

## CHRIST—THE REVELATION OR THE REVEALER? BRUNNER AND REFORMED ORTHODOXY ON THE DOCTRINE OF THE WORD OF GOD

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The great movement in twentieth-century theology known as neo-orthodoxy derived its name from the relationship in which it stood to the theology of the Reformation and to the doctrinal summation of Protestantism accomplished in the scholastic systems of seventeenth-century orthodoxy. As a major representative of neo-orthodoxy, Emil Brunner manifests throughout his systematic works a creative and frequently highly critical contact with earlier Protestant dogmatics. Both in form and in content Brunner's four-part *Dogmatics* reflects—from a post-Kantian perspective—the order and teaching of the classic Reformed and Lutheran systems, particularly as they are presented in the standard nineteenth-century compendia, Heinrich Heppes's *Die Dogmatik der evangelisch-reformierten Kirche* and Heinrich Schmid's *Die Dogmatik der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche*. In many instances, therefore, the success of the neo-orthodox system depended upon its ability to appropriate or to reject and reformulate the structures of earlier Protestant theology.<sup>1</sup>

A specific instance of this relationship between the old and the neo-orthodox theology crucial to the understanding of both occurs in the discussion of theological principles: the prolegomena. There Brunner formulates his doctrine of the Word of God as a debate—largely negative—with the orthodox prolegomena. According to Brunner, a radical change occurred as Protestant theology passed from the age of Reformation into the age of orthodoxy in so far as the scriptural principle of Reformation theology was transformed into a dogmatic identification of the "Word of God" with the words of Scripture. As a corollary of this transformation, the Reformation emphasis on faith in Jesus Christ was changed into a stress on acceptance of doctrine about Christ. Since orthodoxy "under-

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<sup>1</sup>E. Brunner, *Dogmatics* (3 vols.; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1950-1962), falls into four major doctrinal divisions preceded by the prolegomena on "the basis and the task of dogmatics." Brunner's movement from "The Eternal Foundation of the Divine Self-Communication" (Part I, on God and his will) to "The Historical Realization of the Divine Self-Communication" (Part II, on creation, the doctrine of man, and Christ) to "God's Self-Communication as his Self-Representation Through the Holy Spirit" (Part III, on the Church, faith, the order of salvation, and Christian life) to "The Consummation in Eternity of the Divine Self-Communication" (Part IV, on the Christian hope) follows fairly closely, with the exception of the position of the ecclesiology, the orthodox Reformed pattern. Both of the compendia of orthodox theology are available in translation: H. Heppes, *Reformed Dogmatics Set Out and Illustrated from the Sources* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1950), and Schmid, *The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: United Lutheran Publication House, 1875; reissued Minneapolis: Augsburg, n.d.).

stands revelation as revealed doctrine" it all too easily arrives at a system of "correct doctrine."<sup>2</sup> Against this position Brunner poses his own view of revelation, a view that he believes to be closer to the dynamic teaching of the Reformation and to the teaching of the NT itself.

## I. BRUNNER'S DOCTRINE OF THE WORD OF GOD

At the very beginning of Brunner's analysis of Word and doctrine a common ground appears quite briefly between Brunner's teaching and the old orthodoxy: He dwells on the problem of the transcendence of God and its relation to Christian teaching. God "stands outside the circle in which human knowledge and human doctrine—acquired by man's own efforts—can move, and with which they are competent to deal."<sup>3</sup> Human teaching concerning God rightfully claims to be true only when it accurately reflects God's self-revelation. Clearly drawing on the orthodox distinction between *theologia ectypa* and *theologia archetypa*, Brunner notes that "Christian doctrine not only points away from itself to its actual 'subject', but it points away from itself to the divine 'doctrine', i.e. to that which God Himself manifests and 'teaches' about Himself."<sup>4</sup> Common ground, however, soon vanishes.

Brunner flashes a warning signal of the critique he is about to mount when he argues that the concept of the "Word of God" does not provide an easy answer to dogmatic problems, as any divine Word must be of its very nature utterly different from human words or human speech. Since the focus of the NT revelation is Jesus Christ as Word become flesh, the concept of "Word" in the NT indicates more than "speech about" God: The "Word," God's self-communication, no longer is speech but a person, "the man in whom God Himself meets us."<sup>5</sup> If in the OT there was a form of revelation that could rightly be called "Word," that is now past. The form of revelation given in the NT cannot be equated with that given in the OT, for that given under the old covenant was only "preparatory and provisional." The prophetic Word around which OT theology coalesces does in fact utilize speech as the mode of revelation, but this in itself is a limitation: "The provisional nature of this revelation comes out precisely in the fact that God only 'speaks' in it, but does not yet reveal Himself in Personal Presence."<sup>6</sup>

<sup>2</sup>Brunner, *Dogmatics*, 1. 28.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 14; cf. p. 89.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 15. On Brunner's theology in general see *The Theology of Emil Brunner* (ed. W. Kegley; New York: Macmillan, 1962) and on this particular point the essay from that volume by R. Hauge, "Truth as Encounter" (pp. 133-154). Also see E. Brunner, *The Divine Human Encounter* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1943), later revised, enlarged and retitled in the new English edition *Truth as Encounter*; and *Revelation and Reason: The Christian Doctrine of Faith and Knowledge* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1946). Brunner's polemic against orthodoxy appears strongly in the latter volume (pp. 8-11). In all of these works Brunner describes revelation as divine self-communication as opposed to the communication of truths about God.

