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REVELATION AND REASON: ORESTES BROWNSON'S CONVERSION TO ROMAN CATHOLICISM

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BY THE LATE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY, ATTEMPTS TO DEFEND AND REJUVENATE Christian belief in a divine and supernatural revelation had acquiesced to the rigors of modern scientific inquiry. It became increasingly evident that if a supernatural revelation were to be admitted, the necessary rational conditions or grounds for its possibility would have to be posited initially. In America, the search for such grounds signaled the emergence of post-Enlightenment thought and the commencement of a movement toward Romanticism. The Enlightenment tendency to reduce the rationally knowable to the empirically demonstrative triggered the romantic intuitionist reaction first represented by Transcendentalism.

Orestes Brownson's public and intellectual career prior to his 1844 conversion to Roman Catholicism exposes the post-Enlightenment problem of justifying Christian belief by establishing the conditions or grounds for the possibility of revelation. While Brownson's *New Views of Christianity, Society, and the Church* (1836) represents one of the earliest of Transcendentalist religious and social manifestos and he deservedly has been called "the most socially oriented of the Transcendentalists,"¹ underlying his Transcendentalism—indeed his entire career as a Protestant (1826-1844) is his theological grappling with the problem of revelation.

Born in Vermont in 1803, Brownson had affiliated with Methodists, Presbyterians, Universalists, "Free Enquirers," and Unitarians, before joining the Transcendentalist movement and embarking upon his own "Church of the Future." Informally educated, sometimes crude and always boisterous, Brownson's early thought is marked by frequent fluctuations that nevertheless exhibit a philosophical and theological continuity that has not been recognized by his Roman Catholic biographers.² This continuity is rooted in his recognition of the philosophical difficulties underlying the problem of revelation, a recognition unique among his Transcendentalist contemporaries. Moreover, Brownson employed contemporary French sources in distinction from an almost exclusive American dependence upon German and English sources, challenging such Transcendentalist luminaries as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Theodore Parker with a romantic eclecticism derived from Benjamin Constant, Victor Cousin, and Pierre Leroux.

This essay argues that Brownson's synthetic resolution of the problem of revelation represents the intellectual justification behind his conversion to Roman Catholicism in October, 1844. This will be demonstrated by pursuing Brownson's Protestant thought as it develops through four stages into a synthetic theology of revelation. During the first stage (1826-1831), revelation is discerned and demarcated primarily through empirical evidence, reflecting the employment of Enlightenment categories. The second stage (1832-1835) is a subjectivist reaction to the first and is marked by a new romantic intuitionism according to which revelation is appropriated immediately by the knowing subject. The third period (1836-1841) demonstrates the impact of Victor Cousin's eclecticism as Brownson attempts

a synthesis of his two previous extremes, and the fourth period (1842-1844) marks the refinement of that synthesis through the adaptation of Pierre Leroux's doctrine of "life by communion," an adaptation that allows a strong incarnational and sacramental perspective to emerge and steer Brownson into the Roman Catholic Church.

FIRST STAGE: 1826-1831

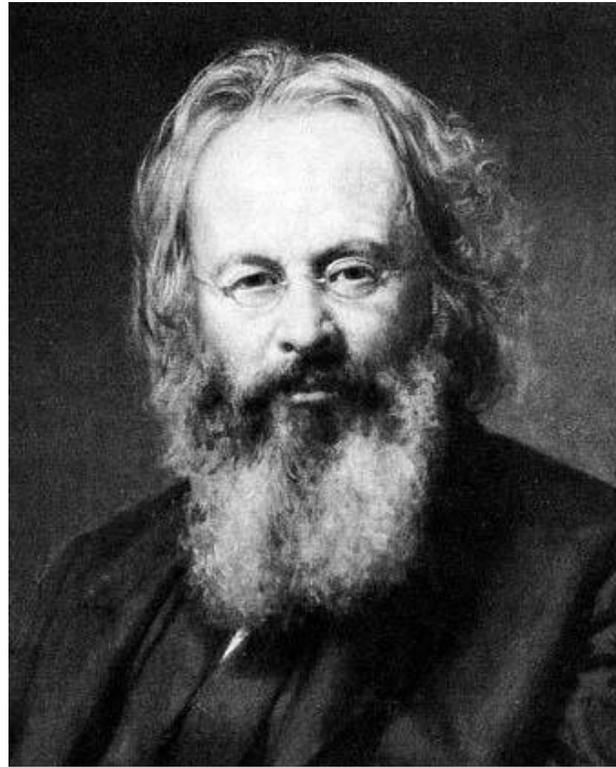
Brownson's ordination to the Universalist ministry in June, 1826, signals the beginning of his career as a preacher and a writer. The Universalism that appealed to Brownson was not founder John Murray's mere extension of the Calvinist doctrine of election to all humanity. In the early nineteenth century a more rational, enlightened form of Universalism, a type of "rural Unitarianism,"³ had emerged in contrast to the strongly experiential evangelical piety of its first stage. The architect of this enlightened Universalism was Hosea Ballou and it was to Ballou's application of Enlightenment rationality to the tenets of American Universalism that the young Brownson was attracted.⁴

