapter, Brunner credits Kutter, and by extension the Blumhardts, with planting those seeds which led to the emergence of the new dialectical theology.

It is worth noting that Bruce McCormack's assessment of Barth corroborates this valuation. McCormack locates Barth's turn toward new theological foundations (and away from liberalism) in 1915 and relates this transition to Barth's encounter with Christoph Blumhardt. Barth and Thurneysen spent five days in Bad Boll with Blumhardt in April of 1915. McCormack cites Barth's report of this occasion: 'Blumhardt always begins right away with God's presence, might, and purpose: he starts out from God; he does not begin by climbing upwards to Him by means of contemplation and deliberation.'[204] It is in the summer of 1915, immediately following the visit to Bad Boll, that McCormack identifies the emergence of 'a new *Ansatz* – a new starting-point for theological reflection.'[205] Furthermore, as with Brunner, Barth appears to identify Kutter as the steward of Blumhardt's insights. Commenting on the disagreements which had befallen Kutter and Ragaz, Barth wrote to Thurneysen:

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[203] Emil Brunner, 'A Spiritual Autobiography', *Japan Christian Quarterly*, 1955, p. 240.

[204] Karl Barth, *Action in Waiting* (Rifton, NY: Plough Publishing House, 1969), 23-4. Cited in Bruce McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). p. 123.

[205] McCormack, p. 123.

> I read his [Ragaz'] article last night and find it very instructive, in the sense that he makes very clear what he is lacking *vis-à-vis* Blumhardt and Kutter… Decisive for me is… the starting-point. Why plunge immediately into ethics ("what should we do?"), the old question which avoids the real subject matter, as if there were nothing more pressing!... In short, when I read this papal decision of Ragaz, I am very happy to know Kutter.[206]

Here, Barth comments on a published correspondence between Brunner and Ragaz. He also confirms Brunner's account of the origins of dialectical theology – that a theology of the Word of God, wherein divine revelation itself would be the ground and starting point of theological reflection, was inspired and encouraged by the Blumhardt-Kutter line of influence.

As with Kutter, Brunner's connection with Ragaz was deeply personal, albeit decidedly more volatile. Jehle describes the relationship as being something other than a friendship, 'a very unusual personal relationship… more like a father-son relationship – with an intense process of detachment.'[207] Ragaz, who supervised Brunner's licentiate thesis (*Das Symbolische*), paved the way for his *Habilitation* and inspired his activities abroad, was the only academic teacher to have a formative and lasting impact on him. The correspondence between the two spans from 1909 to 1940.[208] About Kutter, Brunner wrote that he 'was most of all a preacher and prophet of the living God.'[209] The opposite was the case with Ragaz. Despite being a minister in the Swiss Reformed Church, first and foremost, Ragaz was a social activist. He was highly critical of the church and the pastorate. Reservations about training pastors for service in the church

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[206] Barth to Eduard Thurneysen, 6 Aug. 1915. Cited in McCormack, p. 124.

[207] 'Beide Nachlässe bezeugen eine ganz ungewöhnliche, welchselseitige persönliche Beziehung… Ihre Beziehung entsprach eher einem Vater-Sohn-Verhältnis – mit einem heftigen Ablösungsprozess!' – Jehle, *Emil Brunner,* p. 98.

[208] Ibid. p. 98.

[209] Brunner, 'A Spiritual Autobiography,' p. 239.

led to his resignation as professor in 1921. Ragaz believed that the church needed to reform in the way of a 'social reincarnation.' He wished for preaching and pastoral care to be replaced with social work and for the structures of hierarchy to be democratized.[210] It is not so much that Ragaz, in comparison with Kutter, de-centered gospel proclamation in Christian theology and practice but rather that he had a different understanding of the gospel's content and remit, emphasizing social change and political action.

The devastation of the war and the influence of his contemporaries, especially Barth and Thurneysen, led Brunner to side with Kutter's kerygmatic arrangement wherein proclamation precedes activism. Ragaz, however, led with activism, seeing the liturgical, theological, and institutional conventions of the church as obstructing the material incarnation of the Kingdom of God. As with his relationship to Kutter, the pronounced opposition between Brunner and Ragaz does not diminish the lasting impact of their affiliation. Brunner ultimately embraced a cultural criticism that rendered the project of religious socialism untenable. Kutter's impact was more thorough and lasting because it was with him that the 'sound Christological foundation which Blumhardt had given' to religious socialism was most clearly communicated, the very foundation that would lead dialectical theology beyond its religious socialist roots.[211] Nevertheless, Ragaz also left his mark. Brunner attributed his sojourns to England (1909 and 1913 to 1914) and America (1919 to 1920) to Ragaz' influence,[212] the impact of which can be seen in Brunner's global outlook and continuing engagements abroad. Brunner's ethical writings (esp. *Justice and The Social Order* and *The Divine Imperative*) offer a moral framework that emphasizes the relevance of concrete social and political locations for discerning the will of God. His non-institutional ecclesiology, championed in his 1951 *The Misunderstanding of the Church*, also betrays echoes of Ragaz.

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[210] Jehle, *Emil Brunner,* pp. 43-44.

[211] Brunner, 'Intellectual Autobiography.' p. 5.

[212] Brunner, 'A Spiritual Autobiography.' p. 241.

Alongside Brunner's relationships with Kutter and Ragaz, it is his association with Thurneysen and Barth that is most deserving of comment. The importance of these contemporaries derives less from the intimacy of their early friendships and more so from the historical importance of their loose theological alliance. Brunner and Thurneysen came into contact during Thurneysen's tenure as assistant secretary of the YMCA in Zurich between 1911 and 1913, likely being introduced through their mutual association with Ragaz and Kutter. From 1913 onwards they held written correspondence which was, at times, deeply personal, including Brunner confiding in Thurneysen about his concerns with Ragaz and his conflicts with Kutter.[213] Brunner's written correspondence with Barth did not begin until 1916 and the early letters do not share the mutual and personal appreciation that is found in his correspondence with Thurneysen. Rather, Brunner's letters betrayed a certain unease, that of a younger admirer, towards Barth who was three and a half years his senior.[214]

The first joint venture for these three companions took place in February 1917. Brunner joined Gottlob Weiser and Barth to give a trilogy of lectures in Leutwil where Thurneysen was minister (Also where Brunner himself served in 1912/13).[215] In December 1917 Thurneysen sent Brunner a copy of the sermon collection, *Suchet Gott, so werdet ihr leben* [Seek God, so you shall live], which he and Barth had published earlier that year. Brunner's response to the collection proved to be emblematic of the relationship that he would have with these colleagues. His initial response was one of praise – noting the prophetic, lively, and fresh presentation of these sermons. However, Brunner could not resist his polemical nature and insisted on posing critical questions as well. He accused Barth and Thurneysen of a 'one-sidedness:'

> Legitimate humanism is treated as unfairly as Erasmus was by Luther… it would be wrong to consider human beings merely as chess pieces of God, to ignore all human

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[213] Jehle, *Emil Brunner,* pp. 108-113.

[214] Ibid. pp. 114-115.

[215] Ibid. p. 88.

> responsibility and activity as (Barth's) sermon about forgiveness of sins and that about "the other side" does. The one final thing would be that your God-objectivity, reminiscent of the Reformation, takes everything subjective in such a way that it is left very unsettled, maybe even overwhelmed.[216]

Brunner's response echoes points of disagreement that have since become well known between, at least, him and Bath. Brunner's embrace of the infinite qualitative distinction and his critique of human agency (markers of the dialectical tradition) was, from the beginning, entangled with efforts to maintain the possibility of a 'legitimate humanism.' Such efforts can be seen in his proposals on general revelation, his reflections on an 'Anknüpfungspunkt' [point of contact], the value that he placed on moral instruction, his concerns with apologetics, and a willingness to use middle axioms in public/secular discourse. Nevertheless, Brunner's positive reception of *Suchet Gott* is one more signpost of his change of direction. He offered to publish a review of the sermon booklet for the 1918 Christmas edition of *Neuen Wege,* the journal managed by Ragaz. In response, Ragaz expressed his concerns with Brunner's new theological association and his reticence about Brunner's endorsement of this work.[217]

The disparities between Brunner and his contemporaries should not obscure the common development that was taking place among them as well as the mutual inspiration and appreciation that existed therein. Brunner's reception of the first edition of Barth's *Römerbrief* is evidence of shared horizons. Jehle notes that Brunner's review 'went down in history as the first approving reaction' and that Brunner appeared to have already recognized Barth's greatness.[218] Interestingly, Brunner had already begun reflecting on Pauline literature in relation to his growing unease with modern thought

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[216] Brunner, 'An Thurneysen am 30. Januar 1918.' cited in Ibid. p. 112.

[217] Ibid. pp. 106-107.

[218] 'Brunners Rezension von Barths Römerbriefkommentar… gin gals erste zustimmende Reaktion auf das epochemachende Buch in die Theologiegeschichte ein. Er hatte – und das ist sein Verdienst – Barths Größe erkannt…' Ibid. p. 120.

and was making plans to write on Romans when he became aware of Barth's commentary. He confided in Thurneysen regarding his disappointment in the potential disruption of his own writing plans but also expressed appreciation for Barth and anticipation for the work that he would produce. Writing to Thurneysen in 1918, Brunner remarked that renewed engagement with Paul had convinced him of the detriments of modern thinking, especially empiricism and historicism. He claimed to recognize more clearly the 'superficiality of psychologism and historical positivism.'[219] Brunner added that working through the corpus of the ninth-century theologian and philosopher Scotus Erigena during the summer had further confirmed what he had extracted from the Pauline texts, wherein he realized 'how very relative the "progress" of modern thought' is.[220]

Although it is partially veiled in Brunner's published review, his personal correspondence with Barth regarding the *Römerbrief* reveals the same old controversy as had arisen in his response to *Suchet Gott.* In the midst of this allied break with modern thought, Brunner desired to represent human agency in more nuanced terms. He wrote to Barth and again expressed concern about the absolute treatment of culture and humanism. That is to say, Brunner felt that Barth neglected God's 'yes' to creation, leaving space only for God's 'no.' Jehle remarks that 'this is the criticism that Brunner brought to bear over and over again over the years and with which he sought to defend what he considered to be the indispensable legacy of liberal theology.'[221] That Brunner felt himself to be somewhat on the periphery of Barth and Thurneysen's inner circle was undoubtedly affected by these theological differences. However, as mentioned in the

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[219] 'Zunehmend erkenne er die Oberflächlichkeit des Psychologismus und historischen Positivismus…' – from Brunner an Thurneysen am 29. August 1918. Ibid. p. 14.

[220] 'Er habe in diesem Sommer den Sctous Erigena durchgearbeitet, und da sei es ihm "aufgegangen, wie sehr relative der 'Fortschritt' des modernen Denkens" sei.' – from Brunner an Thurneysen am 29. August 1918. Ibid. p. 14.

[221] 'Es ist dies eine Kritik, die Brunner im Lauf der Jahre immer wieder an Barth herantrug und mit der er das in seiner Sicht unverzichtbare Erbe der liberalen Theologie zu verteidigen suchte.' Ibid. p. 120.

previous chapter, he also credits his sojourn to the United States from 1919 to 1920 as putting him on the margins of the dialectical movement, especially in relation to the establishment of the journal *Zwischen den Zeiten.*[222]

Brunner was granted leave from his pastoral duties and embarked for New York in September 1919 where he spent eight months at Union Theological Seminary. Brunner's theological outlook had already shifted away from the tenets of religious socialism and drawn him closer to Barth and Thurneysen. However, aside from the initial enthusiasm around Barth's *Römerbrief*, there was little indication of the momentum that was building around this group. As it would happen, the months in which Brunner was away in the U.S. proved to be a decisive turning point in which the dialectical movement gained traction and began to take real shape. These events and developments were discussed in the previous chapter and need only a passing mention here. Most notable is Barth's Tambach lecture in 1919 which not only renounced religious socialism but also occasioned the first meeting between him and Gogarten as well as between Bultmann and Gogarten. When Brunner returned to Switzerland in June of 1920 Thurneysen picked up their correspondence to inform him of all that had happened and to invite him in as an ally once more in the movement that was taking place. As Brunner made his way through many of the recent publications, including the published edition of Barth's Tambach lecture, it became clear that the same persisting issues which stood between him and both Barth and Thurneysen remained. In any event, social and intellectual engagements between 1914 and 1922 initiated theological reforms for Brunner. He quickly became swept up in the collective momentum of the dialectical movement and all of his substantive work for the next decade made clear and intentional contributions toward dialectical theology.

II. Reckoning with Modern Thought

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[222] Brunner, 'Intellectual Autobiography,' pp. 8-9.

As argued above, it is unreasonable to identify any single moment or influence as denoting Brunner's emergent dialectical theology. However, by 1920 he had set his sights towards new theological horizons. In these early years of reorientation, Brunner's theological position was most palpable in his critical efforts, reassessing the modernism which he was attempting to overcome. There are clearly positive claims and commitments underlying his critical work, but it would be a few more years before the rubble of his demolition cleared enough ground for true constructive work to begin.[223] A lecture given by Brunner in October 1920 on the subject of '*Die theologische Vorbildung des Pfarrers und die Frage nach einer Reform des theologischen Studiums,*' [The Theological Training of the Pastor and the Question of a Reform of Theological Studies], is indicative of his theological vision at the time. The lecture was delivered to a University of Zurich summer course for pastors and theology students and it was, as Jehle notes, 'a fiery attack against an understanding of science, which assumes that the truth can be found with an ideologically neutral and "objectively establishing" method.'

Brunner critiqued modern theology for its uncritical appropriation of 'causalism, empiricism, historicism, and psychologism.'[224] His concern was that theology in the modern era had embraced these 'objectivist' modes of inquiry and inherited their false assumptions regarding epistemic sufficiency and neutrality. Brunner's disenchantment – also that of dialectical theology more broadly – with the prevailing theology of the day stemmed from the perceived inability of such 'modern theology' to adequately address the reality of the world in which he was living. Jehle offers the following excerpt from '*Das Elend der Theologie*' [*The Misery of Theology*], an abridged version of the lecture

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[223] McGrath credits *The Mediator* (1927) with establishing Brunner's 'theological reputation' as a constructive thinker. – McGrath, *Emil Brunner,* p. 39.

[224] 'Der Vortrag ist ein feuriger Angriff gegen ein Wissenschaftsverständnis, welches davon ausgeht, dass die Wahrheit mit einer weltanschaulich neutrealen und "objektiv festsellenden" Method gefunden werden können… Die moderne Theologie habe völlig unkritisch von den übrigen Wissenschaften den Kausalismus, den Empirismus, den Historismus und den Psychologismus übernommen.' – Jehle, *Emil Brunner,* p. 172.

that appeared in the *Kirchenblatt für die reformierte Schweiz*. Brunner calls the scientific objectivism of modern theology to account:

> Where does it stay in the struggle for the freedom of the proletariat; what does it do to stem the flood of imperialism and chauvinistic nationalism; where did it lead in the fight against the devilish powers of corruption in modern society?[225]

Brunner's 1920 lecture reveals his decided opposition to modernism and his epistemic concerns therein. It should be added that Brunner did not intend to entirely devalue scientific rigor, nor did he deny the contribution of important historical-critical work. However, he wanted to clearly identify the limitations of such work, its embeddedness in modern intellectual assumptions, and its tendency to subjugate other epistemic models. The lecture also managed to antagonize the liberal contingent of Zurich's theology faculty, contributing to a minority opposition to his *Habilitation* one year later.[226]

a*. Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube*

The lecture given in October 1920 was, in many ways, a precursor to the *Habilitationsschrift* which Brunner submitted on February 3, 1921. In this, his second attempt at *Habilitation*, Brunner produced *Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube* which proved to be a successful monograph having five editions published between 1921 and 1933.[227] The Book was a clear marker of Brunner's emergence as a dialectical theologian, denoting his alliance with Barth and Thurneysen. In the foreword to the first edition, Brunner acknowledged the influence of Hermann Kutter, to whom the book was dedicated, and adds that important insights were gained from engagement with the

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[225] Brunner, Das 'Elend der Theologie,' in: Kirchenblatt für die reformierte Schweiz 1920, pp. 197-201. Cited in Ibid. p. 172.

[226] Ibid. pp. 171-173.

[227] Ibid. p. 174.

second edition of Barth's *Römerbrief* and Thurneysen's *Religiöse Entscheidung.*[228] Barth, having read the book in one sitting, sent Brunner a letter of praise, celebrating his work. Jehle cites a review from the *Kirchlicher Anzeiger für Württemberg* which stated that *Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube* 'in many ways explains the position of Karl Barth, but everything clearly, in connection with the rest of scientific research.' [229] Similarly, the 'Theologische Literaturblatt' wrote:

> Barth's rhetorical power has made the Swiss movement, whose father is Kutter, fashionable. With Brunner, the systematician seems to have arisen. His book… has a beautiful rhythmic language, it has restrained passion, it is pervaded by a humble and proud sense of mission and has a dominant idea, a resounding basic idea.[230]

The basic idea presented in *Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube* is that faith [*Glaube*] is irreducible, something different than any form of aesthetic experience [*Erlebnis*] or rational cognition [*Erkenntnis*]. The disparate nature of faith derives from the peculiarity of its impartation. Faith is the resultant paradox of ones' confrontation with the God who is wholly other.

As far as signposting Brunner's new theological orientation, *Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube* seems self-aware. The foreword to the first edition is reminiscent of Friedrich Gogarten's *Zwischen den Zeiten* (1920), deeply aware of and responsive to its cultural location. Just as much, it gives a certain impression of historical dislocation, an inescapable severance from the previous generation:

> This foreword will not indicate anything else but, that this book itself wants to be considered as a foreword… An afterword may sooner be possible, as an epitaph, devoted to a bygone time that is lying behind us and concluding the work of a century.

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[228] Brunner, *Erlebnis, Erkenntnis Und Glaube.* p. IV.

[229] '…dass sie in manchem die Karl Barth'sche Position erkläre, nur alles deutlicher, im Zusammenhang mit der übrigen wissenschaftlichen Forschung.' Jehle, *Emil Brunner,* p. 178.

[230] Idib. p. 178.

> An epitaph full of pious acknowledgement and gratitude, yet an afterword for those who can only look forward and no longer backwards. That we stand before a decisive turn, and which direction we must take, is clear to me; moreover, that what gets offered here already has some share in this turn.[231]

Within two years a second and third edition of *Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube* was published and Brunner already confessed: '*Daß ich weiter gelernt habe*' [That I have continued to learn]. He stated specifically that the concept of the Word needed to be brought more prominently into the center of theological epistemology and that the boundary between immanence and revelation [*Immanenz und Offenbarung*] required a different distribution of weight – deficiencies that received swift and resolute correction in his *Die Mystik und das Wort*.[232] Despite these apparent shortcomings, Brunner's direction of travel was established, with dialectical presuppositions already in hand.

Naturally, selections from Brunner's conclusion offer the best summary of the book's contents:

> Faith is neither experience [*Erlebnis*] in the sense of romanticism, nor knowledge [*Erkenntnis*] in the sense of rationalism… It [faith] does not have to do with formulas and laws, with dogmas and systems, which cramp the freedom and abundance of living and creative possibilities… It is not cold, rigid systematics, but a reverent outlook on divine wonders, bending under the "wholly-otherness" of otherworldly truth…[233] – Faith is not self-abandonment in the intoxication of ecstasy, but the certainty of the spirit that has become clear through reflection…. It transcends the mystic immanence just as much as the gnostic transcendence. It reaches beyond the reification of the divine in the subjective as well as in the objective, in the romantic psychologism as well as in the intellectual rationalism… If it wishes to be understood, it cannot be done other than by paradoxically juxtaposing both experience and cognition, the concepts of the romanticist

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[231] Brunner, *Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube,* p. IV.

[232] Brunner, 'Vorwort zur zweiten und dritten Auflage,' in *Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube,* p. v.

[233] Ibid. p. 127

> and the rationalist, of the mystic and the orthodox. It speaks of God as if one could teach divine truth, but it sets before everything a countermanding prefix.[234] – Insofar as the human speaks, what is spoken is not what it means, alas what is spoken is subject to crisis, as it also participates in the impermanence and frailty of everything human.[235] – It [faith] is a prolapse, an anticipation, hope, "a certain confidence in what one hopes, a conviction about things that one does not see."[236]

Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube juxtaposed faith, the uniquely sufficient category of truth and theological knowledge, with the concepts of experience and cognition. Relying on a sweeping reductionism, Brunner offers the concepts *Erlebnis* and *Erkenntnis* as epistemic caricatures resulting from the respective influence of romanticism and rationalism. He then renames these predominant epistemic tendencies based on their modern manifestations: psychologism (*Erlebnis*) and intellectualism (*Erkenntnis*). Brunner's chapters on '*Religion als Erkenntnis*' and '*Der Intellektualismus*' give very little direct analysis of the so-called rationalism. Instead, he scrutinizes the intellectualist tendency based on the nineteenth century's anti-intellectualist movement, preferring to extract the strengths and weaknesses of intellectualism from the response of its antagonists rather than from the tradition itself.[237]

Brunner's reductionism is extended in his identification of *Erlebnis* and *Erkenntnis* with the subject-object paradigm, an antithesis that he believes to be the lowest common denominator of the epistemic juxtapositions that he is treating. The 'relation between the objective and the subjective in Christian faith' later became the theme of Brunner's 1938 *Wahrheit als Begegnung* where he proposes his doctrine of 'encounter' as a means to move beyond the object-subject antithesis.[238] In *Erlebnis,*

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[234] Ibid. p. 128.

[235] Ibid. p. 131.

[236] Ibid. p. 132.

[237] A point which is highlighted by: David Andrew Gilland, *Law and Gospel in Emil Brunner's Earlier Dialectical Theology* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013) pp. 43-44 and 49.

[238] Brunner, *Truth as Encounter*. p. 2.

Erkenntnis und Glaube, Brunner ultimately collapses the modern manifestations of religion as experience and cognition into the category of the 'subjective-anthropological.' Even those seemingly 'objective' approaches to religion, e.g. psychology of religion, are shown to be subjective in their turn to human experience. The book's opening lines state:

> The religious and theological thought of the last century stands under the mark of historicism and psychologism. These are the last extensions of the movement, which the Renaissance has introduced and the Enlightenment has brought to the breakthrough, and which in one word we can call the subjective-anthropological, a varying line of world-historical dimensions on the theme: the human is the measure of all things…[239]

Also, in its conclusion:

> Psychologism and intellectualism, mystic and gnostic, pietism and orthodoxy, moralism and metaphysic – or however we want to historically identify this dual principle – is the attempt to come to God from man, to draw God into the talk of the human, to build bridges from man, which leads to the eternal, to secure for a share in the work of salvation.[240]

Essentially, Brunner performs critical reductions on broadly modern tendencies that ends in a critique of the modern cult of religious immanence. In this way, Brunner's lasting influence undoubtedly contributed weight to dialectical theology's characteristic preoccupation with balancing immanence and transcendence.

Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube attacks experience (esp. psychologism) and cognition (esp. intellectualism) for consigning knowledge of God to immanent, anthropological mechanisms. These fail to grasp the fullness of faith which cannot be discovered, but only received insofar as it is revealed in the Word of God. Furthermore,

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[239] Brunner, *Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube*, p. 1.

[240] Ibid. p. 129.

that which God reveals is God's own self and is, therefore, radically different than the content of any other knowing. In faith, God is not known as one more object of knowledge but is revealed as the very ground of all being and all goodness. In the knowledge of God, the theoretical and the practical (i.e. the moral) merge into one.[241] Such knowledge can only be understood and represented as a paradox and a contradiction, it can only be experienced as a crisis. The Word of God stands as both a contradiction and a fulfillment of all other knowledge. In the same way, the Word of God is the cause of the deepest existential crisis, revealing the insurmountable gap between humanity and God, but also providing the means for reconciling this gap.[242]

Already in *Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube*, Brunner promotes personalist categories for articulating this knowledge of God over other epistemic idioms. Gilland notes that the work 'clearly betrays the influence of the dialogical thought of Ferdinand Ebner and Martin Buber, which Brunner later develops into a unique theological epistemology under the label of "Truth as Encounter".'[243] However, it is unlikely that Ebner and Buber's work had any direct influence on *Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube*. Buber's famous *Ich und Du* was not published until 1923, after the second and third editions of *Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube*. Moreover, Jehle reports that Brunner was not exposed to Ebner's *Das Wort und die geistigen Realitäten* until the spring of 1922. At best, Ebner could have influenced minor revisions in *Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube*'s later editions but would not have impacted the submitted *Habilitationsschrift* or the first edition of the book. Prior to his acquaintance with Ebner and Buber, Brunner's interest in American psychology of religion led him to George Albert Coe. McGrath has highlighted Coe's influence on *Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube*. The I-Thou language of

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[241] See Gilland's assessment of Brunner's presentation of *Glaube* – Gilland, *Law and Gospel in Emil Brunner's,* pp. 53-54.

[242] Brunner, *Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube*, p. 88.

[243] Gilland, p. 55.

this work reflects engagement with Coe rather than with Ebner and Buber.[244] Brunner's use of these personalist categories is evidenced here:

> This paradox [faith] expresses nothing but that primordial mystery, the irrational… that meaning and reality are the same, that in spirituality we are not dealing with ideas but that all ideas point to a final reality that appears in meaning, to the one lawgiver, a lover, a personality which is not merely conceived but with whom we can enter into a real connection… That the most general and necessary can be grasped where man is quite an "individual"… where nothing that is said or thought by others can step in between the I and the other of the divine Thou, where everyone is "immediate to God."[245]

While Brunner sought to make certain correctives following *Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube,* he already had much of the foundations in place which he developed in his later works.

One of the intriguing and indicative aspects of Brunner's *Habilitationschrift* is that, despite a deeply critical approach, his initial treatment of *Erlebnis* and *Erkenntnis* is aimed at capturing the provisional half-truths [*vorläufige Halbwahrheiten*] which these tendencies have offered. He admits, provisionally, that faith is deeply personal and an affirmation of the individual. Also, that religious truth is objective truth. In this way, Brunner sought to 'retain what was valid in earlier approaches and reject what was not.'[246] He immediately followed by showing the insufficiency of *Erlebnis* and *Erkenntnis,* relaying on a neo-Kantian critique of human faculties, and concluded by showing faith (*Glaube*) to be the only means to "the pure objectivity" [*die reine Sachlichkeit*].[247]

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[244] McGrath notes Brunner's engagement with Coe's *The Psychology of Religion*, which is referenced in *Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube* (p. 53) – McGrath, *Emil Brunner,* p. 20.

[245] Brunner, Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube, p. 129.

[246] McGrath, *Emil Brunner,* p. 21.

[247] Ibid, p. 21.

Nevertheless, Brunner's treatment of the half-truths of *Erlebnis* and *Erkenntnis* is emblematic of his presentation of revelation and theological epistemology. Despite all of his critical efforts and his insistence on the uniqueness of the Word of God, he maintains space for the possibility of general revelation, for a point of contact [*Anknüpfungspunkt*]. For Brunner, knowledge of God is not only a condemnation of all human capacities but also a fulfillment of these insofar as a modicum of truth and goodness remains within the orders of creation – a concept not identical but comparable to prevenient grace. His willingness to embrace, even marginally, the positive nature of creation and human reason was, famously, a point of contention between himself and Barth/Thurneysen.

Ultimately, *Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube* proves to be a springboard for many of Brunner's maturing ideas. The book shows Brunner's explicit departure from his earlier devotion to Bergsonian epistemology and is suggestive of those philosophical influences which would replace Bergson as foundational in his mature thought, [248] esp. Kant, Kierkegaard, Buber, and Ebner. Brunner's primary antagonists in the coming years are also established in *Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube*. Modern theology's tendencies toward historical relativity (historicism) and psychological inwardness (psychologism) become the primary opponents of Brunner's following monographs with Ritschl and Schleiermacher, respectively, being targeted as the patriarchs of these trends.[249] Finally, as is noted above, the preface to the second and third editions of *Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube* forecasted Brunner's movement beyond a merely

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[248] Brunner associates Bergson with the position of *Erlebnis* that he intends to critique: 'Die Philosophie Bergsons bildet [forms]… den Schlußstein [the keystone] der Philosophie und Religion des Erlebens.' – Brunner, *Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube*. p. 20.

[249] Brunner states: 'The whole 'accounting' could be designed as a critical examination of the two great theological representatives of romantic and pragmatic subjectivism, Schleiermacher and Ritschl… If our slogan has to be: Get rid of Schleiermacher and Ritschl, then all the more get rid of modern theology with its historical relativism and its psychological "inwardness," get rid of the religion of modern mystics, romantics and Kingdom-of-God-practitioners (Reichgottespraktiker).' – Ibid. p. 4. – *Die Mystik und das Wort* (1924) and *Der Mittler* (1927) further developed these critiques.

critical dialectical theology which emphasized the infinite distance between God and humanity, and towards a positive theology of the Word of God.

Along with Barth and Thurneysen's recent publications, Brunner's philosophical engagements between 1921 and 1924 proved to be particularly decisive. In his 1922 inaugural lecture (as *Privatdozent*) he developed his Kantian sympathies. Herein, he addressed the 'limits of humanity' in order to establish the need for a God who is entirely beyond human nature. Moreover, because these limits emphasize the infinite distance between God and humanity, the need for revelation is established.[250] The lecture's title *'Die Grenzen der Humanität'* [The Limits of Humanity] was borrowed from the work of the Marburg Neo-Kantian Paul Natorp, *Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der Humanität* (1908).[251] During these years, Brunner was also deeply influenced by his engagement with Kierkegaard and Ebner. He was reading Kierkegaard continuously during this period, the result of which was that when he began systematically reading Schleiermacher in 1922, he did so 'through the lens of Kierkegaard' which 'resulted in downright sophisticated contrasts.'[252] Jehle portrays "*Die Grenzen der Humanität*" as a definitive marker of Brunner's theological and philosophical positioning:

> The lecture documents the various influences to which Brunner was exposed at the time: As a Kantian, he tried to establish a solid basis for the legitimacy and necessity of a critical philosophy, while stressing the limits of what is possible for humans. As a student of Kierkegaard, he illuminated the *via negativa*, which wants to lead people to God through despair. As a dialectical theologian, he fought the subjectivism of modern theology and Schleiermacher on all fronts. After all, he was a "newly enlightened" Barthian and in this capacity was able to explain the radical meaning of the term "distance:" that religion itself is under judgement, that belief is not a possession but pure

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[250] McGrath, *Emil Brunner,* p. 22.; Jehle, *Emil Brunner,* pp. 179-180.

