

Comments on the document by Emil Brunner  
on  
THE ETHICAL REALITY AND FUNCTION OF THE CHURCH  
by  
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Dear Mr. Bennett:

You have been quite patient with me, treating me as a collaborator despite my long silence. It was not that I had not many things on my mind when I read your reports. However, it did not seem advisable to interfere with a discussion on set lines, on a few pages. For my missionary field takes me to strange heathen territory, and forces me to translate more radically than most of our collaborators deem desirable. After reading my friend Brunner's paper, however, I have a ray of hope that my faith may venture forward, too. My old friend with whom I served under Dr. Oldham on the Committee on Secularism, a decade ago, offers such a fine target.

I think that he states two great truths admirably well:

1. That the world waits for the twelve apostles again, and that this time it is not only declericalized but frankly dechristianized.
2. That labor and marriage would still be mysteries of creation and would have to be explored if the world were perfect, whereas the State does belong to the realm of fallen nature only.

Since we agree on that, we are, so to speak, all locked up in one room; and we cannot leave before having agreed on the question: What is Church, Christianity, Redemption? When we or others should go out into the world, some agreement will have to exist over these terms.

Finding myself in this preparatory room with B. I like to register my resounding and emphatic contradiction. This contradiction is directed against three points.

- A. If B. were right, I could not preach the incarnation in history. He makes me feel frustrated.
- B. If B. were right, my own Church (Congregational) would overlook her present greatest sin. He makes me feel childish.
- C. If B. were right, the Church would fail in the realm of social cooperation with non-Christians. He makes me feel superfluous.

This humility of B.'s statement has its admirable side. But it is at best one half of the truth. Mortals that we are, we may focus either on the Protestant Church of 1942 in its eternal task, or on the eternal Church, in its immediate task. But we can't very well do both, at the same time. Brunner has decided to exclude the Roman Christians from any possible collaboration just as my minister who always asserts that "all Christian Churches" collaborate on this or that; and when my wife incredulously asked: "all Churches, the Roman Catholics, too?"

answered, "But, of course, not the Catholics." This man's "of course," is too much for me. Brunner has also decided not to speak of the Unum Necessarium of this hour but to survey academically the general situation.

May I reverse the process? As a Christian, locked up in our room, I know of no general situation, but I do know of the Communion of Saints, Life Everlasting, and the One Catholic Church, and through all times, guided by the Spirit, an incarnating Christ, in this temporal world, unfailingly, in every generation.

The spiritual life of our churches rests on this full contradiction between Brunner and me, between his generalities and my Hic Rhodus. This is the paradox of two foci in one ellipse, between which the spark can fly in polarity and no honeyed agreements or compromises will do us much good until the eternal contrast between Brunner's and my point of view is faced again, in its ineluctable depth. I shall, therefore, concentrate on the opposite focus, deliberately.

A. Against Brunner's lack of belief in Incarnation. (pages 6ff. of his paper)

Brunner's view of Church history is the old partisan view of Anti-Roman 16th century historiography, now extended to all established Churches en bloc: Constantine swallowed the Church. Christianity became fictitious. Edward Schwartz is the last great herald of this untruth. It is untrue for two reasons, one subjective, one objective. The subjective reason is that Emil Brunner owes everything he believes, not to some "source" Christianity but to the martyrs and saints and the dogmatic "quibblers," and the monks and Fathers who all "succumbed to the temptation" and went fictitious in Brunner's terms. Edward Schwartz may describe something external; but a man who exploits a heritage of the times from 300 to 1100, simply by his speaking of "State," and "Church," and "dogma," and "Christ," cannot bury seventeen hundred years by terms like transformation and fictitious and temptation. The itch to kick against that which made us, is unworthy of our short time of grace during which we are still able to discuss our faith.

Objectively, the simple facts as known by every child are these. In 300 and 400, the Church was not swallowed by the emperor, but the Church as the salvation of all sinners, swallowed the greatest sinner of all, the Man-God Caesar. Only "Protestants," in quotation marks, may shun the simple question: What else could she do? Christians cannot, because the Church was founded for sinners.