<sup>6</sup>Brunner, *Dogmatics*, 1. 16. This sense of discontinuity between the testaments in mode of revelation

Nor can the concept of revelation rest easy with the notion of a purely static deposit of truth, either in the form of a prophetic Word or in the form of a witness to the Word Incarnate. The Christian today is not "directly confronted by the witness of the Apostles." That witness comes to us as mediated by the Church in the preaching of the gospel, and in order to be revelation properly so called it must be received by faith.

If there is no faith, then the revelation has not been consummated: it has not actually happened, so to speak, but is only at the first stage. All objective forms of revelation need the "subject" in whom they become revelation . . . Our spiritual forefathers used to call this the "*testimonium spiritus sancti*"; but we ourselves, in accordance with the Scriptures, will not deny the title of "revelation" to this "*testimonium spiritus internum*".<sup>8</sup>

In the eschaton, when we shall see God face to face, we will "look beyond the 'Word made flesh'" only to realize that the ultimate meaning of revelation is "Emmanuel, God with us," in a completely fulfilled live-giving communion.<sup>9</sup>

For the present, however, the center of God's self-disclosure must be Christ Jesus, the Word made flesh. This means that for us, as distinct from the form of revelation given under the old covenant, the revelation is a Person and not a Word. We cannot make as the ground of our theology the assumption that God has spoken to us a definitive form of doctrine as revelation. The revelation, argues Brunner, is Jesus Christ himself:

He is not a "Word"; He is not "speech", or a summary of sentences like the prophetic utterances; and it is this very fact which is joyfully proclaimed: that for this very reason, just because He is quite different from a speech, namely, God Himself present, acting in His own Person, that He is the consummation of the revelation of God. For what the prophets could "only" say, towards which their word could "only" point, as something which was yet to come, a Perfection yet to be realized in the future, has now happened: Emmanuel, God with us. *God* Himself, not only a Word about Him, is now here.<sup>10</sup>

Word can only be a "function" of a subject, but Jesus is a subject himself: He is the revelation, of which his words are only a part.<sup>11</sup>

According to Brunner, orthodox theology failed to grasp this great conception in the Johannine prologue, the Word made flesh, and held to the superseded

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raises a major hermeneutical issue, which Brunner recognizes and treats in *Dogmatics*, 2. 193-208. In the literature on Brunner the most significant theological analysis and critique is P. K. Jewett, *Emil Brunner's Concept of Revelation* (London: J. Clarke, 1954); see pp. 127-136, 168-172 for an examination of Brunner's doctrine of Word. Cf. also E. P. Heideman, *The Relation of Revelation and Reason in E. Brunner and H. Bavinck* (Assen, 1958) 11-18.

<sup>7</sup>Brunner, *Dogmatics*, 1. 19.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 19-20.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 24.

OT view of Word as the revelation of doctrine. In the advent of Jesus all spoken words about God—even the prophetic Word—are manifest as “indirect” revelation, as witness to the Christ, the Incarnate Word. Consequently the “‘Word’ of the Bible” cannot be equated any longer with the “Word of God,” and the doctrine of verbal inspiration can no longer be held.<sup>12</sup> At this point the movement from revelation via Scripture as witness to Christian doctrine becomes if not exceedingly difficult at least utterly subjective. In answer to the question “How does legitimate human speech about Jesus, about God, arise out of revelation, which is Jesus Christ Himself, and is therefore not a spoken word?” Brunner can only point to the internal witness of the Spirit, which convinces the hearer of the gospel that Jesus is truly the Christ.<sup>13</sup>

When the “parabolic dress” of the NT references to this inward working of the Spirit is removed and the Spirit’s witness is described in terms of the “Theory of Knowledge” (by which Brunner very clearly means a neo-Kantian epistemology), we understand that the Spirit “has taken on Himself the manner of existence and the form of action of human spirit-activity.”<sup>14</sup> The Spirit points directly and only to Christ. Thus both the witnessing activity of the Spirit and the revelation itself, the Word made flesh, belong entirely to the phenomenal realm. The Kantian rift between noumenal and phenomenal is maintained, for now the *terminus ad quem* of the entire historical self-manifestation of God is not a knowledge of transcendent God, as the orthodox theory of revelation based on the prophetic Word had indicated, but an acknowledgment of Jesus Christ as the fulness of God’s revelation. In Christ God makes himself present in human form, and the Spirit of God in “the form of action of human spirit-activity” bears witness to this presence.<sup>15</sup>

This identification of Jesus as the revelation appears also in the fact, Brunner continues, that the apostles, unlike the prophets, never make the claim that their teaching is dictated by the Spirit and never identify their words with the fulness of God’s revelation. The seeming correlation of the OT mode of revelation with the theory of verbal inspiration breaks against the witness of the NT: The revelation goes beyond speech to acts and ultimately to the person of Jesus, whose meaning no words can “exhaust” or encapsulate.<sup>16</sup> Insofar as “the point of identity between the revelation of the Person and the word in human speech” is the witness of the Spirit and the Spirit’s witness is qualitatively the same for us