[251] Jehle, *Emil Brunner,* p. 186.

[252] 'Immer deutlich war ihm dabei geworden, wie fruchtbar es war, Schleiermacher "durch die Folie Kierkegaard" zu lessen, da sich dabei "geradezu raffinierte Kontrastwirkungen" ergäben.' Jehle, quoting Brunner's correspondence with Thurneysen from 15, September 1922 – Ibid. p. 191.

> hope. Brunner had clearly shown himself to be a "dialectical" theologian in his inaugural lecture. There was nothing else to add.[253]

These particular theological commitments were already apparent in *Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube*. However, they gained strength and clarity in "*Die Grenzen der Humanität*" and finally, as the following section will show, came to a head in Brunner's infamous attack on modern theology, *Die Mystik und das Wort* (1924).

b. *Die Mystik und das Wort*

Brunner's antagonistic appropriation of Kierkegaard and Schleiermacher set the ideological foundations for *Die Mystik.* In the winter semester of 1922/23, he gave a lecture on '*Seele und Geist, erläutert an Schleiermacher und Kierkegaard*' [Soul and Spirit, explicated through Schleiermacher and Kierkegaard] which Jehle describes as the 'nucleus from which *Die Mystik und das Wort* grew.'[254] *Die Mystik* was also Brunner's first publication to be directly influenced by the dialogical philosophy of Ebner. Brunner first read Ebner's *Das Wort und die geistigen Realitäten* in the spring of 1922 which made an immediate and deep impression on him. More importantly, the juxtaposition of *mysticism* and *Word* was likely inspired by his engagement with Ebner. The same conceptual contrast is found in Ebner's essay '*Die Christusfrage*' where he holds that 'the mystics know "nothing of the action of the Word," the Christian message of the "incarnation of God" is twisted into the formula of the "deification of humanity," a "return to paganism".'[255] Brunner sent a copy of '*Die Christusfrage*' to a friend in

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[253] Ibid. p. 190 – On this point Jehle cites the assessment from John W. Hart's Karl Barth vs. Emil Brunner: The Formulation and Dissolution of a Theological Alliance, 1916-1936, p. 43.

[254] 'Es war dies die Keimzelle, aus der Brunners erstes größeres Werk, 'Die Mystik und das Wort', herauswuchs.' – Ibid. p. 191.

[255] 'Die Mystiker wüssten "nichts von der Tat im Wort", die christliche Botschaft von der "Menschwerdung Gottes" werde in die Formel von der "Gottwerdung des Menschen" verdreht, eine "Rückkehr ins

January of 1923 with a comment that Ebner's thought appeared to agree 'in all essentials' [*in allem Wesentlichen*] with his own.[256] Ebner's characterization of '*mystics*' standing in opposition to a proper understanding of the *Word* is clearly echoed in the primary claims of *Die Mystik*:

> The main point [of the book] is to uncover the opposition between what Schleiermacher willed and the faith-world of the apostles and the Reformers; the inner impossibility of an alliance between every mystical philosophy of immanence and the Christianity of the Bible… and to put before theology the decision: either Christ or modern religion.[257]

The 'single negative thesis' of *Die Mystik* was that Schleiermacher (in particular) and modernity (in general) had favored immanence too heavily, that the Kingdom of God had been identified too closely with human culture, the divine nature too closely with human nature.[258] For Brunner, *mysticism* was taken to mean the 'experience of "being one with the deity",' achieved through 'awareness of the original belonging to God in the human soul.'[259] He intended to draw the sharpest possible contrast between the mystic's *philosophical* understanding that begins with humanity reaching out to God – which he associated with Schleiermacher and the modern traditions following him – and

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Heidentum"!' – Ibid. p. 192, quoting from Ferdinand Ebner, 'Die Christusfrage,' in Fragmente, Aufsätze, Aphorismen. Zu einer Pneumatologie des Wortes. München 1963, pp. 450.

[256] Ibid. p. 192.

[257] Emil Brunner, *Die Mystik und das Wort: Der Gegensatz zwischen moderner Religionsauffassung und christlichem Glauben dargestellt an der Theologie Schleiermachers* (Tübigen: Verlag von J.C.B. Mohr,1924). p. 10.

[258] Ibid. p. 11.

[259] 'Mystik meint bei Brunner das Erleben eines "Einsseins mit der Gottheit"; Mystik in seinem Sinn lebt 'vom Bewusstsein der ursprünglichen Gotteszughörigkert der Menschenseele".' – Jehle, *Emil Brunner,* p. 193.

the biblical understanding of *revelation* which begins with God reaching out to humanity.[260]

Brunner's appraisal of Schleiermacher and his treatment of mysticism advanced a two-fold critique that had previously been offered by Ritschl. This aspect of Brunner's project and its broader impact has been well documented by Christine Helmer.[261] Ritschl had previously led an attack against mysticism and metaphysics. Analogously, 'Brunner isolated what he perceived to be the two pillars of Schleiermacher's thought:'

> First, Brunner saw mysticism as a threat to the theology of the word. Mystical human subjectivism undermined the radically alien and objective divine word of judgement and gospel. Second, mysticism's illegitimate conflation of nature and spirit was due to its unholy alliance with philosophy. Together, mysticism and metaphysics provided grounds for theology that betrayed the witness of the Bible and the Reformation.[262]

Helmer also draws attention to the substantial impact that *Die Mystik* exerted on theology in the twentieth century. Aided by the emerging prominence of Brunner and the dialectical movement, *Die Mystik* made an inestimable impact on the image of Schleiermacher as the father of all modern-liberal-subjectivist theology. The nuance and contextualization due to Schleiermacher and the broader modern tradition is almost entirely overlooked by *Die Mystik*. Furthermore, Helmer has highlighted Brunner's reliance on a Neo-Kantian distinction between nature (humanity) and spirit (God) which leads to what she believes to be a problematically abstracted theology.[263]

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[260] McGrath, *Emil Brunner,* p 26.

[261] See: Christine Helmer, 'Mysticism and Metaphysics: Schleiermacher and a Historical-Theological Trajectory',*The Journal of Religion*, 83.4 (2003), 517–38; and Christine Helmer, 'From Ritschl to Brunner: Neither Mysticism nor Metaphysics, but the problem with Schleiermacher' in *Theology and the End of Doctrine* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014).

[262] Helmer, 'Mysticism and Metaphysics,' p. 517.

[263] Ibid. pp. 525-526.

Despite the deficiencies of *Die Mystik,* the book was a sensation, especially well received by the younger generation of theologians, and went a long way to make Brunner's name known in the theological communities of his day. Barth's response is especially telling. He wrote to Brunner commenting that 'It is a deserving act that will not only make an impression but will also make an era.' However, 'I couldn't take a single historical person and his work like that, because I can't get rid of the feeling that with such extirpation… injustice would somehow be done.'[264] A similar refrain was repeated in Barth's published review where he admired Brunner's cleverness and declared the book recommendable but also 'too "fearless" for himself,' noting that this debate with modern thought could have benefitted from a more measured and nuanced representation of Schleiermacher.[265] The attention that Brunner received now extended beyond the German language world. Hugh Ross Mackintosh offered a review of *Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube* as well as *Die Mystik un das Wort* in 1924 'suggesting that they marked the emergence of a new school of theology' being represented by Barth, Brunner, Gogarten and Kutter and 'indicating his own view that Brunner was the most important.'[266] The content of *Die Mystik* is undoubtedly overwhelmed by its polemical agenda and therefore lacks some 'value as a serious piece of theological analysis.'[267] Nevertheless, it is an important marker in Brunner's career, contributing to his blossoming international reputation and his identification as a leading figure in the new dialectical theology. The brazen character of *Die Mystik*, compared with the more nuanced treatment of Schleiermacher in *Das Symbolische*, throws Brunner's early development into greater relief.

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[264] 'Weisst du, ich könnte einen einzelnen historischen Menschen und sein Werke nicht so hernehmen, weil ich das Gefühl nicht loswerde, dass da bei solcher Extripation bei höchstem Recht dazu doch 'irgendwie' Unrecht geschehen möchte.' – Barth to Brunner on the 27th of October 1923, cited in Jehle, *Emil Brunner,* p. 196.

[265] Ibid. pp. 196-197.

[266] McGrath, *Emil Brunner,* p. 27.

[267] Ibid. p. 125.

Conclusion

This chapter outlined Brunner's theological developments between 1914 and 1924, highlighting his early epistemic interests, intellectual influences, and ultimate disenchantment with the modernism of his youth. Brunner held an early commitment to Bergsonian intuition as a means for conceptualizing the peculiar immediacy of religious experience. Through dialogue with his religious socialist background, the influence from his contemporaries (esp. Barth and Thurneysen) and reflection on Europe's post-war cultural and political crises, Brunner sought to establish new theological foundations which emphasized the radical distance between God and creation. In this way, Brunner's emergence as a dialectical theologian reflects his departure from conceptualizing knowledge of God as immediate and his transition into a theological position that hinged increasingly on the necessity of mediation. Brunner's epistemic preoccupation is present from the beginning of his career, as evidenced by *Das Symbolische,* and remains of central importance throughout his published works. This chapter has shown that what it means for Brunner's theology to be dialectical is determined by his understanding of theological epistemology. The positive nature of a theology of the Word of God remained obscured in 1924 due to Brunner's overwhelming polemics. In the introduction to *Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube,* Brunner fittingly employed the Tower of Babel as an analogy for the theological work which was to be undertaken at the time.[268] Following the suggestion of the previous chapter, the moniker *Theology of Crisis* is more apt for capturing the agenda of dialectical theology during these early years.

[268] Brunner, *Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube,* pp. 1-2.

Chapter 3

Law and Gospel as the Personal and the Impersonal

Chapter 2 traced Brunner's theological development between 1914 and 1924, highlighting the epistemic questions and concerns that prevailed in his early work. Chapter 4 will show how Brunner's personalist and epistemic interests are brought together in his concept of *Truth as Encounter*, identified by Brunner as the 'lodestar' of his theological thinking from 1938 onwards.[269] In part, the present chapter must fill in some of the theological and biographical content that is missed by these adjoining sections. More importantly, this chapter shows that Brunner connects notions of the personal and impersonal to the dialectic of law and gospel and, thereby, assimilates personalism into his dialectal framework. Toward this end, the present exposition utilizes the theme of *law and gospel* as the principal means for organizing Brunner's theology and as the methodological lens through which to view it. The importance of a law and gospel dialectic in Brunner's thought has been recognized by his most perceptive readers, including critics and more sympathetic reviewers.[270] We can also

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[269] Brunner states that 'the lodestar of my theological thinking' was 'first expressed in the little book *Wahrheit als Begegnug* (*The Divine-Human Encounter*) in 1938'. See Emil Brunner, 'A Spiritual Autobiography', *Japan Christian Quarterly*, 1955, 243.

[270] The most thorough assessment of Brunner in recent years is David A. Gilland's *Law and Gospel in Emil Brunner's Earlier Dialectical Theology* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013). Gilland shows the importance of

take Brunner's word on this point. In an appendix to his 1937 theological anthropology, *Man in Revolt*, Brunner stated that since 1925 'the central point of my theological thinking… has been, and is, the dialectic of the Law and Gospel.'[271]

The backdrop for this analysis is set by two sections that introduce Brunner's law and gospel dialectic and briefly consider his establishment as Professor of Practical and Systematic Theology in Zurich. After this groundwork is laid, Brunner's arrangement of revelation and reason, his understanding of the 'eristic' task, and his ethics will be examined with an eye toward the law and gospel dialectic within which they are situated. Through this examination, we will see that Brunner correlates notions of the impersonal, abstract, and reflective with the law and notions of the personal, direct, and concrete with the gospel. A clear picture of Brunner's assimilation of personalism within his dialectical method is gained from this analysis.

I. Introducing the Theme

The relationship between law and gospel is a significant theme, rigorously debated in Reformed and Lutheran theology. In its most rudimentary form, this conceptual paring represents a hermeneutic wherein the Bible is read as presenting its teachings in two doctrinal forms respectively associated with the *law* and the *gospel*. In the sense of the law, the Bible presents numerous imperatives, revealing the moral will of God and commanding obedience to it. In the sense of the gospel, the Bible presents the unconditioned promises of grace, forgiveness, and redemption, which supersede the sinfulness of humanity. Although the gospel proclamations supersede the

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the law and gospel theme for Brunner and, especially, its presence in framing his early thought. For a brief review of the scholarship on the law and gospel theme in Brunner see Gilland's 'A Brief note on Scholarship' [pp. 13-16].; Paul Schrotenboer's 'Dialectic of Law and Gospel' [pp. 20-28] in his *A New Apologetics: An Analysis and Appraisal of the Eristic Theology of Emil Brunner* (Amsterdam: J.H. Kok N.V. Kampen, 1955) also provides a perceptive and sympathetic reading of the theme.

[271] Emil Brunner, *Man in Revolt: A Christain Anthropology* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1939), p. 515.

commands of the law, one never stands without the other. Brunner arranges the law and gospel in a paradoxical relationship which, as will be shown, serves an architectonic function in his overall dialectical framework.

Brunner engages in detailed assessment of the law and its relation to the gospel, especially in the appendices of *Man in Revolt* and his chapter 'The Threefold meaning of the Law' in *The Divine Imperative*.[272] In both places, Brunner draws principally upon Martin Luther. He observes that Luther's interest in the law moves beyond the Pauline assessment of the Jewish Law. Luther is 'intensely interested,' Brunner writes, in 'the law which is written in the heart of man, which he describes by the phrase *lex naturae*.' In this sense, law implicates the law of nature 'which indwells human reason' – i.e., law refers to moral obligations implicit in humanity's 'immanental self-understanding.' [273] Brunner's presentation of law, however, is not limited to moral sensibilities. For Brunner, law includes the totality of ordering principles and obligations that constitute created existence. There are natural imperatives that order almost every area of human life, without which life cannot sustain itself. These include biological and socio-cultural imperatives. Some such imperatives are necessary in the strictest sense (e.g., breathing), others are conditional and unofficial (e.g., habits, customs, and mores), still others are codified and imposed by force (e.g., the rule of law).[274]

Brunner follows Article VI of the *Formula of Concord* and presents the law as having a threefold meaning and function: 'as the word of discipline, repentance, and guidance.'[275] A dialectical relation is present in the first two functions of the law in that, although the law is 'clearly opposed to the righteousness of faith,' it remains 'God's own

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[272] Brunner, 'Appendix II: On the Dialectic of the Law' in *Man in Revlot,* pp. 516-526; Emil Brunner, 'The Threefold Meaning of the Law' in *The Divine Imperative: A Study in Christian Ethics* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1937). pp. 140-151.

[273] Brunner, *Man in Revolt*, pp. 518-519.

[274] Brunner, *The Divine Imperative*, pp. 140-141.

[275] *Formula of Concord,* Article VI 'The Third Use of the Law'; Brunner, *The Divine Imperative,* pp, 150-151.

law.'[276] Despite the antithesis between the obligatory nature of the law and the free gift of grace, the law has its provenance in the creating and sustaining will of God. Brunner's embrace of the so-called 'third use of the law' (continuing guidance for the regenerate) is evidence of another dialectic between the law and gospel. He writes, 'But true as it is that as a believer the Christian is no longer under the law, as a sinner he continually comes under it.'[277] So long as sin remains operative, so does the law. Moreover, in as much as faith is freedom in Christ – specifically, freedom from the law – faith is also obedience to Christ and this obedience is not without moral content.

Characteristically, Brunner establishes a dialectically paradoxical relation between the law and gospel. The law 'does not reveal the grace of God but the wrath of God.' Nevertheless, 'this law plays a part in the process of salvation. It is not to be valued simply negatively.' [278] Brunner asserts that the gospel is singularly revelatory and salvific. Nevertheless, he also insists that the law bears positive content before and after the gospel is received, however marginally and ambiguously it may do so. To understand how this paradoxical arrangement of the law and gospel serves an architectonic function in his overall dialectical framework, the broader and representative function of these themes must be in mind.

The law and gospel dialectic, apart from its narrower association as a hermeneutic principle or a homiletic tool, can be viewed as a subset – a decidedly Protestant subset – of classical debates regarding the relationship between *nature* and *grace*. While comparison of the two conceptual sets (law and gospel; nature and grace) should not collapse relevant historical distinctions, both sets implicate the same fundamental theological issues. Namely, the arrangement of each implicates the place of human striving within the divine activity of God and therefore, also, how the divine nature and human nature relate; how the Kingdom of God intersects with the orders of the world; how salvation history relates to human history. At bottom, the arrangement of

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[276] Brunner, Man in Revolt, p. 518.

[277] Ibid. p. 524.

[278] Ibid. p. 518

law/gospel and nature/grace asks, in what measure is creation, by the fact of its existence, predisposed to truth and goodness? Or, in what measure do sin and finitude render any predisposition null, requiring further revealing and reconciling action on the part of God?

Pausing on the conceptual symmetry between law/gospel and nature/grace is intended to highlight what Paul Schrotenboer has recognized, that Brunner's law and gospel dialectic overlaps with his arrangement of various conceptual pairs. Schrotenboer writes, 'We recall that Brunner's theology is built around a framework that partitions reality into two realms or dimensions of existence, namely, law and gospel or, the impersonal and the personal, world-truths and God-truths. This may also be called nature and grace.'[279] This chapter draws upon Brunner's dialectical framework to show the overlap in these pairs, especially Brunner's turn to the personal and impersonal. Specifically, the personal and impersonal element in Brunner's arrangement of revelation and reason, the abstract and the concrete, and the *eristic* and dogmatic tasks of theology will be examined.

II. Professor of Practical and Systematic Theology

Before turning to the emergence of the personal and impersonal in Brunner's thought, a brief word on Brunner's establishment as professor in Zurich. He submitted *Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube* as his *Habilitationsschrift* on February 3, 1921. According to Jehle, it was only after much debate and discussion that a University of Zurich panel positively rated the *Habilitationsschrift* and granted Brunner the *venia legendi* [the right to teach] as a lecturer in philosophy of religion. He delivered his inaugural lecture as *Privatdozent* on May 13, 1922.[280] Brunner lectured part-time in

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[279] Paul Schrotenboer, 'Emil Brunner', in *Creative Minds in Contemporary Theology*, ed. by Philip E. Hughes (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1966), p. 119.

[280] Frank Jehle, *Emil Brunner: Theologe Im 20. Jahrhundert* (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag Zurich, 2006) pp. 170-179.

Zurich's faculty of theology during the following years while he continued to live in Obstalden serving as Parish minister. He was appointed full Professor of Systematic and Practical Theology in February 1924, leading to his resignation from the pastorate in Obstalden. In January 1925 Brunner, along with his wife Margrit and their four sons, moved to Zurich where he held his professorship until 1955.[281] The move to Zurich opened opportunities for Brunner to commit himself more fully to his academic pursuits. These efforts proved fruitful as he managed to set out with more clarity the constructive foundations of his thought during these first years as professor. Undoubtedly, Brunner was aided by the intellectual stimulation of life in Zurich, the absence of which had been felt in the remote mountain parish of Obstalden-Filzbach.[282]

The remit of Brunner's academic chair, both systematic and practical, is worth lingering over for a moment. Frank Jehle notes that the linkage of these disciplines 'suited his inclinations.'[283] While settling into university life in Zurich allowed Brunner to give more attention to scholarly interests, he was no stranger in the pulpit. The Fraumünster in Zurich, where he first preached in the fall of 1925, became the most important site of Brunner's preaching over the years.[284] A close connection between theological reflection and proclamation was observed in the kerygmatic feature of dialectical theology.[285] As Professor of Systematic and Practical Theology, and as a dual-occupant of the professor's lectern and pastor's pulpit, Brunner was an embodiment of the intimate relationship between these tasks.[286]

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[281] Ibid., pp. 203-204.

[282] Ibid., pp. 204-208.

[283] 'Ein besonderer Reiz seines Lehrstuhls bestand darin, dass systematische und praktische Theologie miteinander verbunden waren, was seinen Neigungen entsprach.' – Ibid., p. 212.

[284] Ibid., pp. 204-205.

[285] See Chapter 1

[286] The relation of the 'professor's lectern' to the 'pastor's pulpit' is an allusion to Kimlyn Bender's comparison of Adolf von Harnack and Karl Barth. Bender remarks on Barth's rejection of 'Harnack's distinction between the confessed Christ of the Church and the historical person of Jesus as discerned by the professional academy;' a distinction which also resulted in a 'sharp and inviolable distinction between

Until the mid-twentieth century, *practical theology* was commonly understood as synonymous with *pastoral theology* wherein *practice* referred somewhat narrowly to the disciplines of ministerial practice, especially homiletics, church administration, religious education, etc.[287] Accordingly, Brunner's appointment as professor of practical and systematic theology could accurately be described as covering the disciplines of *pastoral* and systematic theology. For a cursory glance at Brunner's pastoral theology, Jehle highlights a two-hour lecture that was delivered twice – in the winter semester of 1924/25 as '*Pfarramt und Gegenwartsleben*' [The Pastorate and Contemporary Life] and again in the winter semester of 1926/27 as '*Der Pfarrer und seine Gemeinde'* [The Pastor and his Congregation]. Jehle describes this lecture as being characteristic of '*den jungen Emil Brunner*' and of '*den Geist der dialektischen Theologie.*'

In his lecture, Brunner opposed the idea that the practical duty of the pastor meant the technical administration of 'social work, poverty relief, Blue Cross work, and the like.' Rather, he insisted that 'what is truly practical is knowledge of the revelation in Christ, an understanding of God's Word and the fundamental truths of the gospel. Everything else is accessory.'[288] The pastor's primary task, as presented in Brunner's lecture, was to know the Word of God and preach the gospel. The function and vitality of which cannot be replicated by social work and political activism. In the broader scope of Brunner's thought, these claims get balanced out by his elevation of Christian ethics

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professor's lectern and pastor's pulpit.' See Kimlyn Bender, *Confessing Christ for Church and World* (Dowers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2014). p. 184.

[287] For a discussion of the history of the discipline of practical theology and the shift that takes place in the 1960s to view the discipline with more breadth and nuance see Gerben Heitink, *Practical Theology: History, Theory, Action Domains* (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 1993). pp. 1-4.

[288] 'Energisch wandte er sich gegen das Postulat, wonach man "die Pfarrer mehr in die technischen Details der Amtsführung, der sozialen Arbeit, in Armenpflege, Blaukreuzarbeit und dergleichen eingeführt Wissen" wolle… das "wahrhaft Praktische" sei für einen Pfarrer im Gegenteil "die Erkenntnis der Offenbarung in Christus, das Verständnis des Gotteswortes und der Grundwahrheiten des Evangeliums." Alles andere sei "Beiwerk".' – Quoting from Brunner's 'Der Pfarrer und seine Gemeinde,' Jehle, *Emil Brunner,* p. 212.

which takes the moral value of public engagement seriously. He is not interested in removing social work, poverty relief, etc. as Christian duties. However, he is intent on elevating the act of preaching and clarifying the preeminent duties of pastoral ministry. One outcome is a recognition of the expertise of other disciplines. His lecture included the assertion that the pastor should stay away from those tasks 'which others can do just as well or better.'[289] Space remains for pastors to partner with politicians, aid workers, medical professionals, educators, and many others to support meaningful and important work.[290] However, the pastor's primary work is ordered by the preaching of the Word of God.

This presentation of pastoral ministry is indicative of dialectical theology at the time, especially of its character as a *theology of the Word of God*. Brunner's critique of his religious socialist foundations is felt here. Religious socialism, like much of the prevailing theology of the time, tended to immanentize the eschaton. This was exemplified in Leonhard Ragaz who resigned from Zurich's faculty of theology in 1921 partly due to his contempt for having to train pastors for conventional church ministry.[291] He believed this was an outmoded understanding of the Christian mission that obscured the realized eschatology of political and social activism. Brunner's comments on pastoral ministry must be understood in this context, as offering a corrective to a common theological outlook that preceded him in Zurich. An underlying conviction of dialectical theology was realism about the presence and activity of God in the person of the Holy Spirit, here and now. The practical meaning of theology signaled the realism of

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[289] 'Wer ein Pfarramt bekleidet, soll all dem fernbleiben, "was andere ebenso gut oder besser können".' – Ibid. p. 215.

[290] Years later, in *Justice and The Social Order*, Brunner argued that social justice requires cooperation from a variety of experts, e.g., clarifying the meaning of justice should involve conversation among theologians, philosophers, and jurists. – Emil Brunner, *Justice and The Social Order* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1945). P. 10.

[291] Jehle, *Emil Brunner,* p. 179

the eschatological event in which persons are confronted and called to decision by the Word of God.

Within this vision, Brunner warned about the hubris of pastoral ministry, describing the pastorate as an office of humble submission. Nevertheless, the elevation of the task of proclamation under the influence of dialectical theology led to a sense of theological and spiritual arrogance at times. Ragaz wrote to Brunner in 1927 complaining that such hubris was found in Barth and Brunner's students. As an example of this influence, Jehle points to the situation of prisoners in the St. Jacob prison in St. Gallen during the 1940s who complained that the prison chaplain should take more account of their needs when preaching. The chaplain responded in his annual report by stating that 'Even the prisoner must learn that the preaching of the Word of God does not depend on his need, but on his need to be guided by the Word of God.' Jehle cites the chaplain's response as exemplifying an unfortunate attitude that was influenced by dialectical theology.[292]

Along with these introductory lectures on pastoral theology, Jehle highlights two other essays that capture the shape of Brunner's early theology. For the 1926 anthology *Der Protestantismus der Gegenwart* Brunner provided a chapter on '*Christlicher Glaube nach reformierter Lehre'* and for the second edition (1928) of the theological encyclopedia *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart* he contributed an entry on 'Gnade Gottes: V. Dogmatisch.' Jehle's assessment of these essays draws attention to at least four themes that were characteristic of Brunner's thought at the time. First, Brunner was insistent that theological reflection must take its starting point from God's personal self-communication in the event of revelation and not from any prior human seeking or sense of human need. Second, he promoted the necessity of atonement. Redemption is far more than enlightenment, Brunner argued. The weight of sin and the consequential rift between God and humanity is addressed in a real and ontological way

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[292] 'Auch der Gefangene muss lernen, dass sich die Verkündigung des Wortes Gottes nicht nach seinem Bedürfnis, sondern sein Bedürfnis sich nach dem Wort Gottes zu richten hat.' – Quoting from Erlasse der Evangelish-reformierten Kirche des Kantons St. Gallen, Band IX, Nr. 8, Ibid. p. 216.

in the crucifixion and resurrection. Forgiveness is misunderstood without an account of Christ's atoning action. Third, Brunner emphasized Luther's *sola fide* principle, juxtaposing this with the optimistic humanism of modern thought that had penetrated theology. This emphasis was a natural outworking of his commitment to the necessity of atonement and divine self-communication. Fourth and finally, Jehle notes that, especially in the second half of '*Christlicher Glaube nach reformierter Lehre*,' Brunner turned to the intimate relationship between dogmatics and ethics.

In the first half of '*Christlicher Glaube nach reformierter Lehre*' Brunner argued that the role of humanity in salvation is always passive. In the second half he insisted that faith, on the other hand, is always active. 'Faith is not just hearing, it is obeying.'[293] By relating the law to ethics, Brunner uses the law and gospel dialectic to illustrate the relationship between dogmatics and ethics. He writes that the Word of God is both a gift and a task ['*Das Word als Gabe und als Aufgabe*']. The Word of God brings God's grace (gospel) and God's command (law). In this arrangement 'the Law is "indispensable"' [*'Das Gesetz is "unentbehrlich"'*]. Brunner writes:

> Not a single belief can be understood if the question behind it does not say: what should I do? Only to those who ask this question does the gospel answer. – You should(…): act by faith, which means: in life you are always and only determined by faith, through listening and obeying, by the word of revelation in Christ.[294]

Dogmatics affirms and articulates the positive content of the gospel. Ethics moves one from the reflective task of theology to the active imperatives of praxis. In this way, Brunner situates dogmatics and ethics within the law and gospel dialectic.

To summarize, Brunner's dialectical treatment of the law and gospel is felt throughout his early lectures as professor. In his assessment of practical (i.e., pastoral)

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[293] 'Glaube ist auch volkommene Aktivität.(…) Glaube ist nicht bloß Hören, er ist auch: Gehorchen.' – Quoting from Brunner's 'Christlicher Glaube nach reformierter Lehre' – Jehle, *Emil Brunner,* p. 220.

[294] Ibid. p. 220

theology, Brunner asserts the preeminence of gospel proclamation and divine activity. Herein, he disparages overvaluations of social action. In his systematic remit, he strikes a better balance between the preeminence of the gospel and concern for human agency and concrete action. As we will see, this pattern repeats throughout his work where he lays out the unequivocal supremacy of the gospel and then follows with an attempt to recover some positive content of the law.