As a Universalist minister and writer, Brownson's conception of revelation is unnuanced and only beginning to develop. Revelation tends to be closely aligned with the communication of empirical evidence to the tabula rasa of reason, primarily through the medium of nature:

I presume not to scan the Almighty. All I know of him is what he has revealed of himself. The volume of nature stored with knowledge for all humanity, stands open for the perusal of all who wish to be instructed. On each page is stamped the impress of its AUTHOR.... Here let us read.⁵

The objective truths of revelation must be reduced to the natural and identified with empirical evidence, for Brownson posits no epistemic means whereby a supernatural revelation can be appropriated immedi-

ately and, therefore, no conditions allowing for the possibility of a supernatural revelation. As a result, Brownson's Universalist thought consists of an atrophied natural theology that allows only a tentative and supplemental revelation, an "enlargement" of the natural that cannot be known with rational certainty, only believed on the basis of varying degrees of evidence supplied to the senses. In effect, that which cannot be apprehended by the senses is relegated to the inconsequential.



Orestes Brownson

Brownson's tendency to identify revelation with the natural and empirical resulted in an intense, personal struggle to retain some relevance for revealed religion. Tending increasingly toward social radicalism and despairing of religion itself, Brownson followed the dictates of his reason and conscience and withdrew from the Universalists in 1829 in order to affiliate with the "Free Enquirers," a utopian and agnostic movement of social reform led by Frances Wright and Robert Dale Owen. But never an avowed atheist, Brownson could not long do without religion. Consequently, his affiliation was short-lived. Influenced by William Ellery Channing's sermon *Likeness to God* and his notion of an "inner revelation," Brownson concluded the impossibility of divorcing religion and reform, and arrived at his lifelong conviction that Christianity constituted the principle of all social and moral reform.

In 1831, Brownson assumed the name Unitarian and settled in Ithaca, New York, to resume his preaching and writing. Soon he became an ordained minister in the Unitarian church and in October, 1832, accepted the position of pastor of the Unitarian Society of Walpole, New Hampshire. After two years in Walpole, Brownson gained closer proximity to Boston by accepting the position of pastor of the First Congregational Church (Unitarian) in Canton, Massachusetts.

SECOND STAGE: 1832-1835

It was in Walpole that Brownson began to par-

ticipate in the intellectual fermentation that characterized the Unitarian denomination in its antebellum period. It was also here that he first gained access to the works of the French thinkers that were to influence him so heavily in coming years. From Benjamin Constant's *De la Religion Considerée dans sa Source, ses Formes et ses Developments* (1824-1831), Brownson derived the concept of a religious sentiment common to all humanity and constituting the "fundamental law of human nature."⁶ This derivation signals the beginning of his Transcendentalist phase.

This period represents a time of transition and increasing philosophical maturity in Brownson's intellectual development. Corresponding to a Romantic intuitionism, his notion of revelation becomes increasingly dependent upon the doctrine of the religious sentiment as his newly developed epistemological principle. The religious sentiment, according to Brownson, is an intuition, an immediate and direct revelatory influence of God upon the human soul. As the soul is an image of, and bears a real likeness to, God, so religion is an influence of spirit upon spirit, a sharing of attributes differing only in degree, not in kind. The religious sentiment is the voice of God, the breathings of his spirit into the human soul.⁷ Whereas revelation had been dependent upon empirical evidence, it now becomes dependent upon the intuiting subject.



In effect, the relation of revelation to reason is, for Brownson, a virtual equation. The reason, as the religious sentiment, is spontaneous, intuitive and dynamically active. It is to be sharply distinguished from the rational processes of the understanding, otherwise the former errors of a cold philosophy of sensation will re-occur. During this period of subjectivism, Brownson is so emphatic upon the role of the religious sentiment as the spontaneous reason from which all meaning flows, that it is incorrect to say that revelation is simply communicated immediately to the religious sentiment; revelation is itself tantamount to the religious sentiment.

Brownson now claims that an exclusive reliance on the understanding results in the consideration of all as outward and objective, and nothing as inward and sub-

jective: "God is placed at an infinite distance from the human soul, deprived of spirituality, or at least clothed with a materiality that prevents him from reaching men's hearts." The result is that a "cumbrous machinery of a formal revelation" made to the understanding is required. Rather, revelation is the breathing of the spirit of God immediately into the human soul. Here one can confide in the inspirations of the Almighty.⁸

Recognizing in the conservative rationalism of Unitarianism the empiricism that had characterized his own thought as a Universalist, Brownson utilized the doctrine of the religious sentiment as the impetus for a bold indictment of the Unitarians. Joining the Transcendentalist ferment, Brownson writes:

We are heartily sick of the frigid philosophy of our times, and especially of our own country. There is a coldness in our religious and philosophical speculations, that chills the heart, and freezes up the very life blood of the soul.⁹

The Unitarian rationalists have placed God at an infinite distance from the human soul and clothed him with a materiality that prevents him from reaching the human heart. But the religious sentiment reveals the opposite. God is to be found by turning within.

The barrenness of Brownson's previous empiricism had given way to the lively doctrine of the religious sentiment. No longer despairing of religion, he could write:