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., pp. 24-28. In addition to holding an OT view of revelation, the orthodox—according to Brunner—fell prey to the “alien influence” of Greek philosophy and, like the early Church fathers, confused the results of non-Biblical Logos-speculation with the Biblical witness to the Word. Brunner’s main point, however, is the transition from the OT conception of Word as speech to the NT view of Word as Person.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 30. Note the similarity of this statement to Ernst Cassirer’s eloquent encapsulation of the neo-Kantian epistemology: “The highest objective truth that is accessible to the spirit is ultimately the form of its own activity” (*The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955], 1. 111).

<sup>15</sup>Brunner, *Dogmatics*, 1. 31; cf. p. 30.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 32.

today as it was for the apostles, we can neither claim verbal inspiration for the apostolic testimony nor make it the "basis and the object of faith." The apostolic testimony to Jesus as the revelation can only be "the means of faith."<sup>17</sup> Modern criticism of Scripture substantiates this argument, Brunner adds, since it has shown (1) that the primary form of Christian witness was the gospel narrative concerning the Christ and (2) that the narrative made no claim to be an "objective" account but rather a testimony to Jesus as the Christ. "This fact is so significant because it shows very clearly that the essential Gospel, the 'Word of God', the revelation, is contained, not in the words spoken by the witness, but in that to which he bears witness."<sup>18</sup>

As a final point in his redefinition of the "Word of God" and its relation to doctrine, Brunner strives to separate not only Word and doctrine but also witness and doctrine. The NT witness takes the form of "personal response" to the revelation, whereas doctrine takes the form of "reflective speech about God" as "an object of instruction." The NT witness demands the answer of faith and not theoretical reflection about God. Witness to Jesus as the revelation, unlike the rejected conception of Word as revealed doctrine, makes its address not to the intellect but to "the spirit of the man of prayer."<sup>19</sup> Scripture remains the only source of human knowledge concerning God's revelation and the test against which all doctrine must be measured, but it cannot be the unconditional norm of doctrine. That norm can only be the revelation itself, Jesus the Christ, as witnessed to us by the Spirit.<sup>20</sup>

## II. PROTESTANT ORTHODOXY ON THE WORD OF GOD

Brunner's analysis of the doctrinal problem of the "Word of God" leaves us with a series of crucial questions concerning the doctrinal position of orthodoxy. Did the orthodox simply adopt an OT doctrine of revelation as proper for the Church? Did they fail to consider the Johannine identification of Jesus as the "Word"? And did they, as a consequence, fail to see any difficulty in formulating doctrine? Beyond this, if the orthodox could not conceive of Jesus as "the revelation" what conception of his place in the NT witness do they offer? How do they relate Jesus to the scriptural Word of God—that is, how does Jesus Christ stand in relation to the prophetic Word of the OT and the apostolic teaching of the NT? And finally, what if anything does the orthodox doctrine have to offer to theological epistemology?

When we enter the thought world of Protestant orthodoxy we encounter, without doubt, a different perspective on theology than that presented in the *Dogmatics* of Emil Brunner, but the difference in perspective does not rest on any sense of ease in the formulation of correct doctrine. Many of the orthodox systems are prefaced by discussions of the theological task in which the distance

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 33; cf. p. 29.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., pp. 38-42.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 49.

between God and man, the faultiness of human perception, and the limits of human reason appear as barriers to the full and certain knowledge of God.<sup>21</sup> "The subject of theology is infinite and understood by no one," wrote Polanus, "except insofar as he manifests himself."<sup>22</sup> The theologian does not pretend to approach in his formulations the archetypal theology that is God's knowledge of himself. Human theology in its positive relation to the divine self-knowledge can only be ectypal, a shadow or image of the archetype. It is, moreover, a lesser ectypal theology than either the "*theologia unionis*" that belongs to the mind of Jesus as a man or the angelic theology or the theology of the blessed saints in heaven: Human theology is that knowledge of God accessible to the sinful and limited human pilgrim on this earth.<sup>23</sup> Some of the orthodox also distinguish between a revealed theology communicated to sinful humanity considered in itself and this human theology considered in actuality, in the human subject—where it is further limited by the intellectual powers of the individual.<sup>24</sup> The only guarantee of the truth of the *theologia viatorum*, the pilgrim theology, is its correspondence to the truth of divine relationship as given in Scripture.

Scripture, therefore, and not the revelation of God in nature must be the cognitive foundation (*principium cognoscendi*) of theology. The orthodox, it is true, point to the *Deus dixit* of the prophetic books and define Scripture as the inspired self-revelation of God, the Word of God spoken to man, the perfectly given ectypal knowledge of the divine nature and will accommodated to the human mode of knowing. But this definition does not ultimately function apart from revelatory work of the Son of God, the epistemological focus of Christian theology on Christ, or the Johannine determination of Christ as Word Incarnate.<sup>25</sup> According to Turretin, God is the object of theology insofar as he is covenanted in Christ and revealed in the Word.<sup>26</sup> "The Scripture," wrote Edward

<sup>21</sup>See Heppe, *Dogmatics* 1-9; Schmid, *Doctrinal* 16-17, 35-38.