But if the Church had to baptize Constantine, or his successors, as they asked for it, then by this divine dispensation two steps became imperative:

1. With a man-God, Caesar, not on the altar but in the pew, the dogma of the Trinity had to make it impossible for Arius and his like ever to confuse this former man-God in the pew with the God-man on the altar. All the dogmatic quarrels about the Trinity were the immediate consequence of Caesar's baptism. In other words: the Church did not succumb to the Constantinian temptation, as Brunner says, but overcame it by concentrating on the trinitarian dogma as long as the emperors were dangerously powerful (i.e., from Nicea to Chalcedon) -- The real temptation being Caesar's divinity, not the established Church.
2. Since the ecumenic emperor now sat in his pew, as a believer, in Spain as well as Nicea, in Trier as well as Byzantium, what else could he do but convene ecumenic councils lest he be

forced to worship in contradictory Churches, one and the same man? Actually, this is what happened. The rest is simply a Protestant myth.

As a result, the "State" was born, something of which antiquity never knew since the State of which Brunner speaks right through his paper is the result of Constantine and Augustine and Charlemagne and Alcuin. "State is the Temple-City minus the Temple; and it was Constantine who defrocked the empire so that it could become "State," for the first time. Japan is a Temple-City, in our own days, despite its secular veneer.

The "State" we owe to the Dark Ages, to the saints from Stephen through Ambrosius to Gregory VII, and there is no break in this from the Crucifixion to 1100. The Church produced the "State." And how else could this be? It can only be overlooked if, as E., the theologian of 1942, may afford, we forget the three great eternal battlefronts of the Christian gospel. As the visible Church, as Christendom, and as the invisible Church, we are involved in three different battles at the same time; and these three wars also follow each other, in the history of our faith. Preponderance shifted from one to the other and now to the third, as our story of salvation unfolds. The visible Church fights the many Gods of the heathen, to whom every temple harbors a special God. (This rends GOD.) Christendom fights the many worlds and natures in which the superstitions and national languages divide God's Creation. (The WORLD is rent.) And the invisible remnant, the men of good will, always overcome the cowardice of class and family, clan and race, the pretense of a better pedigree, of a better promise, for their own class. (They rend MAN.) If I may be allowed to curtail the story by a simple list, we find

I. Millennium

Church fights polytheism

II. Millennium

(Church fights ON AGAINST POLYTHEISM) But, besides Christendom fights Polycosmism, in the form of many worlds (as in Hindooism even today are believed) and of many nations.

III. Millennium

Church fights Polytheism (African missions, i.e.) Christianity fights nationalism; but, besides, The Men of Good Will may have to come forward to fight Polydemonism, class war, and racial war, etc.

Polytheism, polycosmism, polydemonism -- of this trilogy, polytheism depraves God, polycosmism depraves the world, and polydemonism depraves man. Obviously, we are not faced by serious polytheists today. (Even the atheists help to that end, since they ask only: God or no God? and the real question: One of Many Gods? is forgotten.) But we are subject to a barrage of racial, class, and sex apostles, white, yellow, brown - youth and anti-youth -- feminists and virilists. The unity of M A N is at stake. But in similar manner, the unity of Nature had been at stake from 1100 down to Einstein and Jeans and to this global war, and some Europeans certainly believe in a polycosmic world (now called a plurality of Lebensräume.) But today, in the eclipse of Christ, science begins to doubt the unity of the world, of nature--a unity which is their Christian heritage. Correspondingly, people actually believe in god-given Lebensräume ("Hemispheres"), which belief is

the projection of pluralism into politics. In other words, polycosmism and pancosmism are the powers of the day, in the minds of men. We Christians have on our side the World Wars as brutal facts which cry like the stones themselves for the unity of God's creation. Therefore we Christians, backed up by the cataclysms of thirty years, probably need these terms polycosmism and polydemonism if we wish to see the incarnation in its true march through the ages. (Protestantism (and that is its "Reformation") pulled the Church back away from the World of Nature, and allowed Christianity to explore it, in a new manner.)

Furthermore, the Church, Christendom, and the Men of Good Will, are faced all three with one and the same temptation which Brunner does not mention but which was much more real under Constantine and Theodosius than Brunner's "State-Christianity." I am speaking of the "pan" solution, in Pantheism, Pancosmism (or the Latin term: Universalism), Pansoulism. Pantheism (to mention, first the form which usually is accepted as the only deviation) seemed such a nice answer to Polytheism, and the Neoplatonists nearly undermined the Church of Christ, from within, because the very teachers of the Church were easily seduced by the Greek ideal world of teaching. The same danger threatens us today in the two related forms of pancosmism and pandemonism. The same scientists whom Christendom employs to unify nature succumb so often to the temptation of throwing God and Man into the universe and treating them as nature, too. And here in this country, most of our ministers are tainted by this pancosmism which proclaims God and Man to be natural.