III. Revelation and Reason

Brunner's *Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube* (1923) and *Die Mystik und das Wort* (1924) were engaged in the critical project of reasserting divine transcendence over against a modern tendency that was judged to have favored immanence too heavily. Two monographs, *The Philosophy of Religion from the Standpoint of Protestant Theology* and *The Mediator*, published in 1927 illustrate Brunner's developing capacity to think constructively as well as critically. *The Mediator* was a landmark publication which, as McGrath writes, 'did much to establish Bruner's theological reputation in the German-language world, creating the abiding impression that he was a positive and constructive, as well as prophetic and critical thinker.'[295] Regarding his critiques of modern theology, especially his treatment of Schleiermacher, Brunner confessed that although he would not retract his positions, he did regret the 'asperity of his tone.' *The Mediator* represents a more refined awareness that 'it is easier to see the mistakes of others than it is to lead forward oneself along the right path.' Although there is a discernable progression with Brunner from polemical interests towards increasingly constructive proposals, he does not do away with his critical edge. Brunner views theology, and indeed the whole of the Christian faith life, as having intimately related polemical and constructive interests. His theological development is not simply a reprioritizing of polemical and constructive positions. Rather, as Brunner's theology

[295] Ibid. pp. 39-40.

matures, he brings critique and construction together with more subtlety and nuance. Brunner held to the conviction that the 'destructive work' had its own necessity. He reported that *The Mediator* had 'grown out of that conflict with modern theology, and still more out of reflection on the message of the Bible.'[296]

The Mediator stands in connection with *The Philosophy* of *Religion from the Standpoint of Protestant Theology*. Brunner describes *The Philosophy of Religion* as 'prolegomena' for which *The Mediator* provides a 'specimen of actual theological work.'[297] In *The Philosophy of Religion*, he clears the ground for his doctrine of revelation which is treated in *The Mediator*. He asserts the Reformer's view of revelation 'as starting point, as the pattern of a Christian knowledge of revelation.' He takes his understanding of the 'Reformation confession of faith' and sets it over against the tendencies of modern thought which he believes to have distorted a correct meaning of revelation. [298] With *The Philosophy of Religion* and *The Mediator*, we can take account of the relationship between revelation and reason as Brunner sets these out in respect of his polemical and constructive interests.

a. *The Philosophy of Religion*

In *The Philosophy of Religion*, Brunner returns to a point that was emphasized in the opening pages of *Die Mystik.*[299] Namely, that he means to take the so-called 'Reformation confession of faith' as a starting point for constructive theology. As mentioned above, the law and gospel dialectic is a suitable lens through which to view Brunner's thought because of its conceptual symmetry and association with

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[296] Emil Brunner, *The Mediator: A Study of the Central Doctrine of the Christian Faith*, (London: Lutterworth Press, 1934). pp. 15-16.

[297] Ibid. p. 16.

[298] Emil Brunner, *The Philosophy of Religion from the Standpoint of Protestant Theology* (London: Ivor Nicholson and Watson, 1937). p. 22.

[299] Brunner, *Die Mystik,* p. 10.

transcendence and immanence; revelation and reason; nature and grace; the personal and the impersonal. However, it is also suitable because of its association with Lutheran and Reformed theology – i.e., with the theologies of the Reformation. We can read Brunner's approach as a kind of Protestant resourcement. Brunner asserts that the Bible serves as the ground and norm – as the 'abiding standard of reference' – for his theology. Nevertheless, Brunner takes the Reformers (esp. John Calvin, Huldrych Zwingli, Martin Luther) as the starting point for theological expressions insofar as he believes that the 'Reformation confession of faith… most clearly expresses the view that the faith founded on the Scriptures takes of itself.'[300] The Reformation confession of faith is typified by reference to the three *solae* (*scriptura, fide, gratia*) and Brunner's work generally privileges the voices of Reformers. Although he is a Swiss Reformed Minister, the influence of and engagement with Luther is at least as evident, if not more so, than that of Calvin and Zwingli. As mentioned above, a quick scan of Brunner's published indices reveals Luther to be his most cited theological source. In this way, Brunner's is as much a theology of the Reformation as it is, in the narrower sense, a Reformed theology.

Brunner's reading of the Reformers is instructive for his understanding of revelation. He believes that the Reformation confession of faith expresses most clearly the normative position of the Bible and that of the early church.[301] Herein, the primary insight that Brunner draws upon is the presentation of revelation as a 'paradoxical unity:'

> According to the testimony of the apostles, what took place in Christ took place once for all. There was no historical continuity of revelation but only a paradoxical unity between that unique event and the present time, the contemporaneity of faith with revelation which is immediate and independent of intermediary criteria. Between Christ as the mediator and the believer there is no intermediation, because this could come about only by means of a continually renewed incarnation of the logos, thus contradicting the

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[300] Brunner, *The Philosophy of Religion,* p. 22.

[301] Ibid. p. 22.

> apostolic dictum "once for all" [ἐφάπαξ]. Only God, as the Holy Spirit, can speak again the word which was spoken at that time once for all, and speak it in the heart of the believer at any later moment in history.[302]

If the incarnation of the Word of God in Jesus Christ is to be understood as unique, then all other sources of this revelation must be united with it paradoxically and not directly. All other sources of revelation are a witness *to* the revelation in as much as they are sources *of* it. Brunner argues further that this paradoxical unity is 'the doctrine of the formal norm' and corresponds to the 'Reformation principle of Scripture, viz. the Word of God in Scripture which is identical with the word of God in the soul, or in brief, Scripture and spirit in their paradoxical and incomprehensible identity.' Scripture is the ground and norm of Christian theology insofar as it is the witness to the incarnation of the Word of God in Jesus Christ. It has its paradoxical unity with the Word of God insofar as it is in and through the biblical texts that God, by the witness of the Holy Spirit, continues to speak here and now.[303] In this sense, all such contemporaneity of revelation results from the continuity of God's own speaking and not from the inherent capacity or authority of those media (esp. Scripture and proclamation) through which this speaking takes place.

Brunner places the paradoxical unity of revelation over against modern conceptions of revelation. He illustrates how, in the centuries following the Reformation, intellectual tendencies associated with realism and idealism influenced modern thought. He characterizes realism as making oneself dependent upon some fact of existence which is external to themselves, i.e. dependent 'on something which has its place in the flux of relative phenomena.' Conversely, idealism is determined by 'only what comes from within and not what comes from without.' Idealism makes one dependent upon some 'non-temporal entity' that is found *a priori* in the human spirit.[304]

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[302] Ibid. p. 23.

[303] Ibid. pp. 22-24.

[304] Ibid. p. 24.

He sees the tendency of realism in Protestant Orthodoxy's doctrine of scripture which identified the Bible directly and un-paradoxically with the Word of God. The Bible was asserted as true in itself rather than being true 'because and to the extent that God meets me there and speaks.' The Word of God, as Brunner describes it, was identified as the letter of Scripture rather than the spirit of Scripture.[305] He locates the tendency of idealism in Pietism and Romanticism's emphasis on religious experience (also, religious 'feeling' *á la* Schleiermacher),[306] and more explicitly in the religious claims of German idealism in the nineteenth century. Finally, Brunner treats historicism which viewed Christianity as a 'concrete historical phenomenon' but did so at the expense of viewing history as 'an endless flux, a continuum, and hence, relativity.'[307] Brunner argues that each of these traditions, in their own way, strays from the principle of paradoxical unity presented by the Reformers which guards both the uniqueness and the universality of the revelation in Jesus Christ.

Brunner scrutinizes theology's intellectual backdrop to set boundaries between the tendencies of reason and the claims of revelation. His polemical interests are aimed at eradicating any ideology or content inconsistent with the Word of God. In this instance, the culprits are the intellectual tendencies of realism and idealism. Due to a lack of expository precision, *The Philosophy of Religion* gives only an obscured picture of the realism-idealism paradigm. In due course, we will need to clarify its importance and meaning. With *The Philosophy of Religion*, the boundaries between revelation and reason are largely drawn from Brunner's definition of the subject matter, i.e. from his definition of philosophy of religion.

In the opening chapter of the book, Brunner explains 'The Meaning of the Philosophy of Religion for Protestantism.' He seeks to make a clear distinction between religion and philosophy. He begins by noting the close relationship between the two. 'Religion as well as philosophy has in view the whole of existence and life.' Specifically,

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[305] Ibid. pp. 31-34

[306] Ibid. pp. 40-44.

[307] Ibid. pp. 45-47.

'philosophy consists in reflection on the connection between all particular facts.' This inquiry includes 'that into the meaning of all science, all civilization and indeed human life in general.' Furthermore, philosophy conducts its inquiry by 'investigating the way in which the facts are intellectually founded.' Similarly, religion has the totality of existence in view. However, religion differs from philosophy 'in the fact that religion itself claims to supply an answer to the crucial question about reality.' Moreover, and most importantly, religion 'gives this answer in the shape of revelation and not as a result of the methodical reflection of the intellect.'[308] This distinction between the ground of intellect and the ground of revelation is fundamental and decisive for Brunner. Philosophy takes place 'within the bounds of reason.' Religion, however, is a consequence of revelation. Specifically, the Christian religion is a consequence of 'God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ' which breaks into the complex of natural reason from outside.[309]

This first distinction, between religion and philosophy, invites a second, between religion and revelation. Revelation is the ground of religion, i.e. revelation is the cause of which religion is consequent. The important point for Brunner is that theology stands within the phenomenon of religion, on the very same ground of revelation, and not outside of it, in the sphere of general reason. Theology is that task, existing within the religious community, which gives scientific expression to the Christian faith and, as with the religious life, its content and standard are determined by God's self-disclosure rather than any consciousness of man's. In this sense, 'theology is not a free science but one that is closely tied. It is tied to the definite fact of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ.' The theologian, by virtue of the nature of theology, cannot take the mental grounds of natural reason as their starting point. Theology presupposes the Christian faith and denies 'that the personal and living God can be generally known from possibilities that lie either in the world or in man's spirit as such.' Brunner contends that, due to the disparate grounds of philosophy and theology, the theologian can speak of philosophy

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[308] Ibid. pp. 11-12.

[309] Ibid. pp. 12-14.

of religion only in a secondary sense but not in its primary sense. Philosophy of religion, in its primary sense (as philosophy), is 'concerned with historical phenomena, i.e. with the historical religions and their "nature".' From the standpoint of Protestant theology – within the phenomenon of religion and on the basis of revelation – one can only speak of philosophy of religion in a secondary sense.[310]

In a secondary sense, according to Brunner, the designation *philosophy of religion* does not denote a mode of philosophy as such but rather 'designates the sphere of the discussion.'[311] Philosophy of religion designates 'a branch of theology in general,' albeit a branch which 'must be judged as lying at best on the edge of Christian doctrine and never at its center.' Brunner employs 'philosophy of religion' as that branch of theology that involves itself with the general conditions of human reason. Except for the fact that form and content cannot be entirely kept apart, philosophy of religion might be separated 'as a special science from theology.' But, the form of any theological reflection, however distinguishable, is not wholly separable from the content of revelation. This is to say, once more, that from the standpoint of Protestant theology, the theologian is always already determined by the Word of God and presupposes the Christian faith. This determination and these presuppositions are not relinquished by attending to the general conditions of human existence. From the standpoint of Protestant theology, the role of philosophy of religion is to assert the relation between revelation and reason, delineating 'the affirmations of faith as distinct from all other affirmations.' This assertion about the disparate nature of revelation does not preclude but rather is the ground upon which the Christian faith expresses itself 'in connection with the rational knowledge' of its age.[312]

A final point on the relation of revelation and reason in *The Philosophy of Religion* must be offered. Ultimately, Brunner aims to present the unity of revelation and reason alongside their opposition. Revelation, however disparate, is not altogether

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[310] Ibid. pp. 14-17.

[311] Ibid. p. 13.

[312] Ibid. pp. 18-19.

antithetical to reason. From the standpoint of revelation, the claims and tendencies of reasons are not complete and utter falsehoods. As discussed in the previous chapter, Brunner addressed the half-truths [*Halbwahrheiten*] of those ideas which he critiqued in *Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Glaube*.[313] Again, in *The Philosophy of Religion,* he aims to identify the element of truth present in the intellectual traditions that he examines. His critique of the realistic and idealistic tendencies in modern and early modern thought extends into the treatment of modern manifestations of rationalism, subjectivism, historicism, and orthodoxy. Brunner wants to show that each of these intellectual traditions is fraught with inconsistency and, in the end, unsuccessful on its own terms. However, he does so only after affirming the element of truth present in each. Brunner insists that where reason presents only half-truth, the 'paradoxically incomprehensible' revelation of the Christian faith which can never be grasped by reason alone presents the fullness of truth.[314]

His comments on 'the element of truth in Orthodoxy' provide the clearest example of this exposition. Orthodoxy is right insofar as it maintains the general thesis that 'Christian faith is Bible faith. When a Christian speaks without qualification of God's revelation, what he means is Holy Scripture.' However, Orthodoxy's principle of Scripture is wrong insofar as it identifies the Bible, as a book, directly with divinely revealed truth. Brunner argues once more, and following the Reformers, that 'Scripture is only revelation when conjoined with God's spirit in the present.' It is revelation only insofar as its content is 'the witness to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ' and insofar as in and through this witness there is a paradoxical unity of revelation, a unity of the Word incarnate in Jesus Christ and the *testimonium spiritus sancti.*[315] For each tradition – rationalism, subjectivism, historicism, and orthodoxy – Brunner follows this pattern, identifying a partial truth that yet results in false claims. His purpose here is to indicate

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[313] See 'I. Teil. Vorläufige Halbwahrheiten' in Emil Brunner, *Erlebnis, Erkenntnis Und Glaube* (Tübigen: Verlag von J.C.B. Mohr, 1923) pp. 6-31.

[314] Brunner, *The Philosophy of Religion*, p. 109.

[315] Ibid. pp. 150-151.

the relationship between revelation and reason. Revelation is portrayed as not only the correction but also the completion and fulfillment of reason. The 'general solution has never been that revelation has its place within the bounds of reason, but rather that reason has its place within the bounds of revelation because it is just from the standpoint of faith that the claim, and indeed also the limit, of reason could be understood.'[316] *The Philosophy of Religion* sets these boundaries for revelation and reason and prepares the ground for *The Mediator*.

b. *The Mediator*

Appearing in the same year as *The Philosophy of Religion,* Brunner's *The Mediator* develops his doctrine of revelation along more constructive lines. The book is comprised of three sections. Book I is predominately concerned with Brunner's continuing polemic against modern thought. Books II and III are more dogmatic in tone and, respectively, they address "The Person of The Mediator" and "The Work of the Mediator." Although Brunner referred to this as his '*Christus-buch,*' it was not intended to be a formal Christology.[317] More precisely, *The Mediator* is a thoroughly Christocentric treatise on the nature of revelation. Book I starts with an initial question: 'Wherever the appeal is made to revelation, is the word "revelation" used in the same sense?'[318] After dividing the concept of revelation into two categories, *special* and *general*, Brunner argues that only the Christian religion has a claim to revelation as *special* in its truest sense. He uses the German word *Einmaligkeit* to express the 'special' nature of Christianity's foundational claim. On this point, Olive Wyon's

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[316] Ibid. p. 56.

[317] Brunner wrote to Thurneysen in the summer of 1927 regarding his '*Christus-Buch.*' See Jehle, *Emil Brunner,* p. 230. However, in the preface to the book, he states: 'Nor does this book claim to be a "doctrine of Christ." In my opinion, the time is not yet ripe for this; in any case, I am not equal to such a task.' – Brunner, *The Mediator*. p. 15.

[318] Brunner, *The Mediator,* p. 21.

translator's note is instructive. She writes that '"uniqueness" is the nearest word in English, but it does not fully express the author's meaning. '"*Einmaligkeit"* means occupying a *unique* moment in *time*. "Unrepeatableness" is the real meaning.'[319]

Other religions appeal to special events such as 'theophanies and divine oracles, miraculous incidents of all kinds.'[320] Christianity differs in that it hinges upon a single event. The incarnation of the Word of God in Jesus Christ is absolute, it is decisive for all of history, once for all, a never-recurring actuality. Every event in the course of history has a quantitative uniqueness, i.e. each historical event is quantitatively singular. However, the Christian conception of revelation differs in its claim to an event that is both quantitatively and qualitatively unrepeatable. Quantitatively, revelation, as it occurs in the incarnation, is not repeated by any proclamation, theophany, or other miraculous occurrences. Qualitatively, the incarnation is the *sine qua non* of God's revelatory and atoning action. Here, the role of Christ, the Mediator, is decisive. 'Between the soul and God, there stands a third element, or rather a third Person, who, although he unites man with God, yet equally maintains the absolute distinction between them; through him alone that reconciliation takes place through which God reveals himself: the Mediator.'[321]

On the other side of claims to *special* revelation are those claims to revelation as *general*. In this sense, any occurrence of 'revelation is merely an individual concrete instance of a general truth.' This understanding of *general* revelation denies the qualitative uniqueness of the incarnation. In the strictest sense, the religion of *general* revelation does not require a mediator because whatever may be conferred by mediation is merely the illumination of that which is already generally known and accessible. This does not mean, as Brunner argues, that Christianity is altogether a denial of general revelation:

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[319] Ibid. p. 25.

[320] Ibid. p. 22.

[321] Ibid. p. 30.

> The question is not *whether* there is any general revelation or not, for if there were none no one would search after God at all, but *in what sense,* whether it is direct or indirect, thus whether the Christian revelation constitutes the highest point in this general revelation or whether it is something quite different – namely – *the* actual revelation.[322]

Brunner insists that the relationship between general and special revelation is actual and yet only ever indirect. Most importantly, he does not intend for the relationship between the two to be understood as supplemental or complementary.[323] General revelation is not the basis upon which special revelation occurs. These are not higher and lower forms of the same instance, wherein the latter builds directly and positively upon the former. Rather, general and special remain categorically different occasions of revelation.

Brunner contends that all religion, as well as all philosophy, contains some elements of truth. However, that which is known apart from Christ is always 'distorted truth.'[324] The relationship of all truth, both distorted and actual, consists in the fact that 'there is only one Logos. This Logos can only be known in Christ. But this Logos is the principle of all knowledge, and, above all, it is the central truth in all religion.'[325] The essential element in expressing the relationship between general and special revelation is one's direction of travel. As with the relationship of reason to revelation, general revelation is only correctly viewed and understood from the standpoint of special revelation but not *vice versa*. Special revelation is decisive, general revelation is not. 'Hence, the knowledge of God in the world "outside," and in the relations of man to the world, only give us a confused picture of their divine origin; indeed it does not yield a

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[322] Ibid. p. 31 – n. 2.

[323] On this point, Brunner means to differentiate himself from theological streams which offer affirmations of general revelation but do so in a way that special revelation is made to be a direct supplement or complement to the prior foundation of general revelation. Here, he names Tillich and the Catholic tradition of *lex nature* as examples of the supplement/complement model. – Ibid. p. 32.

[324] Ibid. p. 33.

[325] Ibid. p. 412.

theologia naturalis which would be suitable as a basis for a Christian theology.'[326] General revelation is understood as having an indirect relation to special revelation in this sense, i.e. general revelation is never the basis for the positive content of Christian theology. In Brunner's understanding, the Christian faith recognizes both general and special revelation but always maintains the essential distinction between these categories. This presentation simply extends his earlier treatment of revelation and reason.

One of the constructive movements that take place in *The Mediator* is that Brunner moves beyond the mere differentiation of revelation and reason, offering a more substantial exposition on the nature of revelation itself. Here, we begin to observe the way Brunner's personalism, the personal/impersonal dialect, relates to the law and gospel motif. McGrath notes that, with *The Mediator,* Brunner 'had clearly begun to assemble… the philosophical framework through which he would be able to explore the implications of "personal revelation" in greater detail.'[327] Following his treatment of special and general revelation, Brunner turns to the person and work of Christ and utilizes personalist categories to assert the unity of these Christological distinctions. While the person and work of Jesus can be distinguished for the sake of theoretical reflection, they exist as a unity in the event of revelation.

> Thus, when we speak of the 'Person' and 'the Work' of the Mediator we mean exactly the same thing. He himself, because He is what He is, *is* the Revelation and the Atonement… If we speak rightly of His Person, in accordance with His Nature, we also bear witness to His Work of revelation and atonement. He *is* what He does and He *does* what He is, and both these statements mean that He reunites man, who is separated, indeed practically severed from his divine origin, with God. He does this by the very fact that He is a Person, because in so far as His being a Person is, as such, already God's reconciling act. For he is indeed the Incarnate Word, in Him and in His being God is the

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[326] Ibid. p. 414.

[327] McGrath, *Emil Brunner,* p. 44.

> One who has come to us. Thus in His very Nature the gulf between God and man has been bridged. He himself is the bridge which God throws across to us, over which God comes to us.[328]

The unity of the person and work of Christ hinges upon the epistemic nature of revelation itself. Principally, the incarnation is a divine self-disclosure, not the disclosure of propositional content. The use of personalist language to capture the epistemic content of revelation is further evident in Brunner's treatment of the 'Who?' and 'How?' of Christological inquiry.

The crux of the incarnation, as well as the history of Christological controversies, is founded on the concurrent distinction and unity of the divine and human nature in Jesus Christ. The problem with modern inquiries into the nature of Jesus, as Brunner sees it, is that 'the question, "Who is He?" has been entirely set aside, and replaced by the other: "How does he come to be what he is?" Thus, the question of the being of Christ is replaced by one which concerns his appearance in history.'[329] Brunner view's the 'Who?' and the 'How?' questions as provoking categorically different modes of inquiry and response. 'Who is He?' is personal, it demands a decision. It requires one to choose for or against the identity of Christ. It is a question which the inquirer finds themselves personally involved in. Conversely, the 'How?' question provokes theoretical speculation that accommodates personal detachment. Brunner writes:

> The first answer to the question: "Who is he?" was this: "He is the Divine Word." Rightly understood, this reply contained the whole truth… What God has to say to us is just this: He has to tell us what *He is.* Unless you know who he is, you cannot know what God has to say to you. When you know who He is, then indeed you possess no mere speculative theory, with no reference to your life; when you acknowledge Christ in faith, you are acknowledging your King, and God is telling you something about yourself and about your life which "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of

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[328] Ibid. pp. 490-491.

[329] Ibid. p. 236.

> man to conceive." When you know who He is, you know who God is, you know who you are, and what God wills to do for you and with you, and you see your real condition. If you have received this grace, that, in response to this question: "Who is He?" you can reply: "I know and acknowledge in Him the Name which is above every name" – you have been set upon a new plane of being, and your whole life has been changed. For the question, "Who is He?" is the same as the one which says: "What part, then, does God take in this whole process, what happens?" That this question can degenerate into an intellectual speculation simply means that it is always possible to state and answer this question lightly instead of seriously, in a frivolous manner instead of in the spirit of one who is seeking God, which means the questioner is not really listening to the message of the New Testament at all, but simply pretending to listen.[330]

For Brunner, the 'Who?' question represents the personal nature of faith. The 'How?' question represents the impersonal nature of theoretical reflection. Revelation is presented as a personal address and is developed further along the lines of existential decision. 'God's Word is not an idea but a personal address. We cannot regard him from the dethatched point of view of a mere spectator.' The Word of God contains a 'thou shalt,' it expresses the Will of God. Faith is simply obedience to this divine will. 'To believe, therefore, simply means to obey.'[331]

Brunner's treatment of the virgin birth further illustrates his position on 'Who?' and 'How?' Christological questions. Brunner rejected the virgin birth as a necessary affirmation of faith. He observed that, apart from two passages (Matt 1:18-25 and Luke I:35) thought to be later additions, the whole of the New Testament is silent on this point. Most surprisingly, neither the Gospel of John with its high Christology nor any of the letters of Paul display any interest or awareness of the virgin birth. Furthermore, 'this idea plays no part in the Christological conflicts of the Early Church.'[332] Brunner felt that the incarnation could be upheld without affirming the virgin birth. He believed that, at

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[330] Ibid. p. 234.

[331] Ibid. pp. 549-550.

[332] Ibid. pp. 322-323.

best, the sinlessness of Christ was not dependent upon it, and, at worst, the notion contributed to a docetic view of Christ, undermining the authenticity of his humanity.[333] With the virgin birth, Brunner displayed a characteristic concern of his personalism, concern that the lived experience of faith gets obscured by theology's theoretical reflection. He understood the doctrine of the virgin birth as an early attempt to engage in metaphysical theory or, at least, to provide an explanation for the metaphysical possibility of the 'Divine Humanity of Christ.'[334] In Brunner's view, such explanations seek to explain away the paradoxical reality of revelation and, therefore, undermine the mystery of the incarnation. Instead, confessing the two natures of Christ (i.e., answering the 'Who?' question) without obscuring or confusing the distinction and unity of Christ's natures requires one to accept the paradoxical nature of Christological statements.

In his essay, 'Redeemer and Redeemed as Persons in History,' Edward Dowey considers the personalist themes in Brunner's soteriology. In this context, he notes that a decade before *Man in Revolt* was published, *The Mediator* already contained many of the personalist categories that would become central for Brunner. Dowey writes that, 'the entire group of personalistic concepts in their characteristic expression were present throughout [*The Mediator*]: person, decision, act, community, conversation, history, I-Thou, encounter, and once-for-all.'[335] With *The Mediator*, Brunner has already begun to juxtapose the personalism of revelation with – in his view – the speculative impersonalism of reason and, in this way, maps personalism and impersonalism onto the law and gospel dialectic:

> Precisely where belief in the Incarnation of the Word exists, all speculation about the Logos – both ethical and theoretical – has broken down. For the incarnation of the Word, and the Word made flesh, the Person of the Mediator, places us in the presence of

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[333] Ibid. pp. 325-326. – See also: McGrath, *Emil Brunner,* pp. 45-46.

[334] Brunner, *The Mediator,* p. 343.

[335] Edward A. Jr Dowey, 'Redeemer and Redeemed as Persons in History', in *The Theology of Emil Brunner*, ed. by Charles Kegley (London: The MacMillan Company, 1962), p. 190.

> decisions of which the followers of a moral general religion, of the so-called "Religion of Jesus," have not the faintest idea. Only through belief in the Word made flesh can the intellectualism, reflective speculation, and aestheticism of the Greek philosophical spirit be rooted out. No moral law, no religious ideals, no Idea of God, however sublime, is able to do this. This alone can be done by the effectual Word, the actual revelation of God, the decision for or against the Mediator.[336]

Here we see Brunner correlating concepts of the impersonal, abstract, and reflective with the law and notions of the personal, direct, and concrete with the gospel.

With *The Philosophy of Religion* and *The Mediator,* Brunner develops the theme of revelation and reason and, in a constructive turn, begins to set out the personalist categories that will determine his later theology. Through the influence of Ferdinand Ebner and Martin Buber's dialogical philosophy, Brunner eventually expresses his epistemic personalism in the concept of *truth as encounter.* Following this development, he readdresses the relationship of revelation and reason within an even more thoroughly personalist framework, which takes place in the appropriately titled monograph *Revelation and Reason* (1941). However, Brunner's doctrine of encounter and the dialogical principles which it exhibits are the topic of the next chapter. At present, I aim to show how these themes develop and begin to take shape within the law and gospel dialectic that Brunner identifies as the 'central point of' his 'theological thinking.'[337]

III. Eristic Theology

In *The Philosophy of Religion*, Brunner determines that, from the standpoint of Protestant theology, philosophy of religion does not designate philosophy as such but

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[336] Ibid. pp. 233-234.

[337] Brunner, *Man in Revolt*, p. 515.

designates a certain sphere of discourse.[338] He employs philosophy of religion as that branch of theology that enters into discussion with the general conditions of human reason. Herein, the function of philosophy of religion is largely critical. Its primary task is to distinguish revelation from reason, to show 'the affirmations of faith as distinct from all other affirmations.'[339] What Brunner describes and what he performs in *The Philosophy of Religion* is that task which he would come to define as *eristics*. Where *The Philosophy of Religion* performs the eristic task, his later essay 'Die andere Aufgabe der Theologie' [The Other Task of Theology] expresses with more precision the exact nature and necessity of eristic theology.[340] In this essay, he declares that 'the first task of theology is to continually call the Church, specifically those who proclaim the Word, to new reflection on the Word of God given to it.' This primary theological task is what Brunner terms *dogmatics*. He describes dogmatic theology as being characteristically biblical and systematic. 'It is essentially biblical theology in so far as the Bible is the primary testimony of that revelation which has taken place… It is essentially systematic theology insofar as it explores the conceptual connections [*sachliche Zusammenhänge*] of the Word witnessed to in the Bible.'[341] However, this first task of theology does not stand on its own. It is necessarily accompanied by another.

If the first task of theology, as dogmatics, attends to the objectivity of the Word of God and its content, then 'the other task of the Theology' attends to the subjective context – i.e., to the concrete reality, wherein the Word of God is received. A tradition

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[338] Ibid. p. 13.

[339] Ibid. pp. 18-19.

[340] Brunner, 'Die andere Aufgabe der Theologie,' *Zwischen Den Zeiten*, 7 (1929), 255–76.

[341] 'Es ist die erste Aufgabe der Theologie, die Kirche, insbesondere die Verkünder des Wortes, stets aufs neue Besinnung zu rufen über das ihr gegebene Wort Gottes… Sie ist wesentlich biblische Theologie, insofern die Bibel das primäre Zeugnis von der geschehenen Offenbarung… Sie ist wesentlich systematische Theologie, insofern als sie den sachlichen Zusammenhängen des in der Bibel bezeugten Wortes nachgeht.' Ibid., p. 255. – This translation is my own apart from the choice to render and give emphasis to 'sachlichen Zusammenhängen' as 'conceptual connections.' On this point I follow McGrath's translation, see McGrath, *Emil Brunner,* p. 66.

exists of referring to this secondary task of theological reflection as *apologetics*. This term, *apologetics*, had already fallen into some disrepute by the late nineteenth century.[342] Moreover, Brunner notes two images that are evoked by conventional understandings of 'apologetic theology.' On one hand, is a 'feeble and fearful defense before a rational tribunal' and, on the other, are attempts to justify Christianity before a world that has lost confidence in it.[343] To reorient this secondary theological task in a way that maintains relevant critiques of such apologetics but also avoids some of the baggage of its prior connotations, Brunner deems it necessary to assign a new moniker, employing the term *eristic* [*Eristik, eristische*]. He refers the term eristic to its Greek etymology: *εριζειν* meaning to contend/dispute, also *εριστικη τεχνη* as 'the art of disputation.'[344]

For Brunner, the dogmatic task is 'first and essential.' Nevertheless, the dogmatic task cannot be separated from the eristic task which, however secondary, remains essential to the nature of theology. The reason for this is that revelation does not take place in a vacuum but occurs insofar as the Word of God meets us here and now. Reflection upon this Word of God 'does not take place in empty space but in historically filled space:'

> The Word of God touches people who have already taken a stand, who have already settled the meaning of their existence in one manner or another. The Word of God cannot fill an empty space but rather seeks admission into a house that is already occupied. It cannot assert itself otherwise than to engage with the spirits that are already

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[342] Brunner highlights the influence of Franz Overbeck on this point, whose *Über die Christlichkeit unserer heutigen Theologie* (1873) drew on criticisms of the so-called 'apologetic' theology. – Brunner, 'Die andere.' p. 258.