<sup>22</sup>A. Polanus von Polansdorf, *Syntagma theologiae christianae* (Geneva, 1617), I.ii: "Subiectum Theologiae est infinitum nemini cognitum, nisi quatenus sese retegat." Polanus, like the other thinkers cited directly in the above essay, was Reformed. Lutheran sources have been cited for comparison in the footnotes. I have adopted this procedure for the sake of clarity in argument, in view of the fact that Brunner himself was Reformed and due to doctrinal differences between Reformed and Lutheran orthodox theology. Concerning these doctrinal differences, see notes below.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., I.iii-ix; cf. Heppe, *Dogmatics* 5; Schmid, *Doctrinal* 16. For a fine study of the Lutheran position regarding these distinctions and the difference between Lutheran and Reformed on the *theologia unionis* see R. D. Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism: A Study of Theological Prolegomena* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1970) 167-173.

<sup>24</sup>Cf. Polanus, *Syntagma*, I.xii, "De Theologia viatorum absolute dicta," with I.xiii, "De Theologia viatorum secundum quid, quid sit & de vero genere eius"; J. Scharpius, *Cursus theologicus* (Geneva, 1620), 1. col. 3, where the "*theologia supernaturalis hominibus communicata*" is viewed both "in se" and "in subiecto."

<sup>25</sup>On this point the analysis in Heppe, *Dogmatics* 13-18, is inaccurate insofar as it drives a wedge between the early Reformed doctrine and orthodoxy, claiming that the latter simply equate Word and Scripture; cf. Schmid, *Doctrinal* 38-44, and the excellent corrective offered by Preus, *Theology* 268-272.

<sup>26</sup>F. Turretinus, *Institutio theologiae elencticae* (Geneva, 1679-1685; new edition, Edinburgh, 1847), I.v.4: "Sed quando Deus proponitur ut Objectum Theologiae, non spectandus est simpliciter ut Deus in se . . . sed ut est *Deus noster* id est foederatus in Christo, quomodo se nobis in Verbo patefecit."

Leigh, “may well be called *the Revelation of Christ*.”<sup>27</sup> Indeed, when the orthodox spoke of the Word of God they had in mind four interrelated significations of “Word”: *Verbum Dei* could indicate the spoken word of God, both in the sense of Heb 13:7—a word of testimony—and in the sense of the *verbum agraphon*, the unwritten Word spoken by God to the patriarchs. *Verbum Dei* also indicated the written Word given of old to the Jews and preserved as “Scripture.” Beyond this, however, the Word is a divine spirit received, the Word in us (cf. 1 John 2:14)—and finally it is Christ himself, whose name is the Word of God and who is “the essential Word of God.”<sup>28</sup>

In this last concept the orthodox follow very closely the doctrine of Calvin in relating Christ, the *Logos*, the essential Word, to the Word of God written. Christ’s prophetic office manifests him as the Word from “the bosom of God” and as “the principal author of prophecy.”<sup>29</sup> Thus for the orthodox the primary implication of the identification of Jesus as the Word is the placement of Christ at the center of the work of revelation, just as the identification of Jesus as the Christ places him at the center of the work of salvation. Christ “was the prophet of the church equally in all ages” revealing the Word of salvation through the work of his Spirit in the prophets and then, in his coming in the flesh, fulfilling the OT Word and revealing to his Church “the heavenly mysteries of the coun-

<sup>27</sup>E. Leigh, *A Treatise of Divinity* (London, 1647), I.ix (p. 189); cf. Z. Ursinus, *Loci theologici traditi in Academia Heidelbergensi*, locus I: “Neque aliud vult Spiritus sanctus, cum uno verbo dicit, Christum in tota Scriptura doceri, & hunc solum in ea quaerendum esse” in *Opera theologica* (ed. Q. Reuter; Heidelberg, 1612), I. col. 417.

<sup>28</sup>L. Rissenius, *Summa Theologiae didactico-elencticae* (Amsterdam, 1695; Frankfurt/Leipzig, 1731), II.i.ii: “Principium cognoscendi est Verbum Dei. Verbum notat (1) Verbum dictum. Heb. 13.v.7. . . . (2) Verbum scriptum. Rom.3.v.2. . . . (3) Animo receptum. I Ioh.2.14. . . . (4) Ipsum Christum. Apoc.19.13.” On the distinction between essential and written Word see Leigh, *Treatise* I.ii. Almost all of the orthodox employ the historical distinction between a pre-Mosaic *verbum agraphon* and the Mosaic inscripturated Word or *verbum engraphon*; cf. Turretin, *Institutio* II.ii.3; Rissen, *Summa* II.v; J. Marckius, *Compendium theologiae christianae didactico-elencticum* (Amsterdam, 1690), II.iii; F. Burmann, *Synopsis theologiae & speciatim oeconomiae foederum Dei* (Geneva, 1678), I.iii.9. Burmann’s discussion in I.iii begins by relating the eternal *Verbum Dei* to the divine communication of Word in the various historical dispensations. A different set of terms also significant to the discussion of Word was proposed by Scharpius, *Cursus*, I. col. 6-7: Word as the Son of God himself (*sermo emphytos*), as the God-given faculty in the creature by which knowledge of God is received (*sermo endiathetos*), and the Word sent forth by God, communicated spiritually to man (*sermo prophorikos*).