But God and Man are unnatural. Nature craves for life; Man can commit suicide. Nature is protean and tries to hide; God can reveal.

However, the temptation of the future, for the Church, will be found in the direction not of pantheism or pancosmism but of pandemonism. That is to say, since so many vital urges rend us, let's make "vitality" and "life" our God. We hear already that inspiration, vitality, prophecy, are called good in themselves.

Why it should be a compliment to be called "stimulating," I do not know. But we do consider it a compliment, in this world of Hollywood and pandemonium. I repeat, then, why I cannot make use of Brunner's inner clerical distinction of Corpus Christi and Corpus Christianum, but must come forward with the terms promulgated by history itself which are three:

Polytheism fought by the Church as visible Church among the pagans, with the temptation of pantheism luring her.

Polycosmism, fought by Christianity among the men of the world, with the temptation of "Naturalism," pancosmism, luring many.

Polydemonism, fought by all men of good will among the clans and races of Man, with pandemonium as a temptation luring many.

As a result, we know today - and not only believe - that God is one, and that the World is one. God has become a singular. And all scientific discoveries about the nature of the world are all pooled and made common property. These are two tremendous achievements to which few people give much thought. On the other hand, very few believe that M A N is one. This, then, becomes the immediate spiritual issue for the eternal Church. For the visible Church will lose her grip on the pagans, and Christendom will lose its grip on science; astrologers and Buddhists, Gods and Natures, will multiply again; if we now do not take the next step and learn to embody the unity of Man.

Hence, the history of our salvation so far is of the essence in coping with the present. And the despair about history which Brunner preaches, is the deepest

cause why the Churches are impotent. Since for so many centuries, they believed in the absence of God, the present century does not believe in God's presence.

B. The Protestant deficiency is heightened by Brunner.

The Churches, under the domination of scientific professionals, have abandoned any claim on criticising the actions of their members and have concentrated their intellectual work on education and Sunday School. In my various activities as church member, as a deacon and otherwise, I was expected to pay, to pray, to speak, etc. But not one of my ministers ever admitted that a doctor could be seriously in trouble. My attempts to find any help miserably failed. On the other hand, these same ministers will "stimulate" the children in Sunday School to cope with any Christian topic. This prodding of the young and this avoiding the mature, has produced the sin of Protestantism against human nature of which we suffer today in our schools and colleges, in the army, and in politics. Protestants have withheld nothing from the babes and sucklings, and left a dearth and desert for the time span of maturity. The Churches like to declaim on marriage and labor problems where they have a good conscience, but they do not weed out the sweet candy from their Sunday Schools, and they do not study man as "unnatural," and therefore entitled to a slow progress in the mysteries of our Creed. Education, as meaning the perfect emergence of one life span and life-cycle at its perfection, is not handled by the Churches with any insight into the darkness which is necessary for growth in a soul as well as in the soil. The Protestants in their carritch (catechism), treat man as nature, and for this reason, their protests against the treatment of man by natural science remains unconvincing.

The very nature of the educational process is misinterpreted by Church practice. And in this respect, the "Church" has become emmeshed in the modern heresy according to which teachers and students, old and young, are supposedly immersed in the spirit of the same times. If, however, this were true, if we were meant to be all contemporaries, the Church would deteriorate into a mere association of contemporaries, a voluntary gathering of individuals for a common purpose. Then, we shall have clubs, not Churches.

While Brunner rightly stresses the fact that we cannot have established Churches in the future, this does not solve the problem of child baptism, the continuity through all generations. From Charlemagne to Niemöller, the State tried to enforce Christianity and now, perhaps, the parents may resign themselves and say: I shall not force my child into a Church. He shall decide for himself. This negative decision (never practised by the Sects, by the way), would still remain a Christian decision. It would be excusable only if the parent felt that in this manner, the child might end up in the Church one day, only more passionately and affectionately. To abstain from proselytizing moulds the next generation just as compellingly as to introduce it from the start into the Church as a born member. His soul is inspired, one way or the other. It does make a difference, after all, whether a boy be called Baldur or Abraham, with his given name.