[343] 'eines Glaubens, der sich in einer schwächlichen und ängstlichen Defensive vor einem Vernunfttribunal rechtfertigt…' Ibid. p. 258.

[344] Ibid. p. 260.

> there. It must create space at their expense. The required obedience of faith [ὕπακοὴ πίστεως] becomes an order to emigrate for those spirits incompatible with it.[345]

There is no neutral position from which one might reflect with pure objectivity, as if unaffected by their historical contingency. There are many directions in which one might take Brunner's point especially as it relates to critiquing theology's abstraction from its concrete context. Brunner takes the event of preaching as the primary point of reflection for exploring how the eristic and dogmatic tasks interact. He expresses his concern about abstracted theological reflections failing to attend to the worldly embeddedness of the Church with reference to the event of the preaching. Without the eristic task, the sermon is in danger of becoming a mere declamation, a rhetorical act that speaks to no one in particular. Even if one could preach "pure doctrine" [*reine Lehre*], such preaching would remain a danger if it did not talk to real people – i.e., to today's people, here and now.[346]

Where doctrine is primarily concerned with expressing the content of the Word of God, eristic theology has a primary concern to engage polemically with this 'axiom of reason' and to show how and to what extent it is that prior language and concepts may be claimed as well as corrected by the Word of God.[347] Revelation has no inherent opposition to reason. 'The opposition arises only because the Word of God claims such a reason as does not wish to be claimed, but wants to be left alone, to claim itself.'[348] Herein, revelation's corrective is not an obliteration of reason but a liberation of it. Reason is a prerequisite of theology by the fact that reflecting upon and speaking descriptively about the Word of God already presupposes humanity's capacity for

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[345] Ibid. p. 255.

[346] Ibid. pp. 274-275.

[347] 'das Vernunftaxiom' is the term Brunner uses to refer to reason's claim of self-sufficiency – Ibid. pp. 256-257.

[348] 'Der Gegensatz entsteht erst dadurch, dass das Wort Gottes eine solche Vernunft in Anspruch nimmt, die nicht in Anspruch genommen, sondern allein gelassen warden selbst in Anspruch nehmen will.' – Ibid. pp. 256-257.

communicative intelligibility. The polemical role of eristic theology aims to ensure that it is the Word of God that claims reason and not reason laying claim to the Word of God. Eristic theology undertakes this critical engagement with the relative language and concepts that constructive articulations are built upon. The eristic theology is, on one hand, a polemical task of engaging in debate with the axioms of reason. On the other hand, eristic theology is an important balance point to the primary task of dogmatics, wherein the manner of theoretical reflection tends towards an abstraction that obscures the personal nature of faith. The eristic task grounds theology within its cultural and intellectual context and thereby guards against the abstractions of theoretical reflection.

'Die andere Aufgabe der Theologie' illustrates how Brunner's treatment of revelation and reason as well as naturalism and idealism converge around an interest to assert and preserve the existential nature of faith:

> It is due to the ambivalence of human existence that there are essentially two "natural," i.e. possible on the ground of reason, modes of understanding existence, the idealistic (with its borderline case, mysticism) and the naturalistic (with its borderline case, materialism). The dichotomy proves to be insurmountable in the fact that these two have been fighting each other for as long as people have thought. The reason for this lies in the fact – only recognizable to faith – that they are both half true and half false. Not only should eristic theology show how a decision is impossible on the basis of theory, but in fact, it should play one off against the other. However, that can only be a means for it to compel existential thinking.[349]

What Brunner means here by 'existential thinking' is the very same thing that is meant when this chapter speaks of personalism. Here, persons are irreducible agents for whom truth and meaning become actual in moments of decision. Moreover, as we saw with the mediator, the category of decision is an important marker of

[349] Ibid. p. 263.

personalist/existential thinking for Brunner. Theory, in its purest form, is merely descriptive. Existential thinking, however, makes a demand, it requires a decision.[350]

In *The Philosophy of Religion*, Brunner compares these ways of knowing to the roles of 'spectators' and 'actors:'

> Theoretical knowledge does not afford the only possible relation to reality. All theory is a matter of standpoint, and as "theorists" we are like "spectators" in a "theatre." … Theoretical knowledge is not everything. It is part of life, but we are more than our theoretical knowledge. For we are concerned with reality not merely as spectators, but also as actors. Theoretical activity is only a part of our total activity: and hence the question of activity in general, or the practical question takes precedence of the question of theoretic knowledge.[351]

In actuality, both dogmatic and eristic theology 'speak the language of theoretical reason.' Theology 'is not itself an act of faith but reflection,' reflection whose content is determined by 'existential knowledge of the Word and of the actual person.' There is an irony at play between the theoretical nature of theology and the existential nature of faith. Theology is 'reflection on that which is not reflection, theory about that and why the Word of God should not be understood theoretically.' [352] The difference between eristic and dogmatic theology is that eristic is more attentive to the conditions within which the word of God is received; 'its theme is precisely the existential as such,' albeit

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[350] In the background of Brunner's existential thinking stands Kierkegaard about whom Brunner writes: 'Wir haben wohl alle den Wert einer wahrhaft eristischen Theologie vor allem an Kierkegaard erfahren.' Ibid. p. 271.

[351] Brunner, *The Philosophy of Religion,* pp. 66-67.

[352] 'Theologie – sei es nun dogmatische oder eristische… auch wo sie die Sprache der theoretischen Vernunft spricht, dabei immer vom Wissen um das Existentielle begleitet ist, und alle ihre Sätze inhaltlich vom Wissen um das Existentielle des Wortes und des wirklichen Menschen bestimmt sind. Sie kommt also immer, in jedem Satz, vom Glauben her, aber sie ist nicht selbst Glaubensakt, sondern Reflexion. Reflexion über das, was nicht Reflexion ist, Theorie darüber, dass und warum das Wort Gottes nicht theoretisch verstanden werden soll.' – Brunner, 'Die andere Aufgabe der Theologie,' p. 269.

in the mode of reflection. Dogmatic theology reflects directly upon the Word of God; it expresses the content of the Word of God 'in the language of abstracting, theoretical exposition.'[353]

Brunner's primary point of grounding – in contrast to theology as theory – is the event of preaching. He argues that the existence and necessity of the two theological tasks are due to the fact of they exist as a unity in the sermon. The sermon is a proclamation of the Word of God which unifies an 'explicative exposition' [*die explizierende Darlegung*] with an argument against the resistance of reason.[354] The Word of God does not merely address the listener positively but also confronts the listener, calling for repentance, compelling obedience. In the sermon, this activity of the Word of God is united in the existential event. In the reflective activity of theology, they are not altogether untied but nonetheless stand side by side:

> The fact that these two modes of theology exist and must exist – which, by the way, do not always need to be separate, but, as in Calvin's *institutio,* for example, can constantly merge – is due to the fact that that which is united in the sermon is not united here in theoretical reflection and discussion.[355]

In this sense, eristic theology is an accompaniment to the melody of dogmatics which provides the main themes of theology. The two exist in harmony but, in theology, are never a pure unity. Brunner views the eristic task as a vital accompaniment to

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[353] 'Die dogmatische Theologie… in der Sphäre und in der Sprache der abstrahierenden, theoretischen Darlegung geschieht... gibt dies in noch höherem Masse von der eristischen als von der dogmatischen Theologie, da ihr Thema – wenn sies ich recht versteht – gerade das Existentielle als solches…ist' – Ibid. pp. 269-270.

[354] Ibid. p. 259.

[355] Ibid. p. 270.

dogmatics. Without the eristics, dogmatics falls flat, losing its vitality. 'It is "that little bit of cinnamon," it is the salt without which any correct dogmatics becomes lazy.'[356]

A further word is needed regarding the relationship between dogmatic and eristic theology as particular spheres of discourse. Dogmatics can rightly be viewed as a form of discourse that occurs within the church and, insofar as it is committed to the particularity of the Christian witness as distinct from all other truth claims, remains *inwardly* facing. Conversely, eristic theology's engagement with the general conditions of human reason and the contemporary context could be considered an *outwardly* facing task. However, the juxtaposition of these two tasks as *inwardly* and *outwardly* facing is mistaken or, at the very least, this is not an arrangement intended by Brunner when he speaks of eristic theology as designating 'the sphere of the discussion.'[357]

Again, the sermon is informative on this point. The polemical impetus of judgement and the proclamation of grace are united in the Word of God. In their unity, they address the very same audience which, in the first instance, is the Church. The Church has no grounds for addressing the world otherwise than through its own continued reception of the Word of God. As Brunner writes: 'Pharisaism is removed from her [from "a genuinely dialectical conception of theology"]; so "we," the Christians, the Church, the theologians, are able to justify ourselves to the world when "we" – in every sense of us – always remain those attacked by the Word of God.' And then again, further on: 'Real preaching is always polemical – not in the pharisaical sense that "those there" are attacked, but that we are attacked.'[358] While the Church's eschatological

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[356] 'Sie ist "das bisschen Zimt", sie ist das Salz, ohne das auch jede korrekte Dogmatik faul wird.' – Ibid. p. 275.

[357] Brunner, *The Philosophy of Religion*, p. 13.

[358] 'Es wird ihr der Pharisäismus genommen: als vermöchten "wir," die Christen, die Theologen uns vor der Welt zu rechtfertigen, wo doch "wir" – in jedem Sinn von wir - immer die vom Wort Gottes Angegriffenen bleiben… Echte Predigt ist immer polemisch – nicht im pharisäischen Sinn, dass 'die dort' angegriffen werden, sondern dass wir angegriffen werden.' – Brunner, 'Die andere Aufgabe der Theologie,' pp. 258- 259.

identity is 'not of this world' (*á la* John 17:14-16), the existential reality of the community and its members remains one of historical and cultural embeddedness. In this sense, the questions, concerns, and intellectual tendencies of contemporary culture will hardly be alien to the Church just as much as the Church is never entirely alien to the cultures in which it exists. For these reasons, the juxtaposition of *inward* and *outward* discourse does not easily map onto Brunner's presentation of eristic theology.

V. The Command and the Orders; Brunner's Moral Theology

We return now to Brunner's realism-idealism paradigm which was introduced in *The Philosophy of Religion.* The polarized tendencies of realism and idealism were used to interrogate and critique the intellectual backdrop of modern theology. However, in *The Philosophy of Religion,* Brunner's illustration of realism and idealism is terse and somewhat clumsy. In particular, realism is a confusing choice as the antithesis to idealism due to its multivalence and multiuse.[359] The pattern of critique intended by Brunner is clarified in his 1932 volume on moral theology, *The Divine Imperative.* Having in mind the same conceptual paradigm vis-à-vis realism-idealism, he exchanges *realism* for *naturalism* and positions his moral theology over against the tendencies of naturalism and idealism. *The Divine Imperative* is an expansive volume comprised of three books – 'Book I: The Problem', 'Book II: The Divine Command', and 'Book III: The Orders.' The volume is a study in moral theology that utilizes the dual concepts of the 'divine command' and the 'orders of creation' to determine moral action.[360] These two constructive movements are set against the backdrop of 'Book I: The Problem' which exemplifies Brunner's understanding of the *eristic* task of theology.[361]

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[359] E.g., When contrasted with nominalism, realism has a definition that is hardly antithetical to idealism and, in fact, accommodates it.

[360] McGrath, *Emil Brunner: A Reappraisal*, p. 80.

[361] For Brunner's description of the *eristic* task see Emil Brunner, 'Die andere Aufgabe der Theologie', *Zwischen den Zeiten*, 7 (1929), 255–76.

In 'Book I,' Brunner argues that naturalism, exemplified by Aristotle's understanding of *eudaimonia*, grounds morality in the fact of existence and is therefore sufficiently concrete but fails to transcend this relativity – i.e., it fails to grasp 'the Good' as an absolute. Idealism, exemplified by Kant's *summum bonum*, is sufficiently absolute but far too abstract, failing to grasp the unending particularities of human existence.[362] Brunner aims for his explication of moral theology to have a proper starting point, the will of God revealed in the Word of God, and to address the antithesis which appears in the contradiction between naturalism and idealism. In *The Divine Imperative*, it becomes clear that Brunner's treatment of the naturalism-idealism paradigm is his way of articulating the polarized intellectual tendencies that emerge out of the enduring problem of universals and particulars. Specifically, when Brunner critiques human reason based on its limitations and insufficiency, he draws upon the perceived intractability of that which is relative and that which is absolute; also, between that which is concrete and that which is abstract.

The entire structure of Brunner's moral theology sets out to address this dichotomy between relativity and abstraction. For Brunner, the command of God establishes the absolute foundation of Christian ethics and the orders of creation provide the concrete framework within which the Christian person is addressed by this command. If either the transcendence of the command or the particularity of the orders is neglected, moral theology reverts to enigmatic abstractions or mere relativism.

After establishing his critique of naturalism and idealism, he lays out 'The Divine Command' as the foundation for moral theology. Brunner asserts that 'the Good has its basis and its existence solely in the will of God.'[363] He reworks, in ethical terms, the position on revelation previously established: 'We know God only through His revelation, in His own Word.'[364] As we saw in *The Mediator*, the Word of God contains

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[362] See Brunner's 'The Rationalization of the Moral in Philosophical Ethics,' *The Divine Imperative,* pp. 34-43.

[363] Brunner, *The Divine Imperative*, p. 53.

[364] Ibid. p. 114.

the command of God, i.e. it contains a divine imperative. Herein, Brunner expresses the categorical imperative of the Christian faith: 'Where our neighbor is concerned there are no isolated "duties," but only the one duty – to do to him what the love of God wills should be done to him here and now.'[365] The divine command is the *sine qua non* of Brunner's ethics and it is likely that the change in the English title, away from the dual descriptive of *Das Gebot und die Ordnungen* to the singular *Divine Imperative,* was an attempt to emphasize the ascendency of Book II's claims.[366]

In 'Book III' of *The Divine Imperative*, Brunner balances the absolute command of God with a doctrine of the orders of creation. The divine command is not the end but the beginning of Christian ethics. Book III transitions into Brunner's explication of the divine orders based on the '*here and now*' of Christian duty. Here, Christian duty is understood as a response to a concrete need in a particular set of circumstances.[367] Brunner's appeal to the orders is an affirmation of 'the existing reality as the sphere in which the Good is to be realized' and, therefore, 'this actual reality defines for us our course of action.'[368] Said differently, 'God is always bidding us to do some particular thing… God's Command does not vary in *intention*, but it varies in *content*, according to the conditions with which it deals.'[369] Discerning the content of God's command requires direct reflection on the concrete reality of existence within the orders of the world. Brunner follows the divine command with the orders to compel ethical reflection on the here and now, i.e. on the concrete, the particular. He appeals to the orders in the interest of balancing the absolute and singular command of God with acute attention to the dynamic particularities of human existence.

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[365] Ibid. p. 134.

[366] See Brunner's comments on this matter in Brunner, 'Nature and Grace', in *Natural Theology*, Peter Frenkel, trans., (London: The Centenary Press, 1946), pp. 18-19.

[367] Brunner, *The Divine Imperative,* p. 134.

[368] Ibid. p. 291.

[369] Ibid. p. 134.

Brunner's orders – marriage and family, the community of labor, the state, culture, and the Church – instantiate an anthropological method within moral discernment. Here I have in mind Kathryn Tanner's argument for theology to make use of an anthropological understanding of culture. Tanner writes: 'Anthropology insists cultures only come in specific shapes; there is no culture in general. The point of anthropology's generalizations about culture as a human universal is therefore simply to enable a preoccupation with the particular.' Consequently, 'an anthropological idea of culture encourages theologians to develop a primary interest in the particular.'[370] Such attentiveness to the unstable and ever-emerging realities of life, where practical concerns and decisions dominate, further emphasizes the inseparability of theory and practice.[371] This anthropological move is precisely Brunner's aim in employing the concept of orders.[372]

Brunner's orders represent general spheres of human existence that enable moral theology to have a preoccupation with the particular. Herein, moral responsibility gets shaped by one's particular place within familial, economic, political, cultural, and ecclesial communities. The command and the orders mirror the relationship between revelation and reason. The command is the product of revelation. The orders are present within creation and available to reason. The orders have no theological value other than from the standpoint of revelation and, therefore, on their own they do not provide positive moral content. Nonetheless, it is only ever within the orders that the command of God is received and discerned.

It is crucial to note here that Brunner's use of the orders of creation has also become an obstacle to his contemporary reception. The orders of creation is a concept that developed in nineteenth-century German Lutheranism by formalizing Luther's

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[370] Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997). pp. 66-67.

[371] Tanner, *Theories of Culture,* p. 72.

[372] See my previous work: Taylor Holleyman, 'The Orders of Vocation: A Brunnerian Proposal,' in *International Journal of Systematic Theology*. 2022; 00: 1– 20.

tripartite description of an economic, political, and ecclesial estate. It was at Erlangen that the concept was developed, reaching its height in the twentieth century with faculty members Werner Elert and Paul Althaus, and the orders have not fared well in their wake.[373] Nazi ideology, during the rise and regime of Adolf Hitler, was able to appeal to Lutheran ethics, appropriating the orders of creation as theological justification for its *Blut und Boden* (*Blood and Soil*) motto.[374] However, Brunner's assessment of the orders is markedly different from that offered by Althaus, whose *Theologie der Ordnungen* (1934) epitomizes the susceptibility of the orders of creation. Althaus emphasized the preservation of existing orders and classified *Volk* as one such order which was to be maintained through ethno-racial differentiation and segregation. Brunner's treatment of the orders simply does not allow such claims to go uncontested and, in his treatment of the state, he explicitly distances himself from Althaus. Brunner is especially critical of Althaus for viewing coercive force as natural to the created order and not merely a result of sin. He also critiques Althaus' inability to recognize the pacifist impulse of Christianity and, therefore, his unwillingness to offer unqualified objections to war.[375]

In contrast to Althaus, Brunner constructed the orders in reference to God as equally *Creator* and *Redeemer*.[376] The consequence of this duality is that each order not only represents a sphere of human life worth preserving but also a sphere of human life in need of redemption. For Brunner, the Christian life is not only conservative but

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[373] Nathan Howard Yoder, *Ordnung in Gemeinschaft: A Critical Appraisal of the Erlangen Contribution to the Orders of Creation* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2016), pp. 2-10.

[374] Carl Braaten, 'God in Public Life: Rehabilitating the Orders of Creation,' in *First Things,* December (1990). p. 32.

[375] In Emil Brunner's *The Divine Imperative* (London, Lutterworth Press, 1937) he deals with Althaus most directly, and most critically, in the 'Notes and Appendices' to Chapters 36 and 37. See Brunner's comments on Althaus and the coercive character of the State, p. 683; Also, Brunner's comments on Althaus' inability to conceive the pacifist impulse of Christianity, pp. 697-698.

[376] Brunner, 'The Command of the Creator and Redeemer,' *The Divine Imperative,* pp. 122-131.

also revolutionary.[377] The orders of creation are treated within this dialectical posturing. That these forms of community exist generally, is a 'gift of the Creator and Preserver of the world;' the concrete form of any particular order, however, 'is the effect of human *sin*, and is therefore, like all that is sinful, the object of moral conflict.' Consequently, the Christian is prohibited from the categorical endorsement of any particular order as 'willed by God.' And yet, at the same time, the Christian should never withdraw from these orders. For it is within each concrete order that 'we are to do the duties' required 'as the work God has given us to do,' or within which 'we are summoned to protest against the lovelessness which it contains and to seek to realize a better order.'[378] The influence of *völkisch* ideology is a meaningful critique of the orders of creation. It is not, however, a refutation of Brunner. *The Divine Imperative* was banned in Germany shortly after its publication due to its incompatibility with the ideology of the *Deutsche Christen*.[379]

In *The Divine Imperative*, Brunner's arrangement of command and orders is perhaps his most thoroughgoing application of the law and gospel dialectic. Jehle refers to the work as Brunner's '*magnum opus*.'[380] In as much as goodness has its grounding solely in the Word of God, humanity is willed by God to act in particular ways within the orders of the world where they are called to serve. Herein, Brunner's personalism continues to come forward. N. H. Søe summarizes that Brunner 'protests against the concept of an autonomous I, a self-sufficient individual.' Moreover, he 'explicitly turns against' the division 'of Christian ethics into an individual and a social ethics.'[381] For

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[377] See Frank Jehle's comparison of Brunner and Althaus in: Jehle, *Emil Brunner: Theologe im 20. Jahrhundert* (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag Zurich, 2006), pp. 261-262.

[378] Brunner, *The Divine Imperative*, pp. 337-339.

[379] On May 9th, 1938 all Tübingen editions of *The Divine Imperative* were destroyed under the supervision of the German state police and all further printing took place in Zürich. – Jehle, *Emil Brunner,* pp. 255-256.

[380] Ibid. p. 256.

[381] N.H. Søe, 'The Personal Ethics of Emil Brunner', in *The Theology of Emil Brunner*, ed. by Charles Kegley (New York: Macmillan, 1962), p. 249.

Brunner, moral agency is always determined by the relationships through which the concrete human has their existence. Human moral agency is determined first and foremost by relation to God. However, God's word is not an impersonal address to a generic human. Rather, the Word of God addresses this person, here and now, in a particular set of circumstances. For Brunner, abstraction is the antithesis of personalism. To speak of the Christian faith as personal is to say that it is concrete, particularized, and active. In *The Divine Imperative,* Brunner utilizes the orders of creation to inundate moral theology with precisely this personal character.

Conclusion

In the next chapter, we will see that Brunner identifies the years between 1935 and 1938 as the period when an epistemology of 'encounter' became the guiding principle of his thought. This epistemic grounding was chiefly developed in *Man in Revolt* and, then most explicitly, in *Truth as Encounter*.[382] With his doctrine of encounter, Brunner's theology becomes not only dialectical but also dialogical. However, even before the influence of dialogical philosophy was quite so developed, Brunner's personalism was already evident. This chapter has shown that Brunner connects a law and gospel dialectic to his conceptualization of the impersonal and the personal. The preceding sections examined Brunner's arrangement of revelation and reason, his understanding of the 'eristic' task, and his ethics with an eye towards their development of the law and gospel dialectic. Specifically, I have argued that Bruner correlates notions of the impersonal, abstract, and reflective with the law and notions of the personal, direct, and concrete with the gospel. This analysis shows how Brunner assimilates personalism into his dialectal framework. These personalist sensibilities will be brought together with Brunner's epistemic interests in his doctrine of encounter.

[382] Brunner, 'Intellectual Autobiography,' p. 12

In conclusion, I return to a previously cited statement from Schrotenboer who writes that 'Brunner's theology is built around a framework that partitions reality into two realms or dimensions of existence, namely, Law and Gospel or, the impersonal and the personal, world-truths and God-truths.'[383] In a prior monograph, *A New Apologetics: an Analysis and Appraisal of the Eristic Theology of Emil Brunner*, Schrotenboer concisely summarized the present themes in their connection:

> The knowledge of the law is that which man has naturally, from out himself…. Essential to the concept of law is the notion of impersonality. Whether Brunner speaks of God or man, of revelation or the ordinances, law is always abstract. Were one to express it in philosophical categories, he would say that the law corresponds to the rational aspect of reality, as distinguished from the irrational… It is the comprehensible; not the incomprehensible. Law is constitutive for reason, but is only regulative for faith…. The Gospel is everything that the law is not. The law is impersonal; The Gospel is personal; in it man and God meet in love. The law is abstract; the Gospel is concrete: it is the personal encounter of God's coming to and addressing man. The law is that which is naturally knowable to man; the Gospel is incomprehensible: it is the real paradox, that which goes above our thinking.[384]

Schrotenboer succinctly captures the thematic connections drawn out in this chapter. The law disrupts the paradoxical relation between Creator and creature. Under the conditions of sin, the law distorts the free grace of God by constructing human criteria through which one attempts to gain or prove their faith.

For Brunner, the disruption of law occurs not only through prescriptive moral imperatives, but also in the form of doctrine, religious practice, and humanity's own self-understanding. Insofar as the law disrupts the personal nature of the Divine relation, it amounts to a variety of forms of impersonalism. The gospel coincides with Brunner's

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[383] Paul Schrotenboer, 'Emil Brunner', in *Creative Minds in Contemporary Theology*, ed. by Philip E. Hughes (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1966), p. 119.

[384] Schrotenboer, *A New Apologetics*, pp. 22-24.

notions of the personal, direct, and concrete – this is the sphere where revelation occurs. Conversely, the law corresponds with Brunner's notions of the impersonal, abstract, and reflective – the domain of reason. This treatment of the personal and impersonal is of particular interest because of this project's central claim that Brunner, operating within a dialectical framework, utilizes dialogical philosophy to bring epistemic and personalist interests together under the doctrine of encounter. Brunner juxtaposes the personalism of revelation with – in his view – the speculative impersonalism of reason and, in this way, maps personalism and impersonalism onto the law and gospel dialectic.

Chapter 4

Dialectic as Dialogue

In this chapter, I will show that Emil Brunner's theology, while remaining characteristically dialectical, is fundamentally shaped by the principles of dialogical philosophy. For this reason, we ought to not only represent his thought as *dialectical theology* but, equally well, as *dialogical theology*. In my first chapter, I explored the meaning of, and characteristics associated with, the moniker dialectical theology. In the second chapter, the epistemic preoccupation of Brunner's early intellectual development was traced. In chapter three, Brunner's dialectical framework was further distilled on the basis of his law and gospel dialectic. Specifically, Brunner's personalist sensibilities were highlighted by showing that the categories of the impersonal and personal overlap with his law and gospel arrangement. The current chapter will show that Brunner utilizes dialogical philosophy to bring his epistemic and personalist interests together under the doctrine of encounter.

Late in his career, Brunner offered two autobiographical accounts of his personal development. The first of these was an article titled 'A Spiritual Autobiography,' published in *Japan Christian Quarterly* in 1955.[385] The second was his 'Intellectual Autobiography' that featured as the opening essay in a 1962 edited volume on his theology.[386] In both instances, Brunner indicates that it was between 1935 and 1938 that he achieved greater clarity on the epistemic commitments that he had previously held. For Brunner, there was a central insight that he was first introduced to through the

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[385] Emil Brunner, 'A Spiritual Autobiography', *Japan Christian Quarterly*, July 1955, 238–44.

[386] Brunner, 'Intellectual Autobiography'.

ministry of the Blumhardts and which influenced him most directly through the mentorship of Leonard Ragaz and Hermann Kutter. This insight, he believed, was captured in part by Søren Kierkegaard's understanding of existentialism but, ultimately, it was the work of Ferdinand Ebner and Martin Buber that helped Brunner clarify his position. This is the development that Brunner narrates as he looks back on his career. First, in 1955:

> There are two other spiritual factors which in the second half of my life became important for me and of which I think I can see the hidden unity in spite of their apparent diversity: The Oxford Group movement and the I-Thou philosophy of Ferdinand Ebner (1882-1931) and Martin Buber. The Oxford Group, which came to my country in 1931 as a new type of revival movement and to which the Swiss church owes a great deal, made me aware, for the first time, of the close connection between spiritual reality and fellowship or communion…. The I-Thou philosophy gave the philosophical, intellectual explanation or interpretation of this extra-intellectual fact. Now, I could see that and why in the New Testament there is such a close connection, if not identity, between communion or fellowship in Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit, in the ecclesia. Fellowship was no mere ethical attitude but a new reality – the reality of God's Holy Spirit among and in men…. This was, at bottom, the same thing which Søren Kierkegaard meant by the word existential. *You cannot understand the Gospel unless you let yourself be personally engaged, the same as being challenged by the Thou which you encounter.* This has become since 1938, the lodestar of my theological thinking, first expressed in the little book *Wahrheit als Begegnung* (*The Divine Human Encounter*) in 1938. I think it was this which at bottom, Kutter and Ragaz had in mind when they spoke of religious socialism. It certainly is what the two Blumhardts had discovered and experienced as the reality of the Holy Spirit as the element of ecclesia.[387]

And again in 1962:

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[387] Brunner, 'A Spiritual Autobiography,' p. 243.

> In coming to grips with the decisive practical questions which the events of time had thrust into the foreground (church and state, proclamation of the Gospel in a secularized society and to the peoples of the world), I came to the conclusion that the root of the whole problem was the question of anthropology… In the realm of sociology my thinking was stimulated by Max Weber and, above all, in the sphere of philosophy, by Ferdinand Ebner and Martin Buber. Here I saw the rationalistic thought-scheme of object and subject overcome by understanding the human person as basically related to the divine Thou and by the distinction between the I-Thou world and the I-It world. Through this I came to see what was the heart of the biblical concept of man. Neither Ferdinand Ebner nor Martin Buber made a secret of the fact that they owed this most important insight to the Bible and the Christian philosopher, Søren Kierkegaard… Armed with this biblical insight, I then wrote my outline of a Christian doctrine of man, which appeared in 1935 under the title *Der Mensch im Widerspruch* (*Man in Revolt*)… My anthropological studies then led me to an even more fundamental question, namely to a reformulation of the biblical concept of truth. A series of lectures held in Upsala in 1936 were devoted to this attempt and were printed in the following year under the title *Wahrheit als Begegnung*.[388]

Accordingly, Brunner's *Man in Revolt* and *Truth as Encounter* represent the high point of his theological epistemology. Also, Ebner and Buber represent the most significant philosophical influence in the second half of his career. A third work of Brunner's, *Revelation and Reason* (1941), also stands in the background of this chapter. Brunner claimed that the distinct epistemic nature of the Christian faith was expressed in dogmatic terms in *Truth as Encounter* and then clarified in 'a new kind of so-called apologetics' in *Revelation and Reason*.[389]

This chapter begins with a brief introduction to the dialogical philosophy of Ebner and Buber. Next, I will establish Brunner's dialogical credentials through consideration of his 1937 lectures on theological epistemology, *Truth as Encounter*. In a third section, this formal epistemology will be examined based on two of its inherent difficulties.

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[388] Brunner, 'Intellectual Autobiography,' pp. 11-12.

[389] Ibid. p. 16.