<sup>29</sup>E. Leigh, *A Systeme or Body of Divinity* (London, 1664), V.v (p. 585). Similarly Turretin in his *locus de officio Christi mediatorio* can speak of Christ, according to the prophetic office, as “*Logos per quem Deus nos alloquitur*” and then define Christ’s prophetic office as the explication and application of the law, the inculcation of the promise, and the revelation of the future; see *Institutio* XIV.vii.4; cf. XIV.ii.6. Even more clearly J. Maccovius comments: “Est autem Propheticum officium Christi, totum verbum Dei, nobis tum externe revelatum, tum interne” and, at greater length, “*Modus proinde Prophetici officii Christi est duplex; Immediatus*, quo Christus per se absque hominum opera, in Vet. Testamento Patriarchas & Prophetas per visiones, oracula, Urim, & Thumim, & per somnia instituit; in Novo autem Testamento etiam externa voce humanum genus docuit, Act.10.36. *Mediatus*, quo Christus per Patriarchas & Prophetas in Vet. Testamento ecclesiam instituit, verbi & sacramentorum ministerio, 2 Cor.3.3” in *Loci communes theologici* (Amsterdam, 1658), chap. lx. Cf. J. Calvin, *Institutio christianae religionis*, I.xiii.7. These considerations of course in no way conflict with the doctrine of the *munus propheticum* as the fulfillment and end of prophecy; cf. Calvin, *Institutio* II.xv.2, with Turretin, *Institutio* XIV.vii.17-18. In short, the unity of the written Word as resting on the eternal Word in no way denies the progressive character of revelation.

sels of the will of God."<sup>30</sup> For the orthodox, Christ in his prophetic office is the source of revelation—he is the Revealer who alone has seen and known God, who has come from the “bosom of the Father” to declare the promises of God to mankind.<sup>31</sup>

Christ is, therefore, both the Revelation itself—the fulfillment of the Word of salvation—and the perfect Revealer, whose incarnation served not only to accomplish the work of salvation but also to manifest definitively the will of God. The epistemological point made by the orthodox is that Christ as Revealer can alone present the truth of God because he is one with God, the essential Word of the Father. Christ as Revealer crosses the epistemological divide between infinite God and finite man and also insures the continuity between the OT and NT revelation.<sup>32</sup>

This means that a distinction must be made between the Word as the focus and content of the scriptural revelation and the work of the Spirit as the way in which that content was conveyed to the human authors. Whereas the orthodox would apply a single and uniform conception of inspiration to both testaments, which—in view of its pivotal use of 2 Tim 3:16; 1 Pet 1:10-11—can hardly be called a purely OT view, they would also describe the progressive revelation of God's promise as coming to fulfillment only in the Word Incarnate of the NT.

<sup>30</sup>J. Owen, *CHRISTOLOGIA: Or, A Declaration of the Glorious Mystery of the Person of Christ* (1679), in *The Works of John Owen* (ed. W. H. Goold; London, 1850-1853), 1, 90, 93. Cf. Calvin, *Institutio* I.xiii.7-9. Similarly A. Walaeus, *Locos communes s. theologiae*, in *Opera omnia* (Leyden, 1643), 1, 118, col. 2; 239, col. 1.

<sup>31</sup>Owen, *CHRISTOLOGIA* 92. There is a major difference between the Reformed and the Lutherans on this point: Whereas the Reformed early on spoke of a prophetic office and developed the doctrine at length, the Lutherans did not. Lutheran orthodoxy does not generally deal with a *munus propheticum* prior to the incarnation (cf. Schmid, *Doctrinal* 340-342) but rather emphasizes in the *locus de scriptura* itself the fact that Christ as Word is the author of the Scriptures; e.g., J. Gerhard, *Locorum theologicorum* (Jena, 1610), I.i.7, on Scripture as Word of God; I.ii.12, 17 on the triune God as the efficient cause of Scripture and on the Son as Word effecting the written Word in the economy of the divine work *ad extra*. Careful differentiation must be made between the orthodox references to the Son as eternal Word and to Scripture as written Word (which accords with Calvin's view of the Son as *aeternus et essentialis* . . . *Patris sermo* and Scripture as *verbum*) and the neo-orthodox view of Brunner, which refers to the Son only as Word and to the Scriptures as “witness.” Nor can we follow Edward Dowey in arguing that Calvin wished to distinguish Christ and a scriptural witness by making a distinction between *sermo* (Christ, *Logos*) and *verbum* (Scripture). For though Calvin surely preferred to render *logos* as *sermo*, he quite frequently used *sermo* and *verbum* interchangeably as references to Christ; cf. E. A. Dowey, *A Commentary on the Confession of 1667 and An Introduction to “The Book of Confessions”* (Philadelphia, 1968), 100; Calvin, *Institutio* II.xiv.1, 7. Indeed Calvin's distinction between the Son as eternal Word and Wisdom of God and the written, scriptural Word, like the orthodox distinction, points to the close relation of the Scriptures to the divine wisdom on the paradigm of archetypal and ectypal knowledge noted above and, in terms of this paradigm, undergirds the doctrine of verbal inspiration, the Spirit providing the link between the eternal Word and the Word written and providing also the guarantee of the truth of the Word written. For the Spirit who inspires the penmen of Scripture is also the Spirit of Christ, the “Spirit of the Word” (cf. *Institutio* I.xiii.7).