Brunner speaks of the State only. From the viewpoint of the new-born, it makes less of an impression who gave him his name than which name was given him, in the cradle. Whether a clan or a state call a man "Mac" is unimportant compared to the fact that he becomes a "Mac." Hence, the Church must make a decision over two generations of a man's soul life: one during which he is given his name and truth and role; the other, in which he translates and substantiates it. The Church exists only when both generations are cared for. It seems to me that Brunner sees a temptation to which the Church succumbed, in

its intrinsic paradox of serving all the ages of man. And Peter, John, and Paul could be accused and, as Brunner well knows, have been accused of the same ecclesiastical compulsion of which he accuses Constantine and Theodosius. Parents were compelled to have their children baptized from the outset. Hence, if we follow Brunner's logic, the Church succumbed to power politics from the very beginning. Conclusion: there never was an untainted Church. The Church evaporates as an illusion of the last 1910 years. In that case, tradition becomes meaningless. If the next generation cannot trust predecessors, how can we intone even the Te Deum Laudamus confidently as the right word of praise? The legend has it that Ambrose and Augustine composed it, rivalling with each other at Augustine's baptism. But Augustine's son Adeodatus was baptised with his father; and the boy was expected to sing it, trustingly, too.

We may well see a Church to which the parents flock because their children have joined it, first. This would reverse the process but we still would have the same paradox: that one generation's freedom is another generation's law.

How does every generation inherit the freedom of the children in God, in the Church? Only by fulfilling its law, first.

Before the mission can be put in operation, the orderly relation between children of God and parents of man has to be reconsidered. For, we will have to convert future fathers and ancestors and founders and mothers. If we try to reach people who are addressed as individuals, they will think of themselves as cogs on the wheel, as soldiers, as mass men, as atoms in the universe, and will say to us angrily: we don't care to count up to three, we wish to forget, or as the saying goes: "I am just a human being," which is just a way of accusing the Church of a lack of sympathy with the man's real plight. And his plight is that he is nobody. If we can turn him into a parent, he moves in another world immediately.

C. Against Brunner's picture of collaboration between the Church and the experts of this world.

If it is admitted - though nobody can be compelled to admit it - that the emphasis shifts today from natural science to social questions, from the fight against polycosmism to the fight against polydemonism, then the question becomes burning: how the Christian faith may express itself, in this battle. Before contradicting Brunner, in this matter, I would like to say a word about the "fictitious 'Christianity'" which had to solve this problem, too. For, this demonism about man's nature is eternal. Now we find that in one particular generation, between 430 and 460 the old Christians had to make a similar "turn-about" of one hundred and eighty degrees.<sup>1</sup> From fighting Roman Law and Greek thought in honour of the Tri-une God, they turned to using Roman Law and Greek science against the polydemonism and polycosmism of the Teutonic Tribes. Augustine still fought Rome, in his City of God, as being one of the cities of Men. he died one year before the Vandals took Hippo. Fifteen years later, when the Roman bishops had to live among the tribes and were faced by the worlds of tribal demons, the one nature of the Greeks and the One Law of Rome became the great charm to pacify these tribes. These groups did not even believe in law or in nature, but in a welter of confusing nightmares.<sup>2</sup> Because Brunner turns his attention to

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1. This turn-about is brilliantly told in E. Pickman, The Mind of Latin Christendom, 1937.

2. See H. Bohmer, Das germanische Christentum, Halle 1913.

the standard of Calvinistic Christianity, he does not see how realistic the fights of Saint Patrick and Boniface, of Benedict and King Alfred, were.

And we need these men, in our memory, if we are going to have anything to contribute, in this new fight in which the demons which the machine has set free ask for pacification. If the Christians who have the indescribable privilege of belief, meet with all the men of Good Will, in this new battle, the soldiers on God's side will all have to maintain a certain incognito. Hence, in the fight against the evils of society, the fact that one is a confessing Christian, or the fact that one represents a branch of the Church, is very little of a credential. The other fellow may be so much more inventive and ingenious. But the unity of purpose with all the men of Good Will through the ages, the similarity of these battles at all times, gives an indescribable vantage point.