Finally, the employment of *encounter* in Brunner's theology will be illustrated by considering his anthropology (*Man in Revolt*) and the apologetic function of *Revelation and Reason*. As noted above, Brunner relates the content of these two works to the developments articulated in *Truth as Encounter.* This exposition will show the confluence of Brunner's personalist and epistemic interests. Herein, Brunner's dialectical commitments are rearticulated dialogically through his doctrine of encounter.

I. Dialogical Philosophy

The label 'dialogical philosophy' is most often associated with the work of the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber. It is also known, perhaps more commonly, by the moniker 'I-Thou philosophy' corresponding to Buber's well-known publication, *I and Thou* (1923). Buber's thought is underpinned by a central epistemic claim that challenges traditional subject-object knowledge paradigms. Herein, he distinguishes the 'I-Thou' category from the 'I-It' (i.e., subject-object) as related but distinct ways of knowing. Despite his preeminent association, neither the 'I-Thou' language nor its corresponding content originated with Buber. Nevertheless, it was Buber who gave the I-Thou relation its 'classical form.' As Maurice Friedman writes, 'it is he who also clarified the difference between the I-Thou and the I-It relations and worked out the implications of this distinction in a systematic and thorough-going fashion.'[390] The theologian Karl Heim declared Buber's I-Thou and I-It distinction to be a 'Copernican revolution of modern thought' in 1930.[391]

Most notably, of those who arrived at dialogical philosophy independent of him were, Buber's contemporary, the Austrian philosopher Ferdinand Ebner and, after

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[390] Maurice S. Friedman, 'Martin Buber's Theory of Knowledge', *The Review of Metaphysics*, 8.2 (1954), 269.

[391] Karl Heim, *Glaube Und Denken: Philosophische Grundlegung einer christlichen Lebenschauung* (Berlin, 1931). p. 405; also, Karl Heim, 'Ontologie und Theologie', *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, 11 (1930). p.333.

Buber, the French existentialist Gabriel Marcel.[392] For our purposes, it is only Ebner and Buber who we need to take an interest in. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that dialogical philosophy is a branch within the broader field of existentialism that extends beyond these two figures.

As is shown in the excerpts above, Brunner speaks of Ebner and Buber in one breath. Our present interest, therefore, is in the continuity of dialogical thought, represented collectively by these two figures. However, even in this instance, Buber will remain the prime example of dialogical philosophy. This is only partially due to the clarity and form of Buber's I-Thou/I-It distinction. It is also due to sparse scholarship and limited access to Ebner's thought. Ferdinand Ebner, an Austrian school teacher, published only one book: *The Word and the Spiritual Realities: Pneumatalogical Fragments* (1921). Shortly after the book's publication he contracted tuberculosis and remained unwell until his untimely death (49 years old) in 1931. Regarding Ebner, Brunner wrote that he was 'an epoch-making thinker of whom the world knows nothing even after his death. It will yet be a while until that mistake is redressed, and the Copernican revolution of thought which began with him, is understood.'[393] Working independent of one another, Ebner and Buber came upon and expressed strikingly similar insights at almost the exact same time. Buber read Ebner's *The Word and Spiritual Realities* while writing the final section of *I and Thou* and reported that 'Ebner's book showed me, as no other since then, here and there in an almost uncanny nearness, that in this our time men of different kinds of traditions had devoted themselves to the search for buried treasure.'[394]

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[392] Ibid. p. 624.

[393] Brunner, *Für Ferdinand Ebner-Stimmen der Freunde*, ed. Hildegard Jone (Regensburg: Verlag Friedrich Pustet, 1935), p. 12. – cited in: Harold Johnson Green, 'The Word and Spiritual Realities: A Translation of and Critical Introduction to Ferdinand Ebner's "Das Wort und die Geistigen Realitaten" and a Comparison with Martin Buber's "Ich Und Du".' (Northwestern University, 1980). p. vi.

[394] Buber, *Between Man and Man*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (New York: MacMillan Paperbacks Edition, 1965), pp. 215-216. – cited in Ibid. p. v.

Dialogical philosophy emerged from the confluence of several preceding traditions. Principally, dialogical thought has roots in the philosophical traditions of the nineteenth century, especially Kierkegaard's existentialism, as well as in Jewish and Christian theological commitments. The dialogical principles of Buber and Ebner are chiefly concerned with the relationship between the individual and the world – i.e., the relationship between the *I* and the *not-I*. Descriptions of a particular relationship between 'I and Thou' can be found as early as the eighteenth century.[395] However, it was Ludwig Feuerbach who first began to show the significance of the dialogical relationship and to set it over against the solipsistic tendencies of Cartesian and Kantian thought, on the one hand, and Hegelian realism, on the other. For Feuerbach, 'to think is to engage in discourse… The intention of every question is to receive a reply or to engage in an argument with another. Without a *Thou* there is no *I*.' Furthermore, as a nominalist, he understood the discursive self to be a 'non-transcendent, non-abstract' individual whose reality and significance cannot be subsumed under any general process or idea.[396]

It was Kierkegaard, however, whose influence is deepest and most direct for Ebner and Buber. Like Feuerbach, Kierkegaard offers a critique of Hegel and idealism more broadly. In opposition to these, Kierkegaard also posits the irreducible significance of the concrete individual whose existence, as such, is only rightly understood through their relation to another. Unlike Feuerbach, however, and as is the case with Ebner and Buber, Kierkegaard's thought contains explicitly theistic presuppositions. His elevation of the concrete individual does not erase the absolute but, rather, it is precisely in one's relationship to the absolute (i.e., to God) that one finds their true existence. For

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[395] Bergman identifies the relation of 'I and Thou' as far back as the eighteenth-century Swiss poet and philosopher J.C. Lavater – see Shmuel H. Bergman, *Dialogical Philosophy from Kierkegaard to Buber* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1991). p. 147, fn. 55.

[396] See Bergman's assessment of Feuerbach as a 'transitional thinker' in the development of dialogical thought – Ibid. pp. 145-150. – Feuerbach's development of dialogical ideas is best found in his *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future* (1843).

Kierkegaard, it is in the context of this relationship – in the context of faith – where existential crisis and decision are real and, therefore, where the individual becomes their true self. As he writes in *Fear and Trembling*: 'The paradox of faith then is this, that the single individual is higher than the universal, that the single individual… determines his relation to the universal by his relation to the absolute, not his relation to the absolute by his relation to the universal.'[397]

Dialogical philosophy emerged out of these modern debates and represents a decided opposition to positivism and rationalism. It also represents, as is indicated here, a decidedly theistic brand of existentialism in the form of Christian and Jewish existentialism. Buber's religious impulses run deep. He was a scholar of Hassidic lore and Jewish mysticism, a biblical interpreter, and a Hebrew Bible translator. For Buber, the ultimate basis of all reality and relating is constituted by the fact that humanity is addressed by the eternal Thou of God. Ebner, a practicing Catholic, is even more expressly theological in his work. In *The Word and the Spiritual Realities*, Ebner takes the prologue to John's gospel as his point of orientation. In this light, he employs *Word* in a twofold manner. In a linguistic sense, he implicates the *word* whereby any 'I' relates to any 'Thou.' In theological terms, he sets these relations against the backdrop of that *Word* which was in the beginning with God and through whom all things were made.[398] Ebner and Buber reveal dialogical philosophy to be a branch of existentialism that takes interpersonal encounter as its ontological and epistemological starting point.

II. Brunner's *Truth as Encounter*

[397] Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). p. 61.

[398] György Kunszt, 'The Word as Ultimate Reality: The Christian Dialogical Personalism of Ferdinand Ebner', *Ultimate Reality and Meaning*, 20.2–3 (1997), p. 95.

Brunner's inclination towards existentialism, especially his fondness for Kierkegaard, has already been shown.[399] With *Truth as Encounter*, Brunner takes to expressing his existentialist commitments in a characteristically dialogical form. He asserts the category of *personal correspondence* as determining the 'Biblical understanding of truth.'[400] On this point, we need to understand how the concept of dialogue or, in Brunner's case, *correspondence* functions both concretely and as an illustration of epistemic modes. Brunner has in mind the actual correspondence between Creator and creature. He is concerned with the real event of dialogue between the revealed Word of God and the human respondent, exemplified in prayer. However, he also utilizes personal correspondence to represent a distinct epistemic category that is juxtaposed with the subject-object paradigm. Here, Buber's description of 'I-Thou' and 'I-It' is especially helpful.

For Buber, dialogue intends much more than mere linguistics. Buber's dialogical modes are the comprehensive means by which we address and are addressed by the world outside of ourselves. Linguistic as well as non-linguistic communications, including actions and undisclosed attitudes, are all a part of this address. In *Between Man and Man* Buber writes:

> Just as eager speaking at one another does not make a conversation… so for a conversation no sound is necessary, not even a gesture. Speech can renounce all media of sense, and it is still speech…. For where unreserve has ruled, even wordlessly, between men, the word of dialogue has happened.[401]

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[399] For extended treatment of Kierkegaard's influence see: Cynthia Bennett Brown, 'Behind Brunner – Søren Kierkegaard,' in *Believing Thinking, Bounded Theology: The Theological Methodology of Emil Brunner* (Eugene: Pickwick Publishing, 2015). pp. 141-181.

[400] Emil Brunner, *Truth as Encounter* (Philadelphia: Westminister Press, 1964). p. 102.

[401] Martin Buber, "Silence which is Communication," in *Between Man and Man* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1949).pp 3-4.

In part, dialogue is constituted by one's posture towards otherness. Understood more fully, dialogue represents the entire form of one's existence, existence in relationship. Specifically, I-Thou and I-It dialogue represent 'the twofold attitude of man' – i.e., two ways in which one stands in relation to the world. When Buber presents the 'basic words' – I-Thou and I-It – he has in mind modes of relation that are established by one's actual and concrete interaction with the world. 'Basic words do not state something that might exist outside them; by being spoken they establish a mode of existence.'[402] Buber's basic words operate with an actualist ontology. I-Thou and I-It are two ways of existing. Dialogue actualizes these modes rather than just describing them. It is in this sense that Buber's understanding of dialogue is actual and concrete. He intends to describe what is taking place *on the ground*, so to speak, in the encounters between the *I* and the *not-I*.

Buber is also making a claim about the epistemology that is inherent to these ways of existing. Buber illustrates the meaning of dialogue as it takes place in the relation between person and nature; between person and person; and between person and God. It is in the relation between persons that Buber's epistemic concerns are most clear. In the English language, an intuitive distinction is made between *knowing* and knowing *about*, especially when we speak about knowledge of another person. If I tell you that I know *about* Pope Francis, this is entirely unremarkable. On the other hand, it would be extraordinary to tell you that I *know* the Pope; this suggests something different. In this example, *knowing* and knowing *about* communicate two related but distinguishable kinds of knowledge.[403] Knowing someone implies that they know me too. Knowing is mutual, it requires reciprocity. Knowing can also be described as personal rather than propositional. Knowing *about* someone, however, is propositional

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[402] Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (London: Simon & Schuster, 1970). p. 53.

[403] William James makes a similar distinction between intuitive and conceptual/representation ways of knowing. – William James, "The Tigers of India," in *Pragmatism and Four Essays from the Meaning of Truth,* New American Library, New York, 1974, (reprint of *Pragmatism* 1907 and *The Meaning of Truth* 1909), p.227

rather than personal and it does not require reciprocity. I can know about someone even when they have no knowledge of me.

Buber's I-Thou relation is analogous to *knowing* and is contrasted with the I-It dialogue, which is analogous to knowing *about*. In this way, what has been said so far regarding I-Thou and I-It as forms of dialogue is misleading. More accurately, Buber's I-Thou relation illustrates his understanding of true dialogue, and the I-It relation illustrates a tendency to move from dialogue to monologue wherein mutuality and reciprocity are obstructed or, potentially, lost. In Buber's description, Addressing the other as 'Thou' is not only marked by the mutuality of a reciprocal address but, in its purest sense, is also holistic and concrete. Conversely, addressing the other as 'It' is objectifying, marked by reduction and abstraction.

In the I-Thou dialogue, the individual is addressed by the world in as much as they address the world. In the I-It dialogue, one reduces the object of their perception to a limited set of describable traits. For Buber, both ways of knowing are entirely necessary, and both can be beneficial. He viewed the I-Thou and I-It dialogue as two sides of the same coin with our actual postures oscillating perpetually between the two. However, he was deeply concerned about the privileging of propositional and positivistic truth. Buber viewed the trajectory of history as trending towards prioritizing I-It thinking and relating.[404] He believed that this increasing interest in objective knowledge corresponded to an increasing objectification of people, of the natural world, and of God. As a corrective, Buber proposed that we recognize knowledge as a perpetual oscillation between the I-It and the I-Thou dialogue. Our object-subject paradigms are entirely necessary, but these should lead us ever again back to, and not away from, a prior existence in mutual and dependent relationships with the world outside of ourselves.

Similarly, Brunner's depiction of 'personal correspondence' is intended to describe the actual nature of the event in which a person encounters the Word of God

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[404] Buber, I and Thou, pp. 87-88.

and responds to it; also, to illustrate an epistemic mode that is juxtaposed to the object-subject paradigm. The text of *Truth as Encounter* originated as a set of lectures delivered at the University of Uppsala in the fall of 1937. The theme for the lectures, suggested to Brunner by the event organizer, was 'the relation between the objective and the subjective in Christian faith.'[405] What emerged in *Truth as Encounter* was a critique of theology's reliance on the object-subject antithesis and a bid for thinking beyond this epistemic mode. In the first instance, we should say more clearly what Brunner means by speaking about the 'object-subject antithesis.' Over against this, we will see how he articulates, dialogically, 'truth as encounter.'

Brunner writes that 'The whole of Western philosophy and the science that has issued from it are dominated by the object-subject antithesis.' Offering a kind of genealogy, he proposes that this epistemic paradigm originated with Greek philosophy which expressed the 'antithesis of *physis* and *idea*,' i.e. the antithesis of naturalism and idealism. The Platonic Socrates held that truth could not be taught by physics but was to be discovered in the world of innate ideas.[406] What developed was an 'antithesis between the world of the senses and the world of ideas.' Most notably, the proposals of Cartesian dualism and Immanuel Kant's noumenal/phenomenal divide developed the antithesis further in the course of history.[407] Modern idealism, with its metaphysics of mind, elevated the 'knowing subject, the thinking self' as the determinant of truth. Brunner illustrates this development, citing Johann Gottlieb Fichte as an exemplar of modern idealism's claim: 'Truth is not *fact*, but mental *act*, *Tathandlung*.' Ultimately, however, it is realism and not idealism that has 'carried the day.' This is due, Brunner writes, 'to the magnificent development of the natural sciences.' Positivism took hold and truth became only that which is 'actually present to the senses.'[408] What emerges in

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[405] Brunner, *Truth as Encounter*. p. 2.

[406] Ibid. p. 7.

[407] For a summary of the intellectual backdrop that Brunner narrates here see McGrath, 'Object and Subject in Theology: The Context to Brunner's Thought' in McGrath. *Emil Brunner,* pp. 155-161.

[408] Brunner, *Truth as Encounter*. p. 9.

this historical sketch is the growing tendency to identify knowledge as the subjective appropriation of that which is objectivity given and truth as the propositional coherence between subjective perception and objective truth. Herein, the propositional takes preference over the personal.

Developing within this intellectual history, theology has been influenced to identify the Word of God as that which is 'objectively given' and faith as 'the subjective appropriation of what is given.' Brunner viewed such an identification as a falsification of the nature of faith:

> Once one is convinced of the legitimacy of this conceptualization, I dare say one can and must go further, and in a similar fashion set other objectivities, such as the church as institution, the sacraments, or the offices in contradistinction to the faith of the individual, and likewise confuse the superindividual-collective and the individual-personal with the antithesis between objective and subjective… The biblical understanding of truth cannot be grasped through the object-subject antithesis: on the contrary, it is falsified through it.[409]

Placed within the object-subject antithesis, the credibility of faith becomes a question about the relation 'between the objective truth of faith (Credo) and the subjective acceptance of faith (creed).'[410] In this way, faith undergoes its own objectification and becomes synonymous with right belief. Brunner described the pervasion of object-subject thinking in Christian faith as a systemic sickness, as 'the corruption of the blood, which thus secretly spreads the corruption into all organs.'[411] Faith as right belief is not an isolated matter, but one which spreads to other objectification – e.g., Church as institution, and the Word of God as biblical text. Characteristic of his earlier theology, Brunner remains critical of any 'one-sided subjectivism.'[412] However, with *Truth as*

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[409] Ibid. p. 69.

[410] Ibid. p. 69.

[411] Ibid. p. 68.

[412] Ibid. pp. 78-79

Encounter, his focus has shifted, and his lectures place greater weight on the discussion with objectivism.

In any event, Brunner's project aims to move beyond the antithesis of objectivity and subjectivity rather than perpetuating their paradigmatic opposition. He proposes the concept of *truth as encounter*, with its divergent epistemic mode, as the means for moving beyond the dual tendencies of objectivism and subjectivism. Brunner argues that truth as encounter is the epistemic mode inherent to the Bible's understanding of revelation and, therefore, inherent to the biblical understanding of truth. In this way, he develops a juxtaposition between the biblical witness and the object-subject paradigm.

He begins with the contention that the Bible 'contains no doctrine of God as he is in himself none of man as he is in himself. It always speaks of God as the God who approaches man [*Gott-zum-Menschen-hin*] and of man as the man who comes from God [*Menschen-von-Gott-her*].' The self-disclosure of God, as well as the self-understanding of humanity, are both relational; they are personal and active rather than propositional and passive. God is not a passive object, examined and determined by the subjective perception of faith. Accordingly, the Bible does not present its contents as a timeless set of propositional statements to which one subscribes by intellectual ascent. In the Bible, the 'relation between God and man is not developed as doctrine but, rather, is set forth as happening in a story.'[413] Brunner argues that the idiom of doctrine is simply not the preferred idiom of Scripture. The Bible is not a theoretical explication of a set of determined positive claims. It is a diverse collection of poetry and prose that narrates God's creating, revealing, and redeeming work. This is not taken by Brunner as a mere literary characteristic but is understood to be emblematic of the very nature of revelation and faith, suggesting that the manner of biblical narration is the more accurate means of communicating the central truth about which it is concerned.

On the matter of Brunner's apparent hermeneutic, McGrath notes that, despite his constant references to 'the biblical notion of truth,' there is an 'absence of any

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[413] Ibid. p. 87.

serious engagement on his part with biblical texts or biblical scholarship.' Furthermore, 'the overall impression is that Brunner's articulation of this theme is imposed upon the biblical text, rather than based upon a detailed study of biblical passages or terms.'[414] This is one more instance of Brunner's reductive tendencies. He seems to reduce the complex canon of biblical texts to its unifying metanarrative. He turns to the 'story' of scripture and treats its 'narration,' but says little about the diversity of genera and traditions that form the canon and offers few details.[415]

Similarly, Edward Dowey argues that 'truth as an act of personal encounter of the believer with God in Christ is to be understood as Brunner's prime hermeneutic principle.' Dowey's assessment seems to confirm Brunner's epistemic imposition upon the biblical text:

> His conception of biblical authority excludes propositional truth, scientific statements about the natural world, and certain legendary and mythical materials found in the Bible (the virgin birth and the empty tomb qualify on all four accounts), not finally on historico-critical grounds, but because they are extraneous to Encounter.[416]

Brunner takes a primary interest in the Bible as narrating the relationship between God and humanity.[417] All other propositions appear to be assessed based on their coherence to this foundational norm. Despite this appearance, Dowey is quick to note that Brunner 'offers no hindrance to any kind of serious and critical study of biblical materials, and he uses such great research with great skill, and yet he does not expect a great deal of positive help from it.'[418] A better understanding of Brunner's biblical hermeneutic will be achieved by pausing briefly on the two instances mentioned by Dowey: the virgin birth

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[414] McGrath, *Emil Brunner,* p. 167.

[415] Brunner, *Truth as Encounter*, pp. 87-88.

[416] Dowey, 'Redeemer and Redeemed,' p. 191.

[417] McGrath, *Emil Brunner,* p. 167.

[418] Dowey, 'Redeemer and Redeemed,' p. 191.

and the empty tomb. With these two matters, we will see how Brunner's epistemology informs rather than excludes his engagement with critical scholarship.

Brunner questions the creedal importance of the virgin birth and the empty tomb. However, he does not treat these issues identically and the divergences in his approach are revealing. In his chapter on 'The Person of Jesus Christ' in *Dogmatics* V. II, Brunner writes that 'the Apostolic doctrine of Jesus expounds the Nature of Him who rose from the dead, but not of Him who was born of the Virgin Mary.'[419] Regarding the virgin birth, Brunner notes that 'In the preaching of the Apostles, in the Preaching of Paul and John, as well as the other writers of the New Testament, this idea does not play even a small part – it plays no part at all.' [420] He believes that accounts of the virgin birth were later additions to Matthew and Luke, attempting to explain the mystery of the incarnation.[421] For this reason, he concludes that 'there is no justification for making it a criterion of true faith in the divinity of Christ.' Furthermore, 'We cannot believe in the divinity of Jesus, as the Eternal son of God, on account of, but in spite of, the doctrine of the Virgin Birth, as it is recorded in the gospels of Matthew and Luke.'[422]

Before addressing the empty tomb, Brunner affirms proclamation of the resurrection which he believes to be an essential teaching of the church. However, this proclamation does not need to be that of a physical resurrection. Both the affirmation (resurrection as essential teaching) and the denial (physical resurrection as non-essential) of Brunner's position draw out his hermeneutic. Regarding the resurrection, Brunner writes: 'The witness to the resurrection of the Lord is the center, the decisive content of the preaching of the first Apostles and disciples from the first moment that they come out into the open.'[423] Unlike the virgin birth, Brunner believes that

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[419] Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption: Dogmatics Volume II* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1952). p. 329.

[420] Emil Brunner, *Dogmatics* V. II, p. 354.

[421] Brunner, *The Mediator*, pp. 323-324.; *Dogmatics V. II*, pp. 352-256.

[422] Brunner, *Dogmatics V. II*, p. 355.

[423] Ibid. p. 365.

proclamation of Christ as the risen Lord is essential to the preaching of the church. This is the case because of its prominence in the New Testament writings, especially the letters of Paul. He dates Paul's letter to the Corinthians to the year 56 and refers to it as 'the most ancient and most reliable testimony.' Brunner writes that Paul's 'mention of the fact that "He hath been raised on the third day… and that He appeared to Cephas; then to the Twelve; then to above five hundred brethren at once," takes us right back to the event itself.'[424] Brunner fails to show the details of his exegesis or his engagement with biblical scholarship. These matters remain 'concealed from his readers.'[425] Nevertheless, his exposition reveals his use of historical criticism to identify the earliest and most credible Apostolic witness, separating it from that which is judged to be 'later and less credible.'[426]

The presence of historical critical awareness does not impede the criticism that encounter is a hermeneutic imposed upon the text. As McGrath and Dowey suggest, Brunner's biased and selective assessment of the 'Apostolic witness' appears to be a means of licensing an epistemology that is presupposed. With continuing reference to the selective credibility of the Apostolic witness and on the basis of his epistemic interests, Brunner separates the empty tomb (physical resurrection) from the witness to the resurrection. Again, Brunner preferences Paul's account over that of the gospel writers. He notes that while Paul affirms encounters with the risen Lord, he takes no interest in the matter of an empty tomb. As with the virgin birth, Brunner suggests that the original testimony to the resurrection did not include references to an empty tomb but that these were later additions.[427] Once more, he gives little evidence or exegetical detail to argue his point. Brunner turns to Paul's teaching about a 'spiritual body' and concludes that it is not necessary to identify the resurrection body with material flesh.

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[424] Ibid. p. 367; citing 1 Cor. 15:17.

[425] Here, I allude to McGrath's statement: 'If his reflections on the concept of truth are grounded on biblical exegesis, this is carefully concealed from his readers.' – McGrath, *Emil Brunner,* p. 167.

[426] Brunner, *Dogmatics V. II*, p. 369.

[427] Ibid. pp. 367-368.

Instead, 'the resurrection of the body means the continuity of the individual personality on this side, and on that, of death.'[428]

This move, separating the empty tomb from the appearances of the risen Lord, allows Brunner to assert encounter as the foundation of faith. He treats encounter as the central theme of the Bible and sets it against any concrete 'World-truths' – i.e., he rejects that faith has its basis in accepting a propositional truth about the resurrection of the body. The Apostolic witness, as objective content, is not the final criterion of truth. This witness must also be judged and confirmed through encounter with the Word of God. 'The Apostle's account of their meetings with the risen Lord are not the basis of, but an element in, the testimony of revelation, which is the basis of our faith in Christ, and therefore of our faith in his resurrection.'[429] Therefore, Brunner holds that one 'believes in the risen Lord not because the resurrection is told as a narrative of something that happened, but because he knows Christ as the living present Lord.'[430] Here we see the manner in which encounter becomes the hermeneutic through which all theological claims, including the biblical witness, get assessed.[431]

Brunner provides scant textual and scholarly support for his assertions about the 'biblical understanding of truth' and leaves pressing exegetical questions unanswered. However, the fact that Brunner's conception of encounter forms the lens through which

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[428] Ibid. p. 372.

[429] Ibid. p. 370.

[430] Ibid. p. 371.

[431] Brunner's treatment of the virgin birth and the empty tomb bears a resemblance to Bultmann demythologizing project. This is particularly interesting given Brunner's criticisms of Bultmann in the introduction to *Truth as Encounter* as well as in the appendices of *Dogmatics* V. II. In short, Brunner's view is that Bultmann's demythologizing is an imposition of modern philosophy onto the text whereas his hermeneutic of encounter exposes the origin essence of the biblical revelation. Despite this critique, Brunner recognized favorable aspects of Bultmann's demythologizing and his nearness to it is felt in the above assessment. – Brunner, *Truth as Encounter,* pp. 46-50.; Brunner, *Dogmatics* V. II, pp. 263-270.; see also Cynthia Bennett Brown's work on Brunner's assessment of Bultmann. – Brown, *Believing Thinking, Bounded Theology,* pp. 64-67.

scripture and the whole of the Christian tradition are read does not mean that the concept itself is entirely extra-biblical. Whatever imposition may take place here, Brunner's claims are formed out of continual reflection upon the biblical narrative even if this reflection is judged to be inadequate in places. What Brunner shows clearly is that encounter has become the guiding principle within his hermeneutic circle. Regarding the potentially presupposed philosophical foundations of encounter, the next chapter will address the biblical grounding of Buber and Ebner's dialogical thought. These thinkers attempted to impose biblical logic onto modern philosophical categories. Dialogical thought is, in its way, an accommodation of philosophy to theology. As far as it goes with Ebner and Buber, conventional philosophical categories – especially the subject-object paradigm – yield to theological foundations.[432]

In any event, Brunner presents three characteristics that emerge from the Bible's narration of revelation and faith. First, 'man can know God only as God gives himself to be known.' The relationship between God and humanity is two-sided but unequal. The relation is entirely dependent upon God's acting and revealing. Second, this revelation is 'an event, an act.' Therefore, revelation is best represented by the active, verbal language of narration. In as much as revelation is known, it is experienced as the event of God's self-disclosure. Third, the event of revelation does not merely describe a timeless static relationship between God and humanity.[433] Revelation is the very foundation of this relationship, the act of its establishment. In Brunner's description, the Bible performs this same actualism insofar as, through narrating revelation, it plays its own part in the history of revelation. Following these biblical characteristics, Brunner contends that in its truest sense revelation means that God is *known* and not simply known *about*. Revelation is not the content about God nor is it merely the disclosure of such content. 'Knowing and happening are in this instance a single process.'[434] Herein, truth is an event, truth is an encounter.

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[432] See the introductory section to 'Chapter 5: Prospects of the Dialogical Theology.'

[433] Brunner, *Truth as Encounter,* Ibid. pp. 90-91.

[434] Ibid. p. 101.

Brunner proposed that the concept of *encounter* could take theology beyond the object-subject antithesis. The second edition of *Truth as Encounter* (1964) adds an introduction that was not part of the originally published lectures.[435] In the conclusion to this introductory chapter, Brunner includes a provocative section titled 'Theology Beyond Barth and Bultmann.'[436] Herein, he paints Barth and Bultmann's theology as stuck within the object-subject antithesis. Brunner accuses Brath of obsession with the 'object of faith.' For Barth, faith is 'the subjective realization of an objective *res*'[437] and, ultimately, Barth faults towards objectivism by subordinating the truth of faith to 'the knowledge of God given by faith.'[438] Conversely, he accuses Bultmann of making faith in Christ identical with a new self-understanding and, therefore something merely subjective.[439] Dialogue, according to Buber, takes place neither outside of (objectively) nor within (subjectively) the individual. Dialogue takes place *between*

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[435] The English edition of *Wahrheit als Begegnung* was first published in 1943 as *The Divine-Human Encounter*. The second edition added an introduction intended to address more clearly the relation between Brunner's understanding of 'encounter' and the general 'philosophical-scientific understanding' of truth. This second edition was printed in English under the title *Truth as Encounter* in 1964 which better captured the meaning of the original German.

[436] Brunner, 'Theology Beyond Barth and Bultmann' in *Truth as Encounter,* pp. 41-50.

[437] Here, Brunner quotes Barth's Church Dogmatics IV.1: 'Faith stands or falls with its object. It is subjective realization. That is, as a human activity it consists in subjunctivization of on objective *res* which in its existence and essence and dignity and significance and scope takes precedence of the subjunctivization and therefore of the human subject active in it, being independent and superior to this subject and what he does or does not do.' - Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics IV.1* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956). p. 742.

[438] Brunner, *Truth as Encounter*. pp. 44-45.

[439] Brunner mentions, in particular, Bultmann's *Theology of the New Testament* wherein one finds such statement as: 'Ultimately "faith" and "knowledge" are identical as a new understanding of one's self, if Paul can give as the purpose of his apostleship both "to bring about the obedience of faith" (Rom. 1:15) and "to give the light of knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ (11 Cor. 4:6; *cf*. 2:14)".' – Rudolf Bultmann, 'The Structure of Faith', in *Theology of The New Testament Volume 1* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2007), p. 318.