<sup>32</sup>E.g. B. Keckermann, *Systema ss. theologiae* (Geneva, 1614), I.iv (col. 87), where we find a distinction between the Son as *Logos internus* and *Logos externus*, the former indicating the mind and self-knowledge of God and the latter being the explanation and interpretation of the eternal will of God toward his elect—that is, the Father made known through his image, his only Son. Keckermann here cites the Johannine prologue with emphasis on v 18. Cf. Owen, *CHRISTOLOGIA* 74.



Thus John Owen could argue that

the Spirit, in the declaration of the New Testament, gave out his mind and will in a way of more liberty and glory. (2 Cor. iii) The expressness and immediacy of revelation was the same; but the manner of it related more to that glorious liberty in fellowship and communion with the Father, whereunto believers had then an access provided them by Jesus Christ. (Heb. ix.8, x.19, 20, xii.22-24)<sup>33</sup>

Outside of Christ there can be “no understanding of the divine truths of the Word,” for Christ is “the life and soul of all such truths.”<sup>34</sup>

Under the OT dispensation, prior to his assumption of human nature Christ taught the patriarchs and prophets immediately by oracles and visions. Even so, the prophecies of the OT have Christ as their primary referent. In this activity, then, the preincarnate Logos shows himself to be the Logos *incarnandus*: His servant-work under the old dispensation points toward his public prophetic office in the new covenant.<sup>35</sup> According to the *Synopsis purioris theologiae* written in 1624 by Leiden professors Walaëus, Rivetus, Poliander and Thysius,

prophecy is the function by which Christ instructs his people in the truth of doctrine legal and evangelical and, with the seal of his miracles, cleanses both sections of it from the corruptions of false teachers, both by himself directly, and indirectly by other assistants of his Word equipped with the gifts necessary for that purpose; the earlier of whom are by synecdoche comprised under the name of prophets, the latter under that of apostles, Mt. 5:25ff; Jn. 17:8.<sup>36</sup>

An alteration in the mode of Christ's prophetic office occurs following his baptism and assumption of office in his human nature: Now the divine and the human are conjoined in the instruction of the apostles. Thus—as we saw in Brunner's doctrine—the acts and particularly the miracles and saving work of Christ relate to the prophetic office as the confirmation of teaching and the fulfillment of prophecy, but here the fulfillment of prophecy reflects also the correlation of the work of the Word incarnate with the ancient work of the Word.<sup>37</sup> The orthodox thus more clearly bind the OT to the NT than does Brunner and manifest more surely the Christological focus of the whole of Scripture.

### III. ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS

In comparing the theologies of orthodoxy and of neo-orthodoxy we encountered two fundamentally different paradigms for describing the revelatory and saving activity of the Word. In the orthodox paradigm we saw two distinct but parallel activities of the essential Word of God, the Logos: The first, which Warfield would call “inscripturation,” is the activity of the essential (and personal or

<sup>33</sup>J. Owen, *Of the Divine Original, Authority, Self-Evidencing Light, and Power of the Scriptures* (1659), in *Works*, 16. 299.

<sup>34</sup>Owen, *CHRISTOLOGIA* 82.

<sup>35</sup>Heppe, *Dogmatics* 455.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 454.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 455-457.

hypostatical) Word and Wisdom of God accommodating its truth to the forms and patterns of human speech. As Johannes Scharpius noted, the *theologia archetypa* was the divine self-knowledge and, as the mind of God having God himself as its content, was God himself.<sup>38</sup> *Theologia ectypa* or supernatural and revealed theology communicated to mankind in Scripture is the written Word of God insofar as it is the self-communication of the Word by means of his Spirit. Insofar as this activity, in addition to the earthly teaching of the Christ, belongs to the prophetic office of the Mediator it is bound to the incarnation and fulfilled by it. Accordingly the orthodox viewed the incarnation of the Word as somehow parallel to inscription and as in itself a revelatory activity. In incarnation the essential Word of God accommodates itself not merely to human speech but to the whole of human nature, taking the form of a servant. As the fulfillment and center of the written Word, the Word incarnate is the Revelation of God—but in his function as prophet and teacher the Christ is also the final Revealer of God.