Since agape is the mark of the Christian as Brunner rightly stresses, this agape must love the friends of God through the ages. Without here being able to say more, I wish to stress that this one source of strength is only available to the Christian. That which unites him with Christ unites him with the Church of the Saints.

Brunner, and this is the most serious objection which I have to raise against his social program, has only two groups: Church and Non-Church, for the collaboration in the future. He is mistaken. And here I speak from experience and although I have to be brief, the reader may be assured that I weigh my words. The pandemonist, the sociological expert, is not the right collaborator for Churchmen or Christians. It is quite true that a new collaboration is in the making. But this is in no way a collaboration between Church and World. Some Church men, and some Worldings, do not belong there, although they may be all right otherwise. "The Men of Good Will" are a leaven who draw from Church and World, as an improvised Samaritan Group, but with its own center of gravity. This center of gravity is the - always short-lived yet organic - group. And this group is ecclesiola inter ecclesiam et mundum, begotten by Church and World. (It is not the Lutheran ecclesiola in ecclesia.) That is to say, these creative groups live and depict processes in the formative life of the Church, for the temporal and short-time of their existence, and for this reason, they are transient sacramental groups from which no member leaves without his baptism of fire. The Church must hope for those groups because she wins new members from these "Pentecost" experiences; she may favor them; she cannot create them, any more than the priest or the Levite could displace the good Samaritan. For they had institutional duties, whereas the good Samaritan only deserted the dinner which his good wife held ready. Brunner excludes this growth of cells, since he does not see the new basis of the relation between Church and World.

These "Men and Women of Good Will" are distinguished by the belief in the unity of M A N. And this belief is not a scientific knowledge, but just as our Faith in God, a mighty dangerous task. Hence, the readiness to believe in this unity, in a concrete situation, is the test for membership. This belief creates a common language, a common spirit, a common rediscovery of prayer, praise, confession, remission of sins. And because it is "rediscovered," Christians must be members of these groups, Johannine Christians. This is the right relation to society. On the other hand, no invitation, by the Church, of expert memoranda - I have some in mind and still shudder - can sustain the haughty remark of Brunner that the Church has agape, and the world has not. The expert may or may not have it. But it is the dichotomy into Church and expert which is wrong. The expert belongs to the age of the science of nature. The Samaritan group is in advance of the age of priest and Levite. That the Church lines up with the experts, is purely defensive action. Churchmen will swallow the scientific expert



although he is not of good will. However, the unity of Man is not demonstrable on paper, but a bold faith in a truth to be revealed, a common speech to burst forth, after much moaning and groaning.

This is the reason why the war against the demons of an atomized society, of migratory workers, soldiers, transplanted populations, will enlist a specific body of men, and yet, these men will not be the Church nor even in the manner of the last millennium, professing Christians. But they will overlap with Church and Christendom. And this new growth of the "Good-Samaritan" branch might unburden the older branches of the eternal tree, the eternal branches of man's cross so that the sap will flow vigorously through them all. The next step always saves all previous steps, in the story of salvation, from having been futile or "fictitious."

Now, this is all stated very imperfectly and without enough footnotes. But I trust that you know that I could supply them. All I tried to do, on these few pages, was to contradict Brunner's arguments by an invitation to look out of the window for a moment and to see God's firmament again. He has vaulted it over us all so that we might live not in slavish fear of fictions, temptations, distinctions, but under his open sky, in threefold certainty: As Church, as Christianity, as Men of Good Will. And could we expect "the one in three" to be satisfied, before their image, too, be contained in three forms? As Church, we reach down from God, the Body of Christ. As organized reason, as scientific mind, we dig down into Nature; as fellowship of good will we reach the whole mass of Society, as its structural element, its heart and soul. Church of God by our faith, Scientists of Nature by our hopes, Soul of Society by our love, we are brought back to our Creator, our Revealer, our Redeemer.

As church members in the praise of God we may lose sight of Nature and Society. But the men and women of the merely naturalistic bend, and the cogs on the wheels of Society, master not even Nature or Society. The scientists lose the unity of nature, their foundation, today. And the souls of the mass-men, of split personalities, remain unborn.

The members of this society are not saved through theology because Brunner's language is lost to them and on them. And yet, they ardently try to save their souls; how, I would like to show you by a document if you should be interested. With these men in mind, I wrote these lines, as Heilsgeschichte wider Theologie: as a story of salvation versus theology.

Very sincerely yours,

Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy

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