(*Zwischenmenschliche*) two beings amid their encounter.[440] Similarly, in Brunner's understanding of revelation as event, truth occurs *between* the Word of God and the person of faith, as *encounter*. It is therefore that such a conception, based on dialogical principles, moves one beyond the objectivist and subjectivist determinations of truth, exemplified in the antithesis between Barth and Bultmann. This is precisely what Brunner means to do in his doctrine of encounter. The above section has examined *Truth as Encounter* to show Brunner's dialogically inspired epistemology forms the 'lodestar' of his theological thinking.[441]

III. Encounter: Two Difficulties

With *Truth as Encounter,* Brunner aims for a biblically grounded and intellectually rigorous articulation of his dialogical personalism. There is much to be gained from Brunner's effort. Chiefly, one finds an invitation to reconsider epistemic foundations that often go presupposed and unexamined; this much remains even apart from agreement with Brunner's ultimate conclusions. Nevertheless, there are at least two significant obstacles that his project faces. The first of these regards the fundamental irony of expositing dialogical thought. The irony stands in the attempt to give a descriptive account of the non-propositional – i.e., of encounter. All theology must wrestle with expressing in concepts, that which claims to belie conceptual expression. However, dialogical thought is particularly focused on the non-descriptive epistemic event and, thereby, its own exposition fails to perform the very thing that it is so eager to emphasize. A reflective account of the immediate and concrete is always, by nature, in danger of obscuring its own message. The dialogical writings of Ferdinand Ebner and Martin Buber, which Brunner is so reliant on, often meander between seeming clumsy and unclear to appearing obvious and elementary. The casual reader may find their

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[440] For a discussion of Buber's concept of *das Zwischenmenschliche* see Kenneth Paul Kramer, *Martin Buber's I and Thou: Practicing Living Dialogue* (New York: Paulist Press, 2003). pp. 78-80.

[441] Emil Brunner, 'A Spiritual Autobiography', p. 243.

obscurity unapproachable and their spiritual romanticism overly sentimental. Consider Walter Kaufmann's, comments on Buber's *I and Thou*:

> The style of *Ich und Du* is anything but sparse and unpretentious, lean or economical. It represents a late flowering of romanticism and tends to blur all contours in the twilight of suggestive but extremely unclear language… [Nevertheless,] Sloth meets with awe in the refusal to unravel mysteries.[442]

Also, from Malcolm Diamond:

> Buber's *I and Thou* has been called a "philosophical-religious poem." The phrase is awkward, but with it, Ronald Gregor Smith, who translated the book into English, captured the flavor of the work. It is a unique blend of the imperative religious utterance and the reflective character of philosophical discourse. While some dismiss it as specious emotionalism, a major source of Buber's powerful impact upon contemporary religious discussion is his refusal to be apologetic about the existential, non-objective character of his thought.[443]

Ferdinand Ebner relates similar issues in the foreward to his *Das Wort Und Die Geistigen Realitäten*. He supplies the response of the first publisher to reject his work. The publisher diagnosed a 'pathological bent' in that Ebner's work was 'winding its way through 300 pages in the endless repetition of a single thought and identical phrases, giving rise thereby to the feeling of always revolving around the same point.' And yet, Ebner also laments a certain lack of clarity and accessibility that he believed to be unavoidable: 'Let it stand thus, with its appearance of remoteness and contradiction to the meaning of the fundamental thought.'[444] He seemed to recognize the irony of

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[442] Walter Kaufmann, "I and You: A Prologue," in Buber, *I and Thou*. p. 24.

[443] Malcolm L. Diamond, 'Dialogue and Theology', in *The Philosophy of Martin Buber*, ed. by Paul A. Schillp (London: Cambridge University Press, 1967), pp. 235–47. p. 235.

[444] Ferdinand Ebner, "Foreward" in Green, *The Word and Spiritual Realities: A Translation,* pp. 5-8.

expressing basic and concrete realities of life in a manner that was deeply esoteric. Brunner's *Truth as Encounter* bears much of this same irony and its accompanying baggage. At times his key points seem too obvious to be interesting; at others, obscurity seems to cloud clarity. In its details, the project is intellectually demanding, and yet, its central point may seem too sentimental to be taken seriously.

I do not intend to reconcile this first difficulty. I only want to suggest that a certain irony and spiritual sentimentality are characteristic of those who seek to have dialogical principles shape their exposition. The close reader of such texts is not rewarded with the assurances of theoretical certainty but, rather, they are invited to open themselves to fresh possibilities. Buber described his standpoint as the 'narrow ridge.' He reports: 'I wanted by this to express that I did not rest on the broad upland of a system that includes a series of sure statement about the absolute, but on a narrow rocky ridge between the gulfs where there is no sureness of expressible knowledge but the certainty of meeting what remains, undisclosed.'[445] Inviting one into the encounter with the undisclosed takes precedence over the sureness of propositional statements and this is precisely the point of Brunner's *Truth as Encounter*.

The second difficulty addressed here regards the relationship between the epistemic nature of *encounter* and that of *object-subject* thinking or, in Buber's terms, the relationship between the I-Thou and I-It categories. Brunner makes the bold claim that 'the biblical understanding of truth cannot be grasped through the object-subject antithesis: on the contrary, it is falsified through it.'[446] There is no novelty in affirming that faith is, at least in part, suprarational. Moreover, that faith is a deeply personal lived experience, the nature of which transcends conceptual expressions. However, Brunner is taking this claim a step further, insisting that the nature of faith, as personal encounter, is undermined by an emphasis on either correctly accessing (subjectivity) or correctly determining (objectivity) theological propositions. A question is raised here about the necessity and credibility of dogmatics. Theology claims that there is one God,

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[445] Buber, *Between Man and Man*. p. 184.

[446] Brunner, Truth as Encounter. p. 69

that God is good, that God is triune, that humans are sinful and yet redeemed by the grace of God incarnate in Jesus Christ, etc. As an intellectual and communicative discipline, such claims are constitutive of Christian theology. Does the Christian faith not lose all attributable identity apart from some set of propositional claims, however minimal?

Brunner affirms the necessity of dogmatics on three accounts. First, dogmatics is necessary and has arisen naturally in the church's history due to its 'struggles against false doctrine.'[447] Second, dogmatics is necessary for catechetical instruction. The church always believes something even if this content is not the essence of faith. A responsibility exists for instructing believers about the content of the revelation which the church has received.[448] Third, the record of God's revelation in the person of Jesus is given in the Bible and dogmatics is a natural extension of biblical exegesis.[449]

Nevertheless, Brunner's radical juxtaposition between encounter (dialogically presented as personal correspondence) and the object-subject antithesis appears to undermine his appraisal of the positive content of faith, expressed as doctrine. This sense is exemplified in the following excerpt:

> There is no longer a place here for the objective-subjective antithesis. The application of this pair of concepts in this connection is entirely meaningless. The self-revelation of God is no object, but wholly the doing and self-giving of a subject – or, better expressed a Person. A Person who is revealing himself, a person who demands and offers Lordship and fellowship with himself, is the most radical antithesis to everything that could be called object or objective. Likewise, the personal act of trust is something quite other than subjectivity… the concern of the Bible is personal correspondence as it is realized in the correlation Between the Word of God and faith.[450]

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[447] Brunner, 'The Necessity of Dogmatics,' *Dogmatics* V. I, p. 11.

[448] Ibid. p. 12.

[449] Ibid. pp. 12-13.

[450] Ibid. *Truth as Encounter,* p. 109

Brunner is aware of the radical nature of his claims.[451] Nevertheless, and despite appearances, it is not his intention to jettison the positive content of faith. Not only does he write a three-volume dogmatics, albeit one of modest length and scope, but in the very same passage quoted above he states: 'This is not to say that there do not also exist between both this Biblical and this general rational conception of truth positive relationship outside of these differences.'[452] The difficulty for Brunner comes in striking the balance. How is he able to reestablish any positive relation between truth as *encounter* and the object-subject understanding once he has asserted such a strong opposition between them?

Brunner addresses the problem by presenting doctrine, in its relationship to faith, as being instrumental and sacramental in nature. Doctrine is instrumental in the sense that it provides an abstract conceptual framework within which the personal reality of faith resides. Doctrine is a token, never confused with but, nonetheless, indissolubly linked to 'actual personal fellowship with God.'[453] While doctrine is not the content of faith, neither does faith come to us apart from doctrine. This relation, furthermore, is sacramental according to Brunner.

Operating with a consubstantial understanding, the Lord's Supper provides the analogy for him. In the words of institution God wills to be present and yet the spoken word is not identical with God's actual presence. Likewise, in as much as God wills to be present 'in, with, and under' the bread and wine, it would be idolatry to confuse these with God's own being. Such is the case, as Brunner understands it, with doctrine and faith. Doctrine is the token of faith and not its reality. Nevertheless, it is 'in, with, and under' doctrine that the otherwise divergent reality of faith emerges and resides. 'This conjunction of token and reality, of signification and what is signified, is already given in the act of divine revelation,' Brunner writes. This claim rests on the fact of God's self-

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[451] As in his statement: 'Questioning these tradition-hallowed forms of thought will doubtless be neither easy nor without danger.' – Ibid. p. 69.

[452] Ibid. p. 109

[453] Ibid. p. 133

imparting in the person of Jesus. Therein, the Word of God is not any spoken content but, rather, all prior content of God's Word finds its zenith and consummation in the gift of God *in persona*. Precisely because this conjunction is given in the act of revelation 'we call the connection [between token and reality] not only instrumental but sacramental.'[454]

The content of faith is expressed variously by Brunner as encounter, personal fellowship, and personal correspondence. In each case, the proper content of faith is decidedly personal rather than propositional. Nevertheless, the Word of God comes to us in and through the propositional content of the history of revelation that is narrated by Scripture; in and through those doctrines and confessions that arises from reflection on this history and its content. While Brunner continues to assert the fundamental distinction between truth as *encounter* and the object-subject understanding, he insists on maintaining a positive relationship such as that between a token and its reality. Once again, Martin Buber is a helpful backdrop to Brunner's understanding. Commenting on Buber's conception of revelation, Maurice Friedman writes:

> Revelation, to Buber, is man's meeting with God's presence rather than information about his essence. As a result, Buber cannot believe that "finished statements about God were handed down from heaven to earth." Rather, human substance is melted by divine fire in such a way that the word that results, while human in meaning and form still "witnesses to Him who stimulated it and to His will." The biblical text reveals man's meeting with the divine, however, only when the reader opens himself to the text and enters into real dialogue with it.[455]

Freidman, reflecting on Buber, articulates the very same conviction that is expressed by Brunner. The human witness about God – e.g. scripture, doctrine, confessions,

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[454] Ibid. pp. 132-134.

[455] Maurice S. Friedman, *Martin Buber and the Eternal Thou* (New York: Human Sciences Press, Inc, 1986). p. 30.

proclamation – insofar as God freely wills it, becomes an occasion for an *encounter* with God's own presence. These human words are not the event of revelation itself. They are but the narration of the event and their contents are the results of subsequent reflection upon it. It is only by divine accommodation that these objectivities become a vehicle for the actuality of God's Word.

It is important to note that for Buber both the I-It and the I-Thou relations are necessary. The posture between 'I' and 'It' is not the substance of evil nor is the attitude between 'I' and 'Thou' an unqualified good. Buber seeks to acknowledge a conflict that arises between these categories without rendering them entirely incompatible. Buber argues that life is truly lived when one experiences, in their relation to the world outside themselves, a perpetual oscillation between the postures of I-Thou and I-It.[456] A conflict emerges between these in the course of Western history where the I-It dialogue has been increasingly prioritized and the I-Thou dialogue has been largely forgotten and overlooked.[457] Buber believed that the increasing and often singular reliance on object-subject paradigms corresponded to an increasing objectification of people, of the natural world, and of God. As an antidote, Buber proposed that we seek the oscillation between I-It and I-Thou dialogue. Our object-subject paradigms are entirely necessary, but they have the capacity to pull us away from genuine relationships. The I-It dialogue, argues Buber, should be understood as emerging out of and leading us ever back to our prior existence in mutual and dependent relationships with the world outside of ourselves.

In this instance, Buber gives us a clue as to how Brunner should be understood. Brunner's notion of encounter emerges from the insights he finds in Ebner and Buber. For Brunner, the relation of doctrine and faith exemplifies the relation between encounter and the object-subject antithesis. These categories are intended to capture Buber's dialogical principles. Brunner critiques theology's reliance on the object-subject understanding because of its privileged status whereby other ways of knowing become

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[456] See Friedman's assessment of 'The World of It' and 'The Eternal Thou' in Maurice S. Friedman, *Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue Fourth Edition* (London: Routledge, 2002). pp. 71-88.

[457] Buber, I and Thou, pp. 87-88.

degraded and get omitted. Herein, an emphasis on the finality and assurance of doctrinal claims and theological sources (esp. scripture and tradition) bares the propensity for degrading and omitting the actuality of faith as lived and transformative experience. The solution for Brunner does not come from rejecting these objectivates in favor of some phenomenological subjectivism. His early dialectical thought is entirely set against such a project. Nor does it come from the total elimination of the positive content of faith, scripture, and tradition – content that is attributable to the object-subject understanding. I would suggest that the best way to understand Brunner is to follow Buber's principle of oscillation, however much Brunner's critical rhetoric may obscure this. With the relationship between faith and doctrine, for instance, one is not opposed to the other in essence. His attempt to move beyond the object-subject antithesis should not be understood as an effort to cancel it out. Rather, moving beyond the object-subject understanding is an attempt to keep theology from being strictly limited by this epistemic mode. Brunner means to liberate theology from the totalizing tendency of the object-subject paradigm by insisting upon the prior and preeminent epistemic foundation of encounter.

IV. Encounter: Two Illustrations

Having now shown the dialogical foundation of Brunner's doctrine of encounter, two examples will illustrate the operation of this epistemology within his thought. First, we will turn to Brunner's anthropology – developed in *Man in Revolt* – and second, to the apologetic function of his *Revelation and Reason*. These two examples are chosen because Brunner relates these works specifically to the insights of *Truth as Encounter*. Prior to this formal epistemology, Ebner and Buber already lead him to see that 'the rationalistic thought scheme of object and subject' was best 'overcome by understanding the human person as basically related to the divine Thou and by the distinction between the I-Thou world and the I-It world.' Brunner developed his

anthropology from these dialogical principles.[458] *Revelation and Reason* is similarly related, by Brunner, to the content of *Truth as Encounter.* He states that these two works perform the respective tasks of apologetics and dogmatics. *Revelation and Reason* is the apologetic to *Truth as Encounter's* dogmatic content. With *Revelation and Reason,* Brunner meant to convey his 'fundamental distinction' – 'personal truth over against scientific, impersonal truth' – 'to the man of our age.'[459]

First, to Brunner's anthropology.[460] *Man in Revolt* begins with a brief appraisal of non-Christian anthropologies. Brunner considers the materialism of various sciences, the typically idealistic views of philosophy, the romantic notions of early modernism, and the general religious understanding of humanity.[461] He argues that a Christian anthropology should take these views and their data into account. There are relevant and important insights gained from each of these fields. Nevertheless, a Christian anthropology must ultimately distinguish itself from all others. Specifically, Brunner juxtaposes the unique personalism of Christianity to, in his view, the otherwise speculative theories of anthropology. For the Christian faith, truth does 'not spring from a process of analysis or meditation or reflection upon existence.' Instead, truth is disclosed in a historical event, in the Divine self-disclosure of the incarnation.[462] This event, this revelation of the Word of God is therefore the source of Christian anthropology.

David Cairns, writing on 'Brunner's conception of Man as Responsive, Responsible Being,' reminds that 'when Brunner talks about the Word of God being the source of our knowledge… the kind of knowledge which he refers to is not theoretic, but

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[458] Brunner, 'Intellectual Autobiography,' p. 11.

[459] Ibid. p. 16.

[460] In the following section, the inclusive term 'humanity' is the preferred over the collective use of 'man.' In the instances that 'man' is used, I am either quoting directly from *Man in Revolt* or following the, admittedly, outdated idiom of Olive Wyon's English translation.

[461] Brunner, 'The Variety of the Views of Man,' in *Man in Revolt*, esp. pp. 40-48.

[462] Ibid. p. 49.

existential.' Brunner has in mind the event of encounter wherein humanity is confronted by God in the person of Jesus. This knowledge 'does not arise without the words of scripture, which constitute the biblical record.' Nevertheless, Cairns writes, 'it is a personal knowledge of faith, created in us by the Holy Spirit bearing witness to God in Christ.'[463] Furthermore, to say that the Word of God is the source of Christian anthropology is to say that no one can rightly understand their humanity until they understand themselves in their relation to God. 'The "I" can only be understood in the light of the "Thou".'[464]

For Brunner, the Word of God is not only an epistemic determination but also an ontological determination. Not only our ways of knowing, but the entirety of human existence is contingent upon the Word of God as that which creates and sustains. This is true for all creation insofar as it is determined by the action and being of its Creator. In this context, Brunner assigns human uniqueness to the notion of responsibility [*verantwortlich*]. 'Man is the being who is responsible. Human responsibility has no other ground than that of the Word of God, that is, that man, in contrast to all other creatures, is not only borne by this Word of God, but is borne by it in such a way that he is in some way or other aware of it.'[465] By responsibility Brunner means that humanity is made in and for the love of God and is accountable to this love. To this he applies a law-gospel dialectic. For those who have received the gospel, the responsible nature of man is understood as love. For all others, their sense of responsibility remains but only as law and guilt. In this way, the Word of God determines humanity in its entirety, in both knowledge and being.

Brunner's translator, Olive Wyon, renders *verantwortlich* as 'responsible.' However, *accountable* and *answerable* are also useful dimensions of the term's

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[463] David Cairns, 'Brunner's Conception of Man as Responsive, Responsible Being', in *The Theology of Emil Brunner*, p. 80.; Cairns' essay gives a concise and astute summary of Brunner's anthropology. In broad outline, I have followed Cairns' summary in this section.

[464] Brunner, *Man in Revolt,* p. 23.

[465] Ibid. p. 73.

semantic range. Brunner's claim is that humanity is uniquely accountable/answerable to God. This accountability, moreover, is inalterable and presupposes the capacity for response. Herein, responsibility is the basic and unchangeable state of human existence. In Volume II of his *Dogmatics,* Brunner expounds on his understanding of man as responsible being:

> The fact that man must respond, that he is responsible, is fixed; no amount of human freedom, nor the sinful misuse of freedom, can alter this fact. Man is, and remains, responsible, whatever his personal attitude to his Creator may be. He may deny his responsibility, and he may misuse his freedom but he cannot get rid of his responsibility. Responsibility is part of the unchangeable structure of man's being… Whatever kind of response man may make to the call of the Creator – in any case he does respond, even if his reply is: "I do not know any Creator, and I will not obey any God." Even this answer is an answer, and it comes under the inherent law of responsibility.[466]

Brunner's conception of humanity as, essentially, responsible being is intended to capture humanity as inescapably related to and determined by their Creator God.

In Brunner's 1934 published debate with Karl Barth he sought to assert human identity as a fundamental relatedness to God by distinguishing between the *imago Dei* as both formal and material image. The *formal* image is the unchangeable, unalterable relatedness of all humanity to God. This formal image is the originally gifted *imago* of Genesis. Conversely, the *material* image is the actual state of humanity living under the conditions of sin. The material image stands for the fact that humanity has not given the answer God intends. [467] Cairns summarizes that 'the formal image is to be equated with man's universal humanity, while the material image is to be equated with the true life of man by faith.'[468]

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[466] Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption: Dogmatics Volume II* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1952). pp. 56-57.

[467] Brunner, 'Nature and Grace,' pp. 24-24.

[468] Cairns, 'Brunner's Conception of Man as Responsive, Responsible Being,' in Kegley, p 83.

In *Man in Revolt*, Brunner discards the terms formal and material due to potential misunderstandings.[469] Nevertheless, he aims to capture the same dialectical claim about humanity as both inescapably related to God and, through sin, perpetually removed from God. He captures the dynamics of the human predicament in *Man in Revolt* by developing a threefold understanding of theological anthropology. A Christian anthropology must speak of humanity's origin, humanity's contradiction, and the actual state of humanity in conflict between origin and contradiction.[470] As Brunner develops his anthropology, he seeks to maintain the full dynamism of the human situation:

> We ought to say rather that the original state of life, the *justitia originalis* has been completely lost – owning to sin – and that in point of fact man is not living in accordance with the love of God; man is not loving God who "first loved" him; yet the theological structure of human existence, as it has been created by the Creator, is not annihilated by the hostility of man to the will of the Creator, although it is perverted in its operation. Even as a sinner man can only be understood in the light of the original Image of God, namely, as one who is living in opposition to it. So far as clear-cut ideas are possible in this realm, what we can say is this: man's relation with God, which determines his whole being, has not been destroyed by sin, but it has been perverted. Man does not cease to be the being who is responsible to God, but his responsibility has been altered from a state of being-in-love to a state of being-under-the-law, a life under the wrath of God.[471]

Brunner insists that humanity can never be understood in isolation. Christian anthropology can never treat humanity as it is in itself, but only ever humanity as it is bounded by its relation to God.[472] As with his formal/material distinction, Brunner's development of the threefold image of God is built upon this foundation. Sin alters the state of humanity's relatedness but not the fact of it.

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[469] McGrath, *Emil Brunner,* pp. 146-147.

[470] Brunner, *Man in Revolt*, p. 83.

[471] Ibid. p. 105.

[472] Brunner, *Truth as Encounter,* p. 87.

Expectedly, Brunner expresses this claim in dialogical terms. He asserts that the 'Thou' is always the boundary of the human 'I.' In the first instance this is decided by the fact that humanity is collectively bounded and determined by its accountability to God. However, it is also the case that 'the material body is given to man, with his actual responsible self-determination, in order that it may be quite plain that he is a "creature," and that he may be aware of his "creaturely" character.'[473] Therefore, the dialogical state of humanity extends to its boundedness within creation. No human 'I' is confronted only by the 'Thou' of God but always, at the same time, is determined by its place within the orders of the world. Thus, Brunner writes: 'As the Creator God gives to man the humanity of his life in community, in love, so also he assigns to him his limitations, in his connection with others. From the outset the human "I" is limited by a concrete "Thou," and only so does it become a concretely responsible self.'[474]

With this first illustration, I mean to show the application of dialogical principles within Brunner's anthropology. That is, to illustrate Brunner's claim that through Ebner and Buber – 'and by the distinction between the I-Thou world and the I-It world' – he 'came to see what was at the heart of the biblical concept of man.'[475] For a second illustration, I turn to *Revelation and Reason* which Brunner deems to be 'a new kind of so-called apologetics.' This work builds on the claims of *Truth as Encounter* in order to further clarify the distinction between 'personal truth' and 'scientific, impersonal truth.'[476] In this context I will show how Brunner orients the realms of revelation and reason based on their relative proximity to the personalist center of the Christian life.

Brunner writes that the first aim of *Revelation and Reason* is 'to help free the genuinely Biblical understanding of revelation from additions and accretions hallowed by

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[473] Brunner, *Man in Revolt,* pp. 107-108.

[474] Ibid. p. 107.

[475] Brunner, 'Intellectual Autobiography,' p. 11.

[476] Ibid. p. 16.

ancient traditions.'[477] This is a clear articulation of Brunner's *eristic* theology whereby Christian thought enters into debate with the axioms of reason.[478] He then adds a second goal, stating that 'this book is an attempt to remove misunderstandings which – for so many of our contemporaries – block the way to the Christian faith, by trying to give an answer to their questions.'[479] Brunner wants to maintain the foolishness of the Christian message (*á la* 1 Corinthians 1:18) while also asserting that 'the Christian faith is not, and does not intend to be, saddled with errors and weaknesses that exist only in the mind of the ignorant outsider.'[480]

Brunner reaffirms a fundamental distinction between revelation and reason that was first articulated in *Die Mystic* (1924) and remained a hallmark of his thinking throughout his career. Reason is the realm of knowledge which is acquired by humanity. Reason is an operation of the knowing subject reaching out to acquire understanding of its object/s. Revelation is unique precisely because it reverses this direction of epistemic travel. That is, revelation must be given, imparted. Revelation is the bestowal of that which humanity lacks the capacity to seek and find apart from divine intervention. Regarding the relationship between God and humanity, McGrath summarizes Brunner's view: 'There are only two ways of conceiving the relationship… This relationship either begins with humanity, and reaches out to God… or it begins with God, who reaches out to humanity.'[481] In *Revelation and Reason*, Brunner asserts once more that rational knowledge is 'truth that I acquire for myself.'[482] Conversely, revelation is the event of self-communication in which God 'imparts Himself.'[483]

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[477] Emil Brunner, *Revelation and Reason: The Christian Doctrine of Faith and Knowledge* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1946). P. ix.

[478] Brunner, *Die andere Aufgabe der Theologie*, esp. p. 256

[479] Brunner, *Revelation and Reason,* pp. ix.

[480] Ibid. p. x.

[481] McGrath, *Emil Brunner,* p. 26.

[482] Brunner, *Revelation and Reason*, p. 365.

[483] Ibid. pp. 367-369.

However, with *Revelation and Reason,* Brunner's dialogical outlook is more apparent. He expresses the entire epistemic framework, encompassing revelation and reason, in dialogical terms. He argues that 'all rational knowledge is impersonal.' Furthermore, 'the fundamental category of this knowledge of truth is called "It".' According to Brunner – in the realm of the sciences, the humanities, and even in interpersonal relations – reason is an operation of the thinking subject directed towards an object. Thus, 'the "other," who confronts me as person, is part of my world, of the world in which "I" as the subject am the center. He, even as person, is the object of *my* knowing.'[484] Conversely, revelation 'is not an impersonal, objective "It" truth, but a "Thou" truth. In this Event of revelation, in the Person of Christ, the divine Thou addresses me, in love.'[485] Herein, Brunner's dialectical commitment to an infinite qualitative distinction is refracted and rearticulated dialogically.

Another continuing pattern that appears in *Revelation and Reason* is Brunner's insistence that the Christian faith is always the faith of embodied persons whose existence remains determined by their place within the created orders. In as much as revelation appears to stand in opposition to reason (the personal to the impersonal), the relation is not mutually exclusive. 'The impersonal is not an untruth, for God also created the impersonal. There is a truth of "things," because things exist; there is an objective truth because there are objects.'[486] Instead, Brunner states that the relation is like that 'between planes of existence: the higher includes the lower, but not vice versa.' In this way, 'the personal truth of revelation, faith, and love includes within itself the impersonal truth connected with "things," and the impersonal truth connected with abstractions, but not vice versa.'[487] Brunner follows Buber's dialogical thinking in that the I-Thou realm, as a prior way of knowing, naturally accommodates the I-It. However, when I-It thinking is privileged, mutuality and reciprocity are lost to the realm of

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[484] Ibid. p. 365.

[485] Ibid. p. 370.

[486] Ibid. p. 372.

[487] Ibid. p. 373; See also McGrath, *Emil Brunner,* pp. 193-194.

abstraction and proposition. To give a dialogical example: You will never *know* someone without, at the same time, knowing things *about* them. However, it is entirely possible and common to know *about* people whom you do not *know* in the sense of having a personal relationship of reciprocity and mutuality. Such is Brunner's dialogical arrangement of revelation and reason.

Revelation's accommodation of reason, however, is not a matter of simple harmonization. Revelation is always a correction and completion of reason which remains fallible and finite. For Brunner, this is precisely the matter that reason – from its standpoint – revolts against, the denial of its self-sufficiency. Nevertheless, the effects of sin upon reason are not absolute and unilateral. There are certain operations of reason which, according to Brunner, remain largely unaffected by sin and other realms of knowledge in which truth is ultimately concealed apart from the light of revelation. Given the apparent continuity and discontinuity between revelation and reason, Brunner determines that a line of demarcation cannot distinguish between the competency of reason and that of faith. Instead, he offers the 'law of the closeness of relation' as the means for determining the degree to which 'the purely rational knowledge and that of faith are intermingled' relative to a given subject matter.[488]

Brunner presents the 'law of the closeness of relation' in the following proposition:[489]

> The nearer anything lies to the center of existence where we are concerned with the whole, that is, with man's relation to God and the being of the person, the greater is the disturbance of rational knowledge by sin; the farther away anything lies from the center,

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[488] Brunner, *Revelation and Reason*, pp. 383-384; See also Cairns' comments on Brunner's "Law of Contiguity" in Cairns, 'Brunner's Conception of Man as Responsive, Responsible Being,' pp. 67-77.

[489] Brunner notes that this same idea was utilized in *The Divine Imperative* to deal with the relation between the visible and invisible Church. He describes it as his 'guiding principle for all problems that concern the relation between the Christian and the World. – Brunner, *The Divine Imperative,* pp. 23-38.

> the less is the disturbance felt, and the less difference is there between knowing as a believer or as an unbeliever.[490]

He then elaborates:

> The disturbance reaches its maximum in theology and its minimum in the exact sciences, and zero in the sphere of the formal. Hence it is meaningless to speak of "Christian mathematics;" on the other hand, it is significant and necessary to distinguish the Christian conceptions of freedom, the good, community, and still more the Christian idea of God, from all other conceptions. In any case, the word "Christian" suggests the way in which rational knowledge is corrected by the knowledge of faith, but its significance varies with each particular instance.[491]

Here we hit upon the crux of the matter as it regards this second illustration. With the 'law of closeness of relations' Brunner orients the competency of revelation and reason based on their relative proximity to the personalist center of the Christian life. Reason has less competency the closer any matter lies to 'man's relation to God and the being of the person.' – i.e., 'in all questions that concern human beings, as persons, as responsible beings.'[492]Once more, *encounter* is seen operating as Brunner's hermeneutic. Human existence, determined by its relation to God, becomes the lens through which the continuity and discontinuity of revelation and reason is to be viewed and measured.

The law of the closeness of relation does not provide any criteria for judging the relative coherence of revelation and reason other than the general continuum spanning from theology to mathematics. Brunner also describes this as a range spanning from concern 'with the world as God's creation' to concern 'with the world as world.'[493]

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[490] Brunner, *Revelation and Reason,* p. 383.

[491] Ibid. p. 383.

[492] Ibid. p. 384.

[493] Ibid. p. 384.