Protestant orthodoxy therefore read and interpreted the Johannine prologue and, for that matter, the first several verses of 1 John quite differently from the way in which they were read and interpreted by Brunner. Brunner makes very little use of John 1:14 in his Christology and much use of that text in his epistemology. On the Christological plane he tells us that the Word becoming flesh must be regarded as an early alternative to the virgin birth and must not be harmonized with that Matthean or Lucan doctrine under the orthodox rubric of *assumptio carnis*. On the epistemological side of the issue he implies that the enfleshment of the Word places the revelation of God beyond words.<sup>39</sup> This interpretation of the Johannine theology occurs not only in the prolegomena but also in Brunner's Christology: Jesus can be viewed as Revealer not in a prophetic sense but in a personal sense—rather than a revelatory teacher he is a revelatory life.<sup>40</sup>

This means that Brunner's conception of the prophetic office bears little resemblance to the doctrine of Reformed orthodoxy. Since the prophet is a bearer of God's Word who recognizes its source as other than himself, the Christ whose Person is the Word cannot rightly be called a prophet. Jesus may be called "the historical Revealer," but he reveals himself, and the "prophetic" or teaching aspect of his work functions primarily to direct believers to his priestly work. Brunner nowhere in his exposition relates the prophetic office of Christ to the preincarnate Word and has nothing to say of the relation of Christ as essential Word to the OT Word of prophecy.<sup>41</sup> In the Christological section of Brunner's system, as in the prolegomena, only a tenuous and subjectively apprehended

<sup>38</sup>Scharpius, *Cursus*, 1. col. 2.

<sup>39</sup>Brunner, *Dogmatics*, 2. 350-360; 202; cf. 1. 23-26.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 2. 275; cf. Hauge, "Truth as Encounter" 140-141.

<sup>41</sup>Brunner, *Dogmatics*, 2. 273-281. Brunner follows the Reformed paradigm of the threefold office (cf. p. 273) but explicates the *munus propheticum* more after the Lutheran fashion (cf. Schmid, *Doctrinal* 340-342), thereby losing the implication of the office for Scripture as a whole and failing to adjust his system by stressing the revelatory work of the pre-incarnate Logos, after the Lutheran pattern, in the prolegomena.

witness conjoins Word of God with Scripture.<sup>42</sup> This contrasts with the orthodox insistence on recognition of the relation of Word and Spirit as grounded on the trinitarian presupposition of a double procession, thereby conjoining not only the work of the Spirit inspiring the authors of Scripture with Word and Wisdom of the Godhead but also linking the inward witness of the Spirit to Christ as Word, as part of Christ's prophetic office.<sup>43</sup>

The key to understanding the difference between Brunner's neo-orthodox prolegomena and the older orthodox prolegomena is, therefore, the relation of the preliminary doctrine of the Word of God to its analogue in the Christological locus. Reformed orthodoxy was deeply aware of the soteriological and epistemological necessity of a Mediator to bridge the gap between God and man and of the equally great necessity of the sole and gracious initiative from God's side. Distinctions such as those between archetypal and ectypal knowledge of God, the essential Word and the Word sent forth accommodated to human needs—both in the inscripturation of divine truth and in the incarnation itself—are when viewed correctly more than simple distinctions: They are also descriptions of the manner in which Almighty God performs the humanly impossible but soteriologically necessary work of opening himself to our humanity. In this series of theological distinctions the orthodox attempted to represent correctly both the ontic and noetic poles of the NT doctrine of Word and to demonstrate the interrelationship between essential and therefore hypostatic divine Truth and the divine work of manifesting that truth both in teaching and in the Person of the Mediator.

As R. H. Lightfoot has argued, the import both of the Johannine prologue and of many verses within the fourth gospel is that mankind unaided can neither hear nor see God, this being within the power of the Logos alone, to the end that "all other sight or knowledge of God is and must be mediated through Him."<sup>44</sup> On this principle Lightfoot could interpret the work of the Baptist (John 1:6-8) as representing the work of all historical witnesses to the Logos and, equally, as the work of the pre-incarnate Logos.<sup>45</sup> This respected modern exegete found in the Johannine prologue, therefore, a pattern very much like that described by the orthodox in their presentation of the doctrine of the Word and of the prophetic office of Christ. Significantly this pattern—particularly as it appears in the highly developed theological epistemology of orthodoxy—recognizes a cognitive gap between God and man much like the Kantian separation of noumenal and phenomenal. Scripture and, following Scripture, the theology both of the Reformation and of orthodoxy set about describing the manner in which God overcomes this separation.

<sup>42</sup>Brunner, *Dogmatics*, 2. 201-202, 341-342.

<sup>43</sup>Cf. Leigh, *Système*, I.ii (p. 7); F. Gomarus, *Disputationes theologicae*, in *Opera theologica omnia* (Amsterdam, 1644), pars III, disp. II, thesis xiii: "Auctor est Deus, Pater, Filius, Spiritus sanctus."

<sup>44</sup>R. H. Lightfoot, *St. John's Gospel: A Commentary* (ed. C. F. Evans; London: Oxford University, 1956) 161; cf. pp. 81-82. Lightfoot also (pp. 51 ff.) renders highly improbable Brunner's attempt to rule out all "Greek" and "speculative" issues when addressing the Johannine concept of Logos; cf. Brunner, *Dogmatics*, 1. 27-63.

<sup>45</sup>Lightfoot, *Commentary* 81.

