

## Revelation and Reason

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*(A summary by the author)*

“The fundamental question is this: If we take Barth’s theological position, is philosophy of religion possible? If it is possible, what kind of philosophy of religion will it be? Barth has not written any book or article entitled “Philosophy of Religion.” He is simply absorbed

## REVIEWS

in the problems of dogmatics, However, this does not mean that he completely dismisses any kind of philosophy of religion as in the case with Koepp. Barth is not especially interested in philosophy of religion. His sole interest is in dogmatics as such.

Brunner is the only one among the so-called dialectical theologians who has written a book entitled "Philosophy of Religion." However, the meaning of Brunner's philosophy of religion is different from the type of philosophy of religion which belongs to the so-called liberal theology. What is the difference?

If we review all the types of philosophy of religion, I think we can divide them into two major groups. One group grounds revelation in reason. The other grounds reason in revelation. The first group can be subdivided further into three minor types. The first type, represented by Hegel, explains the truth of religion as essentially the same as metaphysical truth. Religion expresses metaphysical truth not by means of pure conception, but concrete means. In this sense, religion can be called

the metaphysics of the masses.

The second type, represented by Troeltsch, maintains that religion is qualitatively different from metaphysics. A philosophy of religion which tries to vindicate the truth of religion must start from religious experience and point out that religious experience is the apriori product of religion. That is to say, religious experience is grounded in reason. This is the method of Neo-Kantian philosophy applied to religion in order to verify the truth of religion.

The third type, represented by Wobbermin, asserts that the truth of religion must be grasped not by any philosophical method but by religious experience. He calls his method the method of "*Religionspsychologie*." This type presupposes the existence of *das wesen der religion*, that is the essence of religion which is the same as the truth of religion, and tries to grasp it. In other words, in order to grasp the essence and the truth of religion man must produce religious experience by the "*religions psychologie*" method. If he wants to, man can produce religious experience.

## REVIEWS

Here the application of such a method is made, no doubt, by human reason. In this sense, the third type of philosophy of religion is classified under the group which grounds revelation in reason. I call this group a "philosophical philosophy of religion" which is closely connected with liberal theology.

Dialectical theology, which radically opposes liberal theology, denies the possibility of a "philosophical philosophy of religion." According to dialectical theology there is no such a thing as the essence of religion. This is a residue of the eighteenth century philosophy of Enlightenment. Therefore, a philosophy of religion that vindicates the truth of religion in general does not exist. Religion is a mere abstraction. It does not really exist. Only religions exist. The truth of Christianity can be grasped, not by so-called philosophy of religion, or a study of religion in general, but by theology, the specific study of Christianity.

If this is so, do we need a philosophy of religion which tries to grasp the essence of religion in

general? Brunner answers that we need philosophy of religion, but the function of it must be entirely different from a philosophy of religion which belongs to the first group mentioned above. According to Brunner, the function of philosophy of religion is to clarify the relation of revelation to reason in such a way as to ground reason in revelation. If people understand what revelation is, there will be no need for a philosophy of religion. Theology alone will be quite enough to know God. But the people, especially the people of this modern age, measure all truth by the criterion of reason. To such people, before we come to study the Bible, we must first teach what revelation means. This is essentially the function of philosophy of religion. And the function of such a philosophy of religion is to make it clear that reason has its place within the bounds of revelation, because it is precisely from the standpoint of faith that not only the claim but, indeed, the limit of reason can be understood. In this sense Brunner's philosophy of religion can be said to be a study which makes clear

## REVIEWS

the relation of revelation to reason.

Brunner sometimes calls such a philosophy of religion *eristics* instead of *apologetics*, and wants to make it "another task of theology." Against this assertion of Brunner, Barth said, "No!" and declares that philosophy of religion still belongs to the realm of philosophy as such, which is nothing but anthropology, i.e. the study of man. Theology, which is the study of God or God's revelation, belongs to a different dimension from philosophy. Theology turns to God, but philosophy of religion turns to man, i.e. man's experience of God. God Himself and man's experience of God are different. The direction is diametrically opposite. What Brunner calls revelation is not revelation itself, i.e., God's speaking to man, but the human experience of revelation. Philosophy of religion, which is the study of the human experience of revelation, can be carried on by means of the same procedure as secular thinking which is after all the same as philosophical thinking. Theology, which is the study of God's speaking to man, must be carried on by means of a different

way of thinking, which can be called *theological thinking*. Theological thinking is thinking in prayer, or we might say, thinking under revelation.

Brunner does not make clear this difference between theological and philosophical thinking. As a matter of fact, it is not merely Brunner alone who does not realize this difference between these two ways of thinking. There are many people who do not know this difference. Especially those people who do not understand Barth are the ones who are not initiated into theological thinking. Anyway, what Brunner really tries to make the task of philosophy of religion cannot be called a clarification of the relation between revelation and reason, but should be called strictly the clarification of the relation between theological and philosophical thinking. If there is any possibility of religion, its task is to clarify the difference and the close relationship between theological and philosophical thinking, so as to guide students who wish to pursue theology in the correct way of thinking.

If so, philosophy of religion does

## REVIEWS

not belong to the proper domain of theology. It belongs to the domain of philosophy as such. Philosophy of religion can only be utilized by theology as *Hilfswissenschaft*. Barth himself is dealing with these problems in the first part of his Dogmatics Vol. I., and does not set up any independent section or study which is designated as philosophy of religion. However, the reason why Barth is so hard to understand, or the reason why Barth is easily misunderstood, is due to the fact that he does not take the trouble to clarify the difference between theological and philosophical thinking. He simply presupposes that the readers of his books know what theological thinking is, and starts his theological thinking from that point.

Consequently, Barth is extremely difficult to understand, particularly

for orientals. And it is for this reason that a study of the difference and the relationship between theological thinking and philosophical thinking must be made an independent science which ought to be called philosophy of religion.

If this is done, we can subdivide the second philosophical group into two types. The philosophy of religion represented by Brunner, and the philosophy of religion which discusses the difference and relation of theological and philosophical thinking. Or to put it another way, the difference and the relation between theology and the secular sciences (including philosophy), but this type, that is, philosophy of religion as an independent study, has not been developed yet. This field is open for future research.

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