Brunner's dialogical orientation of revelation and reason liberates theology from an oppositional relation to the physical sciences by giving faith and reason space to exercise their respective competencies. He appears to follow the Reformers, summation: 'in secular matters – both in science and in practice – the reason is competent; in spiritual matters, faith.' However, Brunner states that this dualism is only a starting point. In matters of ethics, in particular, the 'natural' and the 'spiritual' are not so easily separated.[494] Brunner's proposition on 'the closeness of relation' opposes an absolute line of demarcation in order to accommodate the complexities of ethical questions. Brunner advances this apologetic a few years later in *Justice and the Social Order* (1945). Herein, he spends the time to illustrate how the Christian faith should engage with secular reasoning on matters of ethical concern – specifically, on the understanding and implementation of social justice. For now, the apologetic function of Brunner's *Revelation and Reason*, along with the dialogical anthropology of *Man in Revolt*, will stand to show the continuing application of dialogical principles in Brunner's thought.

Conclusion

This chapter looked at Brunner's understanding of truth as encounter, which he describes as the "lodestar" of his theological reasoning. It was demonstrated that Brunner employs the notion of encounter to unite epistemic and personalist interests by drawing on dialogical philosophy, particularly that of Ebner and Buber. This chapter established Brunner's dialogical credentials by taking into account his 1937 lectures on theological epistemology, *Truth as Encounter*. In this formal epistemology, encounter becomes the hermeneutic through which Brunner appraises the life of faith and its theological content. Brunner's dialogical character was also investigated based on two

[494] Brunner, *Man in Revolt*, p. 61; See also Cairns, 'Brunner's Conception of Man as Responsive, Responsible Being,' pp. 76-77.

of the inherent difficulties of dialogical thinking: an ironic relation between its non-descriptive emphases and descriptive exposition; and the precarious balancing act of critiquing I-It thinking without undermining its necessity. Finally, the use of encounter in Brunner's theology was demonstrated by looking at his anthropology (Man in Revolt) and the role of Revelation and Reason in apologetics. This chapter serves to show that, while retaining its distinctive dialectical nature, Emil Brunner's theology is fundamentally influenced by dialogical philosophy. Because of this, it is right to represent his thought not only as dialectical theology, but also as dialogical theology. Building on the dialogical logic present in Brunner's concept of encounter, Chapter 5 will argue for the prospects of a dialogical theology – i.e., the prospects of a theology that openly employs the vocabulary and tenets of dialogical philosophy.

Chapter 5

The Contemporary Prospects of a Dialogical Theology

This thesis has thus far utilized the concepts of dialectic and dialogue to frame Brunner's theology. I have shown how epistemic concerns and personalist impulses developed out of Brunner's early dialectical foundation. Through the influence of dialogical philosophy, these epistemic and personalist interests converged in his doctrine of encounter. For this reason, I have argued that Brunner should be regarded not only as a representative of dialectical theology but, equally well, as an example of dialogical theology. This final chapter builds on the dialogical logic operative in Brunner's concept of encounter and presents the contemporary prospects of a dialogical theology. Specifically, I argue that understanding Brunner as the prototype for a dialogical theology is a viable and productive way to recover Brunner's voice in the contemporary context.

McGrath's work on Brunner begins by pointing to Brunner's 'largely forgotten' legacy.[495] His project culminates with the appeal that 'Brunner deserves to be brought back into contemporary theological discussion.'[496] McGrath points to five areas in which he believes Brunner maintains contemporary significance: as a voice of theological

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[495] McGrath, *Emil Brunner,* p. ix.

[496] McGrath, *Emil Brunner,* p. 228.

diversity within the Reformed tradition; as a resource for dialogue between theology and the natural sciences; as a foundation for contemporary apologetics and cultural engagement; as a theologically rigorous defense of personalism; and as a model of Trinitarian modesty.[497] McGrath concludes by reiterating that, 'whatever his weaknesses, Brunner offers a theological platform with considerable potential for the engagement of contemporary cultural concerns. It would be madness not to make better use of it.'[498] McGrath's recommendations are brief, but he offers several starting points for continuing application of Brunner's thought. In this way, McGrath has laid the groundwork for recovering Brunner's influence in contemporary theology.

David Gilland and Cynthia Bennett Brown have also joined in the effort to recover Brunner's significance. Both scholars have contributed to the contemporary 'reappraisal' of Brunner.[499] Gilland shows how the relationship between law and gospel forms the 'systematic core' of Brunner's thinking against the backdrop of his disagreements with Barth.[500] Gilland provides clarity and insight into Brunner's early theology, but does not take an interest in contemporary application and has little to offer in this way.[501] Brown is more interested in Brunner's continuing utility. She argues Brunner's relevance for theological methodology, pointing to his understanding of theology's purpose (to know God) and its boundaries (esp. the biblical witness and theology's place in service of proclamation).[502] Brown contends that Brunner can still make meaningful contributions to both personal and theological formation.[503] Her appeals, however, remain modest and she does not push Brunner's ideas beyond the scope of his own usage.

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[497] Ibid. pp. 228-237.

[498] McGrath, *Emil Brunner,* p. 237.

[499] Alluding here to McGrath's subtitle: *Emil Brunner: A Reappraisal*

[500] Gilland, *Law and Gospel*, p. xiii.

[501] See, especially, Gilland's 'Conclusion,' pp. 263-268.

[502] Brown, *Believing Thinking, Bounded Theology*, pp. 184-187.

[503] Brown cites the unexpected impact that Brunner exerted in her own life. – Ibid. pp. ix-x.

I am indebted to these figures who have paved the way for renewed interest in Brunner. However, in this concluding chapter, I hope to be more radical than they have been. With the moniker *dialogical theology,* I designate a mode of theological inquiry that explicitly utilizes the language and principles of dialogical philosophy. However, I also mean to indicate a mode of engaging with and beyond Brunner, one which recommends his salience for contemporary theology. I am treating Brunner as foundational to dialogical theology, as its prototype. Therefore, if the prospects discussed below move beyond Brunner in any way (beyond his own theological positions and interests) I intend for them to do so along the trajectory of his own thought. Specifically, the prospects of a dialogical theology, as I envision them here, follow the dialogical logic found in Brunner's doctrine of encounter. In this way, I treat Brunner's epistemology as a starting point rather than as the finish line. In as much as Brunner evinces the potential of a dialogical theology, he need not define its limits altogether.

In the foreward to the first edition of *Truth as Encounter* Brunner writes: 'The Biblical conception of truth is: truth as encounter. Applying this knowledge in all spheres of church doctrine is of quite incalculable import; in this application I am aware that I have only made a modest beginning.'[504] The purview of this chapter – thinking with and beyond Brunner – understands Brunner's statement here as an invitation, an invitation to extend the dialogical impulse of his doctrine of encounter. I mean to take Brunner up on this point precisely, to consider the application of truth as encounter 'in all spheres of church doctrine.' While actual application in this comprehensive sense (all spheres) is beyond the scope of this project, the prospects offered here are nonetheless extensive in their implications. They are concrete examples of a much broader theological posture. Specifically, I offer three characteristics of the theological mode that I envision. These three characteristics are a critical epistemology; a nascent understanding of

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[504] Brunner, *Truth as Encounter*. p. 2.

performativity; and a holistic understanding of dialogue. I will describe each of these characteristics with continued reference to their emergence within Brunner's thought

These three characteristics represent areas in which Brunner can be brought into dialogue with contemporary resources and ways in which Brunner's dialogical theology commends itself to contemporary instincts. The end of this exposition does not arrive at a determined set of principles that could comprehensively govern theological activity. Nor do I mean to suggest that the prospects discussed here provide an exhaustive characterization of dialogical thought. Rather, with these features – chosen for their interrelation and theological salience – I mean to tease out a kind of theological posture, a way of orienting oneself dialogically within theological inquiry. Specifically, I will show dialogical theology to be a posture that is acutely attuned to the possibilities and implications of one's relating to God, the world, and others. Herein, theology understands itself principally as a way of relating, holding only loosely to the authority and finality of its doctrine but firmly to the relationships in which it participates. I argue that the prospects of a dialogical theology are creative avenues for continued engagement with and beyond Brunner and, therein, that Brunner provides a viable platform from which to engage in contemporary theological discourse.

Along these lines, I consider the aforementioned characteristics of a dialogical theology – critical epistemology, performative concern, and holistic dialogue – with an eye toward their connection to Brunner's thought. This chapter begins with a brief word on the integration of dialogical philosophy into theology and then proceeds in three parts, taking each of these dialogical features in turn. As the exposition of these features unfolds, the nature of the first characteristic will be explored right up to the point at which its conceptual boundaries begin to spill over into the second, and likewise with the second into the third. However, this should not be taken to suggest that the relation between these features is like that of propositions in a line of deduction, one building directly and diachronically upon the others. Rather, all three concepts are intersecting, overlapping, and mutually reinforcing – each gives meaning and clarity to the others.

I. The Theological Integration of Dialogical Philosophy

Anticipating certain concerns regarding theology's accommodation of philosophy, I want to start by addressing the integration that I am imagining here. Caution regarding the accommodation of philosophy has persisted since theology's inception and is immortalized in Tertullian's famous inquiry, 'what does Jerusalem have to do with Athens, the Church with the Academy?'[505] However, also from its inception, theology has never failed to make use of the language and concepts provided by its intellectual environment. Depending upon varied arrangements of revelation and reason, theology has operated at every point along the continuum between the total accommodation of philosophy and its asserted exclusion. Nevertheless, theology's very existence as a communicative discipline is predicated upon the use of language whose intellectual capital eclipses any strict theological or ecclesial limits. Moreover, and to put a fine point on it, if the author of John's gospel can appeal to the *logos* concept – trading on its prior understanding as well as redescribing the term Christologically – then appropriation of philosophy stands upon sound theological precedents, even if accompanied by necessary discretion.

Dialogical philosophy, especially as developed by Ferdinand Ebner and Martin Buber, is also a special case as regards its relation to theology and faith. Ebner and Buber both operated with explicitly theistic presuppositions. The 'fundamental thought,' expressed in Ebner's *The Word and Spiritual Realities* is that humanity exists in and through its relation to God.[506] This relationship is the foundation of the *spiritual reality* of life and 'finds its objective expression in language.' Language and the relationality in

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[505] *Prescriptions against Heretics*, 7. Translated and edited by S. L. Greenslade, *Library of Christian Classics: Vol. V, Early Latin Theology* (Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1956)

[506] Harold Johnson Green, 'The Word and Spiritual Realities: A Translation of and Critical Introduction to Ferdinand Ebner's "Das Wort Und Die Geistigen Realitaten" and a Comparison with Martin Buber's "Ich Und Du".' (Northwestern University, 1980). p. 6.

which it emerges are made possible by the *Word* through which God brings all things into being. Therefore, the true meaning of life (as spiritual reality) and language (as the 'sensory expression' of the spiritual reality) are understood only in the relationship of the I (humanity) to its proper Thou (God).[507] For Ebner, this I-Thou relationship is realized uniquely in Christianity: 'Only its [Christianity's] spirit has the true belief, which in its ultimate ground is the faith of man in the word.'[508]

Likewise, for Buber, all spheres of relationality are grounded in and consummated by the relation between humanity and God (The eternal Thou). As Buber writes, 'in every sphere, through everything that becomes present to us, we gaze toward the train of the eternal You; in each we perceive the breath of it; in every You we address the eternal You, in every sphere according to its manner.'[509] Buber's religious convictions were, of course, Jewish, and not Christian. Here still, the theistic relationship undergirds all other relationality and, indeed, being itself. Moreover, Buber's religious interests were intentionally inclusive and, despite enduring criticisms of Christianity, he confesses to 'have found in Jesus my great brother.'[510]

Importantly, neither Ebner nor Buber can be accused of smuggling religion into some prior philosophical commitments, leastwise not without significant qualifications. At its very foundation, their thought grows out of their respective Judeo-Christian roots. In this way, and despite their religious differences, Ebner and Buber's dialogical thought is a biblically grounded philosophy. Both figures operate with foundationalist inferences, derived from philosophically interested readings of the biblical text. For Buber, the story of creation is most central. Maurice Friedman writes that 'it is creation in the Biblical

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[507] Ibid. pp. 17-18.

[508] Ebner's bold claim is based on a Christological understanding of 'word,' as explained in the following paragraph. – Ibid. p. 29.

[509] Buber, *I and Thou*. p. 57.

[510] Martin Buber, *Two Types of Faith* (London, 1951), pp 12f - cited in Emil Brunner, 'Judaism and Christianity in Buber', in *The Philosophy of Martin Buber*, ed. by Paul A. Schilpp (London: Cambridge University Press, 1967), pp. 309–18.

sense that underlies Buber's assertion that man is given a ground on which to stand and that he is able to go out to meet God, man, and world from that ground.'[511] For Ebner, the prologue to John's gospel is most formative. Ebner exploits the multivalence of *das Wort*, invoking the linguistic faculties that undergird human relationality as well as the divine Christ-logos of John 1:1.[512] In this way, when Brunner identifies his notion of *encounter* as the 'Biblical understanding of truth" and juxtaposes it to 'the general rational understanding of truth,' he is authentic to the intentions of Ebner and Buber.[513] Whatever accommodation might take place in the formation of a dialogical theology, there is clear and natural compliance between theology and dialogical philosophy.[514] Dialogical thought is, in its way, already an accommodation of philosophy to theology. As far as it goes with Ebner and Buber, conventional philosophical categories – especially the subject-object paradigm – must yield to theological foundations.

One final qualification is in order on the matter of thinking with and beyond Brunner. The extent to which Brunner would embrace the dialogical theology that I am putting forth is up for debate. At a minimum, Brunner would likely be uneasy with the moniker *dialogical theology* for the very reason that this ascription might suggest a theological 'system' that takes its cues from predetermined philosophical positions. Consider Brunner's 1931 published lectures, *The Word and the World*.[515] He states that the 'subordinate purpose' of this book was to address misunderstandings around the meaning of 'Dialectical Theology.' In this context he writes:

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[511] Friedman, *Martin Buber and the Eternal Thou*. pp. 23-24.

[512] György Kunszt, 'The Word as Ultimate Reality: The Christian Dialogical Personalism of Ferdinand Ebner,' *Ultimate Reality and Meaning*, 20.2–3 (1997), pp. 95-69.

[513] Emil Brunner, *Truth as Encounter*, (Philadelphia: Westminister Press, 1943). p. 86.

[514] For further confirmation of Buber's biblical foundations as well as Protestant theological affinity for Buber see Helmut Gollwitzer, 'The Significance of Martin Buber for Protestant Theology', in *Martin Buber A Centenary Volume*, ed. by Haim Gordan and Jochanan Bloch (KTAV Publishing House, Inc., 1984), pp. 385–418.

[515] Brunner, *The Word and the World*.

> If it be asked further why it is called “the Dialectical Theology” or “the Theology of Crisis,” the answer is not so simple. Neither Barth nor I nor any member of our group has conferred on it this title. Our only possible name for it would be “the Theology of the Bible” or “Christian theology.” At the same time, the former two names are not unfitted to bring out what it stands for.[516]

This excerpt reveals that, at one level, Brunner wants to avoid a qualified theological type. He attempts to represent dialectical theology as pure, unadulterated by the corruptions of much modern thought – i.e., as simply ‘the Theology of the Bible’ or ‘Christian theology.’ While this is a nice aspiration, such objective neutrality is dubious at best. However, Brunner goes on to illustrate that the descriptors ‘Dialectical’ and ‘Crisis’ do in fact communicate something useful about a particular set of theological commitments. It is likely that Brunner would react similarly to the ascription of a ‘dialogical theology.’ He would be reticent about conformity to a qualified theological type but open to the practicality (even the inevitability, perhaps) of such titles and what they implicate. Nevertheless, the following sections intend to pave the way forward by extending the dialogical logic that is inherent to Brunner’s epistemology and thereby suggesting the contemporary prospects of a dialogical theology.

II. Critical Epistemology

In order to show its contemporary prospects, dialogical theology will be characterized based on its critical epistemology, performative concern, and holistic understanding of dialogue. The first of these characteristics – epistemic critique – is the most obvious on the surface of Brunner’s rhetoric and has been addressed in part by the previous chapter. Brunner’s conception of encounter is set strongly against, although not to the exclusion of, the object-subject antithesis. The strength of this opposition is presented in such statements as the following: ‘The biblical understanding

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[516] Ibid, p. 6.

of truth cannot be grasped through the object-subject antithesis: on the contrary, it is falsified through it.'[517] Whether one finds Brunner's notion of encounter favorable or accepts the possibility of moving beyond the object-subject antithesis must be weighed against the full claims and arguments of these final two chapters. In the present context, I am interested in the epistemic critique that is inherent to dialogical thought. The infinite qualitative distinction, which bounds human faculties but never divine freedom, confirms the principal *Ecclesia semper reformanda est*. It is thereby that critique finds its place as a perpetual component of theological activity. I will show that, as a feature of a dialogical theology, epistemic critique should foster attentiveness to imperialist intellectual assumptions and bound theological reflection in a particular way.

Before exploring these claims further, a clarification is in hand. Commenting on the 'truly revolutionary' influence of Martin Buber upon Christianity, Walter Kaufman writes that Christian theology has often sought to 'baptize Buber,' appropriating his thought in ways that distort his original intentions. Kaufman notes four such distortions: (1) 'Buber's I-Thou relationship became a Thou-I relationship for many neo-orthodox theologians, who wished to cling to the sundering of God and man through original sin and the total dependency of man on God's grace through faith in Christ.' (2) Many have failed to recognize the compatibility and fluctuation between I-Thou and I-It. Instead, the two ways of knowing have often been treated as rivals requiring a choice between them. (3) Christ has functioned as Thou in the place of Buber's 'imageless God.' (4) The I-Thou relation has been prioritized as a reference to relation with the Eternal Thou and its meaning in the realm of interhuman relations has been neglected.[518] In its appropriation of Buber, Christian theology would do well to bear in mind Kaufman's observations. At this juncture, I am particularly interested in the second of these distortions: the presentation of I-Thou and I-It modes as essentially oppositional. Apropos this misconception, it is necessary to clarify that dialogical critique does not

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[517] Brunner, *Truth as Encounter*, p. 69.

[518] Friedman, *Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue Fourth Edition*. p. xiii.

require or intend an exclusionary opposition. Rather, dialogical critique aims to keep object-subject thinking in check and to create space for the prior knowledge of encounter.

As was shown in the previous chapter, one of the difficulties faced in Brunner's explication of encounter is the precarious balance of holding that 'there is no longer place here for the objective-subjective antithesis' while also maintaining that 'between both this Biblical and the general rational conception of truth' there exist positive relations outside these differences.'[519] Despite the above examples – highlighting that Brunner's rhetoric often obscures the present point – dialogical critique is not absolute. Buber writes, 'the basic word I-It does not come from evil – any more than matter comes from evil.' However, 'when man lets it have its way, the relentlessly growing It-world grows over him like weeds, his own I loses its actuality, until the incubus over him and the phantom inside him exchange the whispered confession of their need for redemption.'[520] The It-world, Buber contends, is ever-expanding through means of discovery and leading to increased capacities of experience (subjectivity) and use (objectivity).[521] Having experience of the world outside of the self and making use of this world in myriad ways are natural functions of life and entirely necessary for its maintenance. Subjectivity and objectivity can hardly be done away with. Nevertheless, Buber's expressed concern is that 'the improvement of the ability to experience and use generally involves a decrease in man's power to relate.'[522]

In dialogical thought, critique is leveled against the exclusionary tendencies of the subject-object paradigm wherein a prior relationality gets crowded out, being either

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[519] Brunner, *Truth as Encounter*, pp. 108-109.

[520] Buber, *I and Thou*, pp. 95-96.

[521] Ibid, pp. 87-89

[522] Ibid. p. 92.

neglected or treated as lacking in rational legitimacy.[523] Rather than abolishing the I-It world, Buber insists that knowing operates in the dynamic fluctuation between the immediate and the reflective; the personal and the propositional; the mutual-relational and the experiential-descriptive. Ferdinand Ebner expressed his interest to recover the spiritual reality of life (the I-Thou relation) which he believed to be obscured by the conventions of philosophy and science. However, he wrote that this endeavor – despite its admittedly suprarational and descriptively resistant nature – 'in no way makes thinking in and of itself impossible or superfluous,' nor must it 'affect the progress of the former' (i.e., science and philosophy). Instead, his book, *The Word and the Spiritual Realities*, intended to 'confound philosophy in the latter's self-confidence.'[524] This is the nature of dialogical critique, guarding against over-confidence in conventionally privileged knowledge paradigms to create space for ways of relating that are otherwise neglected.

In this light, the epistemic critique of a properly dialogical theology would, in principle, be oriented toward guarding against epistemic imperialism. I borrow this turn of phrase – 'epistemic imperialism' – from Peter Harrison's *The Territories of Science and Religion*.[525] Harrison relates this idiom to an 'epistemic space in which supposedly neutral rational considerations trump all others.' Specifically, Harrison refers to the 'epistemic imperialism of science' which has twentieth-century positivism as its prime example.[526] While I am not directly interested in the functions of science and religion as distinct ways of understanding the world (which is the context of Harrison's

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[523] Here I refer to the I-Thou world as a 'prior relationality' because, for Buber, the immediacy of encounter between I and Thou precedes the reflective activity of the I-It world.; Buber, *I and Thou*, pp. 62-63.

[524] Green, *The Word and Spiritual Realities: A Translation,* p. 7.

[525] Peter Harrison, *The Territories of Science and Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015). p. 190.

[526] Ibid, p. 190.

assessment),[527] modern positivism is a clear example of the kind of epistemic tyranny that dialogical thought means to critique. Positivism's elevation of logic and sensory data is absolutist in its rejection of other epistemic forms (esp. those derived theologically and metaphysically).

The critique of positivism, although a convenient example due to Ebner and Buber's intellectual context, is only an ancillary illustration. My interest is not in this particular criticism. Instead, I am principally interested in the description that accompanies Harrison's idiom 'epistemic imperialism.' In relation to the phrase, he identifies assumptions of neutrality and universality (re. applicability, value, and authority).[528] Neutrality assumes that certain claims are immune to qualitative assessment by virtue of their sheer objectivity. Universality assumes that certain claims are, at least in their essence, a-historical and a-contextual – i.e., timeless truths rather than products of 'a particular combination of circumstances.'[529] I use epistemic imperialism in Harrison's sense, referencing instances in which presumed neutrality and universality operate as validation for the supremacy of particular claims over others. This is the nature, therefore, of dialogical critique: It does not deny the possibility, nor even the necessity, of objective (even timeless) truth but, rather, is attentive to the potential presumptuousness and imperialist operations of such claims.

In this regard, I am conscious of a certain affinity with liberation theology, especially in its connection with postcolonialism. Analogous critiques are not difficult to find in these arenas. Gustavo Gutiérrez writes that 'Theology as critical reflection thus fulfills a liberating function for humankind and the Christian community, preserving them from fetishism and idolatry, as well as from a pernicious and belittling narcissism.'[530]

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[527] Harrison writes that his project 'seeks to describe how it is that we have come to understand the world in terms of these distinct categories of "science" and "religion" – how, in other words, we have come to separate the domain of material facts from the realm of moral and religious values.' Ibid. ix.

[528] Ibid. pp. 190-191.

[529] Ibid. p. 191.

[530] Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (New York: Orbis Books, 1973). p. 10.

Theological fetishism, idolatry, and narcissism are undoubtedly symptoms of the epistemic imperialism described above with its assumptions of neutrality and universality. Gutiérrez continues his assessment of critical reflection stating that 'theology has a necessary and permanent role in liberation from every form of religious alienation.'[531] In dialogical terms, religious alienation – which Buber expresses as the inability to relate – is the outcome of the 'progressive increase of the It-world' and it is this very thing that dialogical critique means to guard against.[532] To be clear, dialogical theology, as I envision it here, is not a theology of liberation as such, nor does it pretend to be immune to its own imperialist assumptions and operations. I only mean to suggest that dialogical thought is hospitable to the constructive and corrective value of critical theory as employed in liberationist and postcolonial thought.

I also want to avoid the suggestion that the epistemic critique of dialogical thought is entirely novel. We should not miss the opportunity to recognize that analogous criticism is alive and well. Mayra Rivera's *The Touch of Transcendence* comes to mind, especially due to its use of relational models. With assistance from Latin American liberation theology, feminist, and postcolonial sources (among others) Rivera critiques modern attempts to imagine God's otherness. Rivera turns away from models of transcendence as vertical distance, models which enforce hierarchical power structures.[533] Instead, she develops a relational model wherein otherness celebrates the singularity of the other and transcendence is brought out in the relational space between creatures. There is much to be gained by listening closely and self-critically to these prophetic voices who are already exhibiting the import of theological critique. What I mean to indicate here is that a properly dialogical theology incorporates criticism of imperialist intellectual assumptions as an active and essential feature and not as an

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[531] Ibid. p. 10.

[532] Buber, *I and Thou*, pp. 87-89.

[533] Mayra Rivera, *The Touch of Transcendence: A Postcolonial Theology of God* (London: Westminster John Knox, 2007). pp. 1-2.; Displaying affinity with dialogical thought, Rivera also employs the category of 'encounter,' although through the use of Emmanuel Levinas rather than Martin Buber.

afterthought. This attentiveness to epistemic imperialism is an inherent dialogical feature.

The second point to be made is that dialogical critique also bounds theological reflection in a particular way. Specifically, faith – which occurs in the personal dimension between I and Thou – bounds theology – which occurs in the reflective dimension between I and It. Here, we must have in mind Buber's previously cited contention that 'the capacity for experience and use generally involves a decrease in man's power to relate.'[534] Emil Brunner applies this assertion in the realm of Christian faith and doctrine:

> One who thinks in terms of theology must, so long as he does this, pass from the attitude of the worshiper to that of the thinker who is concerned with his subject. Greater clearness and precision of theological concepts can only be gained at the cost of directness of faith, and the readiness for action which it contains. While a person is studying theology he is not in the state of a praying and listening disciple, but he is a pupil, a teacher, a scholar, a thinker. This does not mean that theology *must* inevitably damage faith and obedience, but it does mean that it *may* harm it.[535]

Brunner refers to 'the danger of putting theology in the place of personal faith' as '*Theologismus*.'[536] He is quick to add that 'it is impossible to draw a sharp line of demarcation between the truth of faith and theological truth. The distinction is relative in character.' Nevertheless, 'the more that reflection and impersonal objectivity predominate, the greater will be the difference.'[537] Here we find the boundary set by faith and obedience. Brunner writes: 'In order to keep dogmatic theology within its bounds we may claim that only so much theology is good as can be combined with no injury to the attitude of faith, and to obedience itself.'

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[534] Buber, *I and Thou*, p. 89.

[535] Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of God: Dogmatics Volume I* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2014). p. 41.

[536] See Olive Wyon's translators' note ('TR.') in Ibid, p. 41.

[537] Ibid, p. 41.

The first thing that needs to be said on this account is that there is no absolute distinction between faith and theology. The relationship, as Brunner states, is always 'relative in character.' Neither revelation nor the faith it produces are devoid of content. Theology is the reflective task whereby this content is discerned, interrogated, and articulated. Within the field of theological reflection, faith and its content can be parsed out based on their distinctive qualities and with reference to their relative operations. However, in real-time, the boundaries between faith and theology are always porous and generally more ambiguous than the demands of descriptive clarity allow for. Faith and theology stand in a circular relationship of mutual reinforcement. Whether one is the constituent or product of the other is always a matter of relative perspective and not an absolute distinction.

Without losing sight of the precarity of the present distinction, there remains specialized theological activity that is performed principally by professional scholars. Furthermore, and notwithstanding relations (both formal and informal) to ecclesial communities, such activity largely takes place in academic settings amongst a community of fellow specialists. Brunner's comparison of faith and theology has this sort of specialized theological activity chiefly in mind. In Kathryn Tanner's *Theories of Culture*, she examines the relationship between academic theology and the less specialized everyday theological activity.[538] Herein, she treats both the distinctiveness and similarities in their operations.[539] Regarding their distinctions, Tanner notes that academic theology turns the immediate and practical concerns of 'everyday Christian life,' into matters of abstract reflection. 'When problems of practice are raised in academic theology they therefore suffer some transformation in character; practical answers to practical problems become intellectual answers to intellectual problems.'[540] The move from pragmatic-immediacy to the intellectual-reflective is also accompanied

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[538] Kathryn Tanner, 'The Nature and Task of Theology,' in *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997). pp. 61-92.

[539] Ibid. pp. 80-92.

[540] Ibid. p. 80.

by a change in value sets. Specifically, it is the values of 'conceptual thoroughness, clear definition, comprehensiveness, and coherence that make specialized intellectual activity distinct from its untrained counterpart.' These values, Tanner writes, tend to 'set the norms for excellence relative to the field.'[541]

Brunner follows the convention of referring to the specialized activity of academic theology as dogmatics and offers descriptions similar to those found with Tanner. The move from the immediate to the reflective, however, is put into dialogical terms for Brunner: 'In doctrine man speaks no longer in the "Thou"-form to God – as in the original confession of faith – but he now speaks about God as "He".' Brunner describes this move as the 'transition from the personal sphere into the impersonal.' Neither he nor Tanner mean to make the distinction absolute, and both offer a myriad of qualifications toward this end. Nevertheless, and this is precisely the point, the very task of clarifying the relation between academic theology and the life of faith, bears the irony of obscuring the porous and dynamic reality of their connection. The values of systematic coherence and logical precision struggle to accommodate the flexibility and complexity of faith. Herein, Brunner writes, 'The ideas [treated by theology] are expounded clearly in definitions and they lose that fluidity which suggests variety of meaning, akin to poetic speech, which is proper to the directness of the witness of faith.'[542] Interestingly, Tanner also trades on the poetic analogy to capture the nature of the Christian life over against the theoretical logic of its specialized reflection: 'Christianity is one big poem in that the meanings of its elements are subtle and ambiguous, and the connections among them elusive and associative, as matters of practice always are.'[543]

The real danger of insisting that the life of faith bounds theological reflection is that the matter is too easily taken for granted. Few would deny that doctrine should do no harm to faith and that faith cannot be reduced to the intellectual ascent to a

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[541] Ibid. p. 81.

[542] Brunner, *Dogmatics Vol I*, p. 62.

[543] Tanner, p. 91.

propositional set of statements. The assumed banality of such claims tempts one to move past their implications far too quickly. The most subtle and pervasive idols, however, are those which are well-intended and innocent in appearance. Nicholas Lash writes that 'the *critical* dimension of the theological task is to be sought in the direction of the critique of idolatry – the stripping away of the veils of self-assurance by which we seek to protect our faces from exposure to the mystery of God.'[544] Without denying the inevitable necessity of clear and positive theological claims, it remains that theological assertion – particularly when well-intended and innocent in appearance – always runs the risk of making an idol of itself. The confidence one finds in theological resolution becomes a deterrent to continued exploration of the knowledge of God which, Lash writes, 'is not less unknown the more deeply it is understood.'[545] Lash cautions against the idolatry of absolutizing particular theological constructions. Those who seek God must pursue 'the quest for truth along the path of dispossession.' Lash reminds us that 'faith in God, and God alone, is inherently iconoclastic.'[546]

Borrowing Lash's imagery, faith bounding theology encourages self-critical iconoclasm as an invaluable theological task. Dialogical critique operates with the assumption that constructive theological activity is not immune from the production of idols and criticism is necessary to undermine such constructions. However, this description might fail to capture the existential force of what is being suggested, especially in the process of dispossession. The iconoclastic sense in which faith bounds doctrine, that which I am attempting to tease out presently, is better captured by Barbara Brown Taylor's assessment of disillusionment in the life of faith. As Brunner and Tanner suggest, poetic speech (poetic prose in this instance) is often better suited

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[544] Nicholas Lash, *Theology on the Way to Emmaus* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 1986). p. 9.

[545] Ibid. p. 8

[546] Ibid. p. 11.

for capturing the complexities of faith.[547] She explores the deeply personal and experiential nature of disillusionment as well as a sense of the holy mysteries that lie on the other side:

> What has been lost gradually becomes less important than what is to be found. Curiosity pokes its green head up through the asphalt of grief, and fear of the unknown takes on an element of wonder as the disillusioned turn away from the God who was supposed to be in order to seek the God who is. Every letdown becomes a lesson and a lure. Did God fail to come when I called? Then perhaps God is not a minion. So who is God? Did God fail to punish my adversary? Then perhaps God is not a policeman. So who is God? Did God fail to make everything turn out all right? Then perhaps God is not a fixer. So who is God? Over and over, my disappointments draw me deeper into the mystery of God's being and doing. Every time God declines to meet my expectations, another of my idols is exposed.[548]

The encounter with God requires that one tear down all that has been set up in God's place. Buber described disillusionment and dispossession in the life of faith as a 'holy insecurity' for the very fact that the path to encounter with God proceeds along such lines.[549] He described his own position as the 'narrow ridge.' Attempting to encapsulate his standpoint, Buber writes: 'I did not rest on the broad upland of a system that includes a series of sure statements about the absolute, but on a narrow rocky ridge between the gulfs where there is no sureness of expressible knowledge but the certainty of meeting what remains, undisclosed.'[550] Dialogical theology, as a critical

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[547] A dialogical theology ought to delight in theopoetic disruptions. It is worth repeating here that Buber's I and Thou has been called a 'philosophical-religious poem.' See: Diamond, 'Dialogue and Theology', in The Philosophy of Martin Buber, p. 235.

[548] Barbara Brown Taylor, *The Preaching Life* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 1993). pp. 9-10.

[549] See Friedman's comments on Buber's 'holy insecurity' in *Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue Fourth Edition*. pp. 157-158.

[550] Buber, *Between Man and Man*. p. 184.

theology, is principally interested in this dispossessive iconoclasm. The pay-off is not in what is lost but, rather, in the possibilities that emerge on the other side. As Catherine Keller describes it, negative theology produces 'an overlap between mystical disclosure and prophetic iconoclasm.'[551]

It should be restated here that the present intent is not to offer any strict principles but rather to suggest an orienting theological posture. Dialogical criticism, therefore, ought to give an orientation of intellectual humility. Herein, the goal is theological restraint and not disbandment. How well theological claims cohere to certain absolutes – although meaningful – is neither a singular nor an infallible measure of the 'truth' value of the Christian witness. Dialogical critique aims at any epistemic imperialism that would suggest otherwise. Instead, a dialogical orientation measures theology based on its implications for one's relating to God, the world, and others. Herein, theology understands itself principally as a way of relating, holding only loosely to the authority and finality of its doctrine but firmly to the relationships in which it participates. In saying this, a certain pragmatic interest is being admitted and, thereby, dialogical criticism gives way to performative concerns.

III. Performative concern

Decades before the concept was developed by J.L. Austin and given cultural force by Judith Butler, there was already a nascent understanding of performativity in dialogical philosophy. This has been hinted at in part by the preceding section. The nature of dialogical critique as expounded above can be understood in terms of performativity. In dialogical philosophy, the way one addresses the world does something, it has an effect. The critique of subject-object thinking, described above as a critique of epistemic imperialism, is a response to the effects of unchecked intellectual

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[551] Catherine Keller, *The Face of the Deep* (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 201.

assumptions within predominant epistemic modes. The concern is that well-intended intellectual rigors ultimately contribute to forms of isolationism and objectification.

We have seen already that relation to the Eternal-Thou undergirded all other relationality for Buber. Some of his dialogical contemporaries express this idea in even more explicitly theological terms. What Buber describes as the I-Thou relation, Ebner terms as pneumatological grammar – *pneuma*, because the relation between I and Thou is the *spiritual* reality of life for Ebner.[552] Of particular interest is Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy's grammatical method which he also refers to as incarnated grammar [*Leibhaftige Grammatik*].[553] Rosenstock-Huessy, best known for his friendship with Franz Rosenzweig, was a Christian convert and professor of history and sociology.[554] He wrote on a variety of disciplines including the philosophy of language. Rosenstock-Huessy's grammatical method was initially composed in a manuscript sent to Rosenzweig in 1616.[555] The text was published in 1924 as *Angewandte Seelenkunde* and has been called 'the first source document of the philosophy of dialogue.'[556]

Hugo Bergman, notes the 'remarkable similarity' that *Angewandte Seelenkunde* bears to Ebner's *The Word and Spiritual Realities.* Both texts were written at nearly the same time 'without either writer having knowledge of the other.'[557] Bergman identifies Ebner and Rosenstock-Huessy as transitional figures who develop both the religious and linguistic features of dialogical thought just before the movement reached its high

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[552] Bergman, *Dialogical Philosophy, pp. 158-161*.

[553] Hans van der Heiden, Otto Krosen, and Henk van Olst, 'Introduction,' in Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, *Practical Knowledge of the Soul* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2015), p. xvi.

[554] Bergman describes Rosenstock and Rosenzweig's WWI correspondence, wherein Rosenstock defends his adopted Christianity and Rosenzweig defends his Judaism, as "one of the greatest, most earthshaking religious documents of our time." Bergman, *Dialogical Philosophy,* p. 162.

[555] 'Foreword,' in Rosenstock-Huessy, *Practical Knowledge of the Soul*, p. ii.

[556] *Angewandte Seelenkunde* in English as *Practical Knowledge of the Soul* (Wipf & Stock, 2015).; identified as original source document in van der Heiden, Krosen, and van Olst, 'Introduction,' *Practical Knowledge of the Soul*, p. v.

[557] Bergman, *Dialogical Philosohy,* p. 163.

point with Buber.[558] As with Buber's understanding of dialogue, Rosenstock-Huessy treats grammar as a mode of relational existence rather than a descriptive faculty. He is of particular importance here because he emphasized the performative element in dialogical thinking and, thereby, is the clearest example of how dialogical thought anticipated later developments in the philosophy of language.

In *Angewandte Seelenkunde*, Rosenstock-Huessy defines grammar as 'the discipline of changing from one form into another.'[559] True speech is that which performs an action and initiates change. It is described throughout the book as the 'grammar of the soul.'[560] As with Buber's I-Thou relation, true speech is spontaneous and immediate. True speech is distinguished from ordinary speech (comparable with Buber's I-It) which, having the language of science as its prime example, is reflective and mediated by concepts.[561] Bergman's summary of Rosenstock-Huessy's grammatical method is worth attention because his description bears a striking resemblance to the work of J.L. Austin. It needs to be noted here that Bergman's lectures on dialogical philosophy (where he summarizes Rosenstock-Huessy) were delivered in 1962, the same year that Austin's 1955 Harvard lectures were posthumously published as *How to do Things with Words*. It is a near certainty that Bergman had no awareness of Austin's notion of performativity, making the symmetry between Bergman's illustrations and Austin's descriptions all the more remarkable.

Bergman describes that, for Rosenstock-Huessy, 'all true speech changes reality and creates it anew.'[562] He illustrates the point by citing societal examples where such

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[558] Bergman's *Dialogical Philosophy from Kierkegaard to Buber* is the most thorough assessment of the development of dialogical thought available to date.

[559] Rosenstock-Huessy, *Practical Knowledge of the Soul*, p. 33.

[560] Ibid. esp. pp. 18-33.

[561] Bergman, *Dialogical Philosophy,* pp. 163-166.

[562] Bergman claims that Rosenstock-Huessy also refers to true speech as 'liturgical grammar.' However, it is not clear where Bergman gets this terminology. The phrase does not appear in the English translation of *Angewandte Seelenkunde*, and it is not listed by Rosenstock-Huessy's translators as one of the terms

true speech breaks through. Bergman gives the example of 'a groom's pronouncement to his bride, "You are betrothed to me".' The betrothal utterance does not merely describe a relationship but generates and participates in the relationship of husband and wife. Herein, a change of reality takes place not only for the bride and groom but, at least conventionally, also for the society around them in that 'society now addresses the women by a different name.' Among other examples, Bergman also cites 'confession in a court' and 'the judge's sentence.' These are all 'acts of speech that change reality.'[563] Here we see that Rosenstock's 'true speech' is described in a manner that produces striking parallels to J.L. Austin's performative utterances, composed in opposition to constative language.[564] In the opening lecture of Austin's *How to do Things with Words*, the very first example of a performative utterance he gives is the 'I do' of a marriage ceremony.[565] Austin, also at the start, implicates the particular performativity of statements in a courtroom, noting that jurists are those best equipped to recognize the true meaning of a performative utterance.[566]

The interest, however, that has been generated around Austin's work is not ultimately due to the mere distinction between performatives and constatives. Rather, the payoff comes in that the lines between the two linguistic modes ultimately get eroded and this gives way to the more generalized investigation of speech acts. Austin writes:

> Now we have failed to find a grammatical criterion for performatives… it is often not easy to be sure that, even when it is apparently in explicit form, an utterance is performative

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commonly applied to his grammatical method. – Bergman, *Dialogical Philosophy,* p. 168.; van der Heiden, Krosen, and van Olst, 'Introduction,' *Practical Knowledge of the Soul*, p. xvi.

563 Bergman. *Dialogical Philosophy*, p. 164.

564 For a concise summary of Austin's delineation of constatives and performatives see Loxley, 'From the Performative to the Speech Act: J.L. Austin' in James Loxley, *Performativity* (London: Routledge, 2006). pp. 6-21.

565 J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962). p. 5.

566 See footnote #2 in Ibid. p. 4.

> or not… It is time to make a fresh start on the problem. We want to reconsider more generally the sense in which to say something may be to do something.[567]

Toward this end, Austin parses out the locution, illocution, and perlocution of the speech act and therefore shows that the basic semantic and referential function of language (locution – already a kind of action itself) is inseparable from the effects that speech intends (illocution) as well as the outcomes that it produces in its hearer (perlocution).[568] Here, Austin offers far more clarity on the nature of the speech act than is generally available in dialogical philosophy. Dialogical thought pushes the direct and personal performance of I-Thou speech over against the abstract and generally descriptive activity of I-It speech. We have shown that it is a misnomer to understand the distinction as absolute. Nevertheless, it is a misnomer produced by dialectical philosophy's own rhetoric. In any case, Austin's speech act theory more clearly expresses the porous relation between the performative and constative categories.

Unlike Austin's explication of speech act theory, the pragmatics of Rosenstock-Huessy's ordinary language or Buber's I-It relations are often more implicit than explicit. Although there is a clear articulation of the performativity of particular speech acts (e.g., the act of prayer), there is no fully developed speech act theory in the way of Austin. Nevertheless, and as is shown above, concern about the effects of impersonal speech emerges from the epistemic critique of a dialogical theology. There is an implicit understanding in dialogical thought that one's way of speaking has effects. Specifically, the privileging of objective and third-person categories contributes to forms of isolationism and materialism that are socially and politically manifested. In this way, and aside from its nascent and somewhat underdeveloped character, dialogical philosophy seems to have also anticipated the social and political possibilities of speech act theory,

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[567] Ibid. p. 91.

[568] See Austin's construction of these categories in 'Lecture VIII', Ibid. pp. 94-107. Also, see a concise summary of the concepts in Loxley. *Performativity,* pp. 18-19.

possibilities developed later by Jürgen Habermas, Jacques Derrida, and Judith Butler among others.[569]

What the dialogical notion of performativity seems to be missing is a better means for articulating the fluidity between various types of speech (e.g., constative vs. performative; I-Thou vs I-It) and their effects. In this regard, the notion of illocutionary force, especially as developed by John Searle and Daniel Vandervenken may be of use.[570] This is also a case in which Brunner, precisely because of his dialogical epistemology, is able to provide assistance. Although he had no recourse to the concept itself, Brunner displays a sense for the fluidity between particular theological speech acts. This is brought out most clearly in his in the prolegomena to his *Dogmatics* in his discussion of the relationship between doctrine and the witness of faith.[571] Brunner describes witness and catechism as two particular kinds of speech act along a trajectory that spans from the personal immediacy of faith to the impersonal and reflective realm of dogmatics.

Witness is a testimony to who God is in Jesus and its narration contains teachings about God. To this degree, it is speech *about* God and not a direct address *to* God. Nevertheless, Brunner argues, witness maintains much of the directness of faith insofar as it is a personal confession, and to the degree that its illocutionary force intends to inspire faith and obedience in the hearer. Brunner compares the witness of the Apostles with 'the instruction of catechumens for Baptism in the Early Church.' In both instances, witness as well as instruction, 'the *faith* of the learners is the aim.'[572] However, in catechetical instruction, the directness of faith is one step further removed insofar as instruction stands closer to abstracted reflection. By describing witness and catechesis based on their relation to personal and reflective speech, Brunner gives us a

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[569] Loxley, *Performativity,* pp. 45-46, 140-141

[570] John R. Searle and Daniel Vandervenken, *The Foundations of Illocutionary Logic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

[571] Brunner, 'Doctrine and the Witness of Faith,' in *Dogmatics* V.I, pp. 35-42.

[572] Brunner, *Dogmatics* V.I, p. 39.

sense for the continuum of theological speech acts. He extends this continuum to include prayer – the most direct form of a personal address to God – and the abstracted reflections of specialized academic theology, which is the speech act farthest removed from personal address. Along this continuum, the boundaries between faith and theology become less rigid. Faith always remains the source and goal of all theological speech, but 'the further dogmatics extends,' the more that faith becomes a 'distant source and a distant goal.'[573] In this way, Brunner appeals to the advancement of faith as the illocutionary goal of all theological speaking and offers possibilities for the development of a robust theological speech act theory.

Notwithstanding its similarities to speech act theory, dialogical philosophy's distinguishing feature is that its notion of performativity is theologically grounded. For Rosenstock-Huessy, the claim that true speech changes reality is derived from the original speech act wherein 'God said, let there be light, and there was light.'[574] Similarly, Ebner takes God's act of creating through the Word (*á la* John 1:1) literally.[575] For Ebner, revelation and creation are not only fundamentally Christological activities, but they are also uniquely linguistic activities. Creation is the product of divine fiat, of God's spoken command. Moreover, in God's generative speech, humanity is directly addressed. Ebner perceives the *Imago Dei* precisely as humanity's addressability, imprinted by the divine speech act. To be is to be addressed by God. Included in this addressability is the capacity for response. Brunner writes that 'God creates man as one who can hear his call and can answer it.'[576] Therefore, human uniqueness is understood as a capacity for relating; a capacity to address and be addressed. *True* speech, in this sense, is not true because of its correspondence to an object. Rather, true speech addresses a Thou in the first person and is therefore felicitous with its created reality. It

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[573] Ibid. p. 40.

[574] Genesis 1:3 (NRSV); see also Bergman, *Dialogical Philosophy,* p. 164.

[575] Green, *The Word and Spiritual Realities: A Translation,* p.xxxix.

[576] Brunner, *Man in Revolt*, p. 102.

is true to the degree that it participates in that relationship which is the prerequisite of all other speaking and relating, the prerequisite of being itself.

In this way, Rosenstock-Huessy' appellation for true speech as 'incarnated grammar' is especially evocative.[577] Incarnated grammar is language that mirrors dialogue with God and thereby participates in God's creative activity. This is the grounding for a dialogical theology's understanding of performativity. However, and importantly, this theological genealogy of language is not only meant to implicate the particularity of the divine-human relation. Rather, all speaking and relating are implicated. The wide variety of ways in which language gets used are understood, dialogically, as ways of relating. The pragmatic effect of language – i.e., its performativity, is judged principally on the kinds of relations that it generates. Language, although grounded in the divine relation, is not limited to it and it is therefore that a dialogical understanding of performativity places moral and theological implications on every sphere of human activity.

IV. Dialogue as Holistic

Having treated critical epistemology and performativity, I turn to the final characteristic of a dialogical theology, dialogue as holistic. Here I have in mind dialogue not only as a reference to the use of language but also to the entirety of our ways of relating. In this final section, I am interested in the implications of this holistic understanding of dialogue. The preceding analysis has shown that a nascent understanding of performativity is theologically grounded in dialogical philosophy and also inherent in its epistemic critique. Toward this end, a properly dialogical theology, one which utilizes the language and principles of dialogical thought, will display an expressed interest in the moral and religious effect of its theological production. The

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[577] van der Heiden, Krosen, and van Olst, 'Introduction,' in Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, *Practical Knowledge of the Soul*, p. xvi.

meaning and significance of this must now be viewed in light of the understanding that, for a dialogical theology, the entirety of the human life is communicative and therefore relational. Herein, dialogue refers to linguistic as well as non-linguistic communications, including actions and undisclosed attitudes.

It is Buber once more who draws out the implications of this most clearly. In the previous chapter, it was noted that Buber's dialogical modes are the comprehensive means by which we address and are addressed by the world outside of ourselves. Strictly speaking, dialogue takes place in the 'sphere of between' [*das Zwischenmenschliche*] – i.e., between I and Thou.[578] Subjectively understood, however, one's participation in dialogue is constituted by their posture toward otherness. For Buber, whether one addresses anything outside of themselves in the personalist form of 'Thou' rather than the objectivist form of 'It', is not a matter of their objects shared biology, rationality, or capacity for language. This is simply to say that shared linguistic faculties are not a prerequisite for dialogical partnerships because dialogue is not only a matter of speech but rather, and more fundamentally, a matter of how we relate.

One of the features of Buber's thought that, according to Maurice Friedman, is often distorted through Christian theological appropriation is that the I-Thou relation gets prioritized as a reference to relation with the Eternal Thou and its meaning in the realm of interhuman relations gets neglected.[579] To make better use of Buber, as I am suggesting should be the case for a dialogical theology, the holistic understanding of dialogue should be incorporated. The performative nature of relational existence has its foundation in the Divine-human relation, but its moral implications extend throughout the entirety of the ecosphere. As Friedman suggests, the eternal grounding of the I-Thou relation should not be cause for neglecting its application in interhuman relations. Such duplicity is an error, as Brunner reminds us: 'There are no "duties towards God" and "duties towards man." There is only one "duty:" to love God. And this one duty of loving

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[578] Friedman, *Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue,* p. 98; also, Buber, *Between Man and Man*, pp. 203-205.

[579] Friedman, *Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue.* p. xiii.

God is itself the other duty of loving our neighbor.'[580] However, it would also be selling Buber short to suggest that the moral force of our performative lives ends at the interhuman sphere. Buber's ecological interests should also not be missed.

In addition to relation with the Eternal Thou, Buber recognizes three spheres in which the world of relations arises: with fellow humans, with nature, and with spiritual beings [*geistige Wesenheiten*]. [581] Before turning to relation with nature, it will be helpful to clear the ground of relationship with spiritual beings by way of a brief explanation. Buber refers to *geistige Wesenheiten* which various translators have rendered as 'spiritual beings,' 'intelligible forms,' 'forms of the spirit,' and 'spirit becoming forms.'[582] In Buber's use, *geistige Wesenheiten* refers broadly to various immaterial phenomena that nevertheless take on material expressions. Buber likens *geistige Wesenheiten* to those phenomena which artists actualize.[583] The emotions encountered through poetry serve as an example. These emotions are expressed in poetic verse and, to that degree, are bound to language but never wholly contained by it. In this sense, one's relation to *geistige Wesenheiten* can be expressed in language, but the reality of such encounters always transcends their expression. Moreover, in this sphere, aesthetic interests appear as more direct and moral implications indirect.

To make sense of the sphere of relating to nature, Buber illustrates the contemplation of a tree. In contemplating a tree, one concerns themselves with all that might be measured, experienced, observed, and classified about the tree. Everything discovered in this contemplation, from the aesthetic to the scientific, can be expressed in some way. 'Throughout all of this,' Buber writes, 'the tree remains my object and has its place and its time span, its kind and condition.' However, he continues, 'it can also happen, if will and grace are joined, that as I contemplate the tree I am drawn into a

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[580] Brunner, *The Divine Imperative,* p. 133.

[581] Buber, *I and Thou*, pp. 56-57.

[582] See Kenneth Paul Kramer's assessment of *geistge Wesenheiten* in Kramer, *Martin Buber's I and Thou: Practicing Living Dialogue* (New York: Paulist Press, 2003). pp. 60-61.

[583] Buber, *I and Thou*, pp. 60-61

relation, and the tree ceases to be an it.'[584] Importantly, such relating is not a threat to the act of contemplation: 'There is nothing that I must not see in order to see, and there is no knowledge that I must forget… Whatever belongs to the tree is included: its form its mechanics, its colors and its chemistry, its conversation with the elements and its conversation with the stars – all this in its entirety.' In these moments, Buber verges on the esoteric and ethereal. However, what Buber aims to capture is entirely concrete. 'The tree is no impression, no play on my imagination, no aspect of a mood; it confronts me bodily… What I encounter is neither the soul of a tree nor a dyad, but the tree itself.'[585]

The point to be taken is that relationality is deeply pervasive and not limited to the divine-human or interhuman realm. The same posture of reciprocity that one seeks with fellow humans can be sought throughout nature. Such reciprocity is not only a real possibility but also an antidote to the predatory tendencies that seek merely to make use or have experience of the world. Dialogically speaking, there is no human action that is not, at the same time, interaction. Buber's description of the contemplation of a tree evinces dialogical philosophy's potential resonance with the thriving field of contemporary ecotheology. The ecological interest of much recent theology represents one more contemporary impulse that a dialogical theology would recommend itself to. With this in mind, the field of ecotheology emerges as another point of contemporary engagement for Brunner.

McGrath identifies Brunner's theology of nature and his rigorous defense of relational identity as two possible avenues for contemporary application.[586] A productive basis for engaging contemporary ecotheology can be found by bringing these two aspects of Brunner's thought together. Conveniently, Brunner's understanding of the orders of creation already combines his personalism and naturalism. Brunner's doctrine of divine orders is a claim about the presence of God's will within creation. These orders

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[584] Ibid. p. 58.

[585] Ibid. pp. 58-59.

[586] McGrath, *Emil Brunner,* pp. 229-321 and 232-234.

are, as Brunner writes, 'spheres within which we have to act, because in them, even if only in a fragmentary and indirect way, God's will meets us.'[587] At the same time, the orders are a recognition that human existence is irrevocably bounded to community and therefore determined by concrete relations. For Brunner, the orders of creation manifest his dialogical thinking. Within the orders, moral action emulates the I-Thou relation:

> From the ethical point of view the secret of faith is this: that the individual self loses its loneliness, that the "I" breaks through to the "Thou" – that the "I" which was insanely shut up within itself, and as such made the other an object for its own use, seeking to dominate the other from love of power or for its own enjoyment, is liberated, that this insane egocentricity has been healed because the "I" has been forced open to admit the "Thou." That divine fellowship with God which the Word of God creates in faith must prove its truth and reality in the human fellowship of love.[588]

In this way, Brunner uses the orders of creation to instantiate relational existence.

Despite the pervasiveness of dialogical reasoning within Brunner's moral theology, he does not achieve the holistic outlook accomplished by Buber. Brunner limits the orders of creation to human social spheres. He does not contend with humanity's irrevocable connectedness to nature. The closest that Brunner comes to dealing with ecology is in the opening section of *Man in Revolt*. As discussed in the previous chapter, he considers the 'variety of views of man' – i.e., a variety of non-Christian anthropologies.[589] Brunner argues that a Christian anthropology must ultimately distinguish itself from all others. Nevertheless, he maintains that valuable insights should be gained from other disciplines. In this regard, he begins with the so-called 'physico-chemical' view of man:

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[587] Brunner, *The Divine Imperative*, p. 291.

[588] Ibid. p. 320.

[589] Brunner, 'The Variety of Views of Man,' in *Man in Revolt*, pp. 40-53.

> Man, a part of the physico-chemical world, subject to the law of gravity like everything else, is a portion of matter composed of hydrogen, carbon, nitrogen, phosphorus, calcium, and other elements. It will not do to regard this physico-chemical substratum as a mere trifle, as merely the outer shell within which the real human being lives.[590]

This point in Brunner's anthropology is the closest that he comes to grounding human nature not only in interpersonal relationality, but also in its ecological connectedness.

Nevertheless, the limitations of Brunner's own exposition do not prevent the prospects of a dialogical theology from coming forward. Dialogical theology, as I intend it, is a mode of engaging with and beyond Brunner. It is a means of extending the dialogical reasoning found in his epistemology. In this regard, I offer the orders of creation as an example. With the orders of creation, a dialogical theology is free to extend Brunner's reasoning into the ecological sphere. In principle, this would mean adding the ecological community to the natural forms of community identified by Brunner – familial, economic, political, and ecclesial communities.[591] In doing so, Brunner's orders of creation would become a dialogical foundation for creation care and a basis for engaging in contemporary ecotheology discourse. Herein, Brunner's summons to 'take our place humbly and gratefully in the spirit of service, within the actual social environment in which our life is placed,' would also include service to the *ecological* environment in which our life is placed.[592] With this illustration I am showing that a more holistic notion of dialogue creates new possibilities for Brunner's contemporary significance and that these possibilities are generated by proceeding along the trajectory of Brunner's own thought.

This chapter has extended the dialogical reasoning of Brunner's doctrine of encounter to show how Brunner can serve as the prototype for a dialogical theology. Understanding Brunner in this way is a viable and productive means for recovering his

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[590] Ibid. p. 40.

[591] Brunner, 'The Natural forms of Community,' in *The Divine Imperative,* pp. 330-339.

[592] Brunner, The Divine Imperative, p. 339.

voice in the contemporary context. Dialogical theology, first of all, intends a mode of thinking with and beyond Brunner. As a theological orientation, its roots lie with Brunner but, in application, its branches extend beyond Brunner's own scope. The outcome of this Brunnerian trajectory is a theological posture, a way of orienting oneself dialogically within theological inquiry. Informed by a critical epistemology, a nascent understanding of performativity, and a holistic approach to dialogue, dialogical theology is acutely attuned to the possibilities and implications of one's relating to God, the world, and others. Herein, dialogical theology understands itself principally as a way of relating, holding only loosely to the authority and finality of its doctrine but firmly to the relationships in which it participates. Dialogical theology finds its cash value (to borrow William James' pragmatic expression) in the kinds of relationships that it fosters and allows for.[593] As theology, the divine-human relation is preeminent but never separable from its implications placed upon all speaking and acting. Finally, this vision for a dialogical theology provides a platform for Brunner's voice in the contemporary context.

Conclusion

This thesis has shown that Emil Brunner, while operating within a dialectical framework, utilizes dialogical philosophy to bring epistemic and personalist interests together under the doctrine of encounter. Chapter 1 established Brunner's dialectical foundation, setting Brunner within the historical and intellectual context of the dialectical movement. It was shown that dialectical theology was deeply influenced by the post-war social and political climate of the early twentieth century. Based on Brunner's self-understanding of the movement, dialectical theology was characterized as paradoxical, retrievalist, and kerygmatic. Chapter 2 focused on Brunner's early intellectual development and highlighted the epistemic interests that predominated his earliest

[593] William James, 'What Pragmatism Means,' in William James, Pragmatism and Other Writings (Penguin Books, 2000), p. 37.

work. Between 1914 and 1924, Brunner's theology shifted from a Bergsonian emphasis on the immediacy of religious experience into a critical theology that emphasized the need for revelation to be mediated. Chapter 3 turned to the law and gospel dialectic that served an architectonic function in Brunner's mature theology. It was shown that Brunner developed his personalist sensibilities by mapping the categories of the impersonal and personal onto his law and gospel dialectic. Chapter 4 examined Brunner's epistemology of encounter which become the guiding principle of his thought in the latter half of his career. Through the influence of Martin Buber and Ferdinand Ebner's dialogical philosophy, Brunner combined his epistemic and personalist interests within the doctrine of encounter. Because of the depth of this influence, it was argued that Brunner's work should be characterized as dialogical theology.

Given Brunner's identification of encounter as his guiding principle, a right understanding of Brunner requires close attention to his epistemic development and claims. Chapters 1 through 4 contributed to the field of scholarship by offering a more thorough and sustained examination of Brunner's epistemology than is otherwise available. In Chapter 5, the project concluded with a second contribution. In this final chapter, the prospects of a dialogical theology were utilized to develop creative avenues for continued engagement with and beyond Brunner. Herein, Brunner was taken as the prototype of a dialogical theology – i.e., the prototype of a theological posture that has a primary interest in its implication for relating to God, the world, and others. By pushing Brunner's dialogical impulses beyond the scope of his own content and interest, he can be re-engaged as a productive resource in contemporary theology.

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