Brunner's view of Christ as the Revelation, as Word so become flesh that he no longer points beyond himself to the transcendent, coupled with Brunner's subjective view of the apprehension of God's Word in Scripture reinforces rather than surmounts the Kantian noumenal-phenomenal rift. This view rests upon a distinction between the manner of revelation in the OT and the NT determined not so much by an internal distinction in Scripture as by an insistence that "Word" be univocal in significance and a failure to recognize the orthodox distinction between revelation and inspiration. In Brunner's epistemologically determined view of the Word of God, Christ remains the focus of the scriptural revelation and ultimately the content of the revelation, but he can no longer be considered the "author" of the written Word of God, insofar as Brunner recognizes no objective correlation between the essential Word of God and the Word as written and does not deal with the necessarily trinitarian work of the Godhead in producing the written Word. Indeed he cannot, since for Brunner what is written cannot finally be "Word of God."

On the side of orthodoxy we encounter a doctrine of verbal inspiration—but it is not a doctrine set in isolation from the Christological presupposition underlying both epistemology and doctrine.<sup>46</sup> Rather than determine that either Christ alone or Scripture alone can be "Word," the orthodox present a rich and profound conception of the various levels of meaning given to "Word"—*Verbum Dei*—*Logos tou Theou* by the Scriptures. In so doing they present a challenge to any limited epistemology, whether that of fallen and sinful man locked into his false and corrupt views of God, religion and worship, or that of the neo-Kantian man locked into the phenomenal world with no certain knowledge of the transcendent. The orthodox doctrine of the Word of God and Scripture undergirds a theology of mediation in which both of those barriers are broken down. Whereas Brunner's theology concentrates on the way in which God in Christ has entered the human situation and has created a saving history in Christ, the orthodox theology balances this historical or horizontal motif with a vertical, ontological and causal motif that not only grounds the historical saving activity but continually points the believer from the historical toward the transcendent.

The orthodox, with few exceptions, demonstrate a far richer conception of the meaning of the Word of God than one would expect from Brunner's critique. Indeed it is Brunner's conception of revelation as divine self-communication that appears a bit one-sided and restrictive: God may communicate life and hope to mankind, but the rigid epistemological firmament separating the noumenal and phenomenal levels of the Kantian universe prevents him from revealing—even in Christ, the Word Incarnate—the supramundane truth concerning his transcendent Being. In this context Brunner's caveat against "intellectualism" together with his claim that revealed truth cannot also be rational truth eradicate any cognitive relationship between the Logos of God and the logic of man, thereby forfeiting the delicate balance described by orthodoxy between intellectual ac-

<sup>46</sup>On the continuing Christocentrism of Reformed epistemology see my "Duplex Cognito Dei in the Theology of Early Reformed Orthodoxy," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 10/2 (Summer 1979) 51-61. I have examined some of the hermeneutical problems encountered by the orthodox in an article entitled "The Debate Over the 'Vowel Points' and the Crisis in Orthodox Hermeneutics" to appear in a forthcoming issue of *The Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*.

ceptance of God's truth revealed in and by the Word and faithful apprehension of Christ, the Word Incarnate, as Savior.<sup>47</sup> Far from pursuing a course toward an arid intellectualism, the orthodox strove to elucidate in their theology of Word the manner in which God through the several forms taken by his Word addresses savingly all aspects of the human spirit: mind as well as heart. God's Word both demands the witness of faith and presses toward theoretical reflection. For Christ, the Revelation and the Revealer, is both the focus and end of the scriptural Word and the One by whom and in whom the nature and will of God is made manifest.

It is not the intention of this essay to imply that the seventeenth century can become the arbiter of contemporary theological thought, but only to signal the need for a careful reappraisal of orthodox teaching. If the orthodox did produce a theory of verbal inspiration that was in some of its formulations quite mechanical, they nevertheless did not lose sight of the present revelatory character of the Scriptures as Word and they remained aware of the eternal Word to whom, ultimately, the entire Scripture bears witness.<sup>48</sup> We need to be aware that their doctrine of the Word of God represents not an untenable equation of text with Word but an alternative epistemology that, if allowed to speak, raises a significant question concerning the captivity of Brunner's version of neo-orthodoxy to the Kantian theory of knowledge.

<sup>47</sup>Cf. the similar criticism of Brunner's epistemology made by P. Tillich, "Some Questions on Brunner's Epistemology," in *The Theology of Emil Brunner* (p. 106). The issue of a distinction between revealed and rational truth was not overlooked by the orthodox: They chose to set such revealed truth as the two natures of Christ and the Trinity above human reason without declaring them to be unreasonable or nonrational. This was done with the intention of rejecting the theory of "double truth"; see B. Keckermann, "Thesis: Vera Philosophia cum sacra Theologia nusquam pugnat," in *Opera* (Geneva, 1614) 1. col. 68-74.

<sup>48</sup>I find myself, here, very much in accord with Warfield's sense of the continuity between Calvin and orthodoxy and his equally strong sense of the rigidity of some late orthodox formulations of the doctrine of Scripture; cf. "The Divine and Human in the Bible," in *Selected Shorter Writings* (ed. J. E. Meeter; Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1973), 2. 543-544. Warfield's occasional modification of the doctrines of Reformed orthodoxy never meant a departure from the system as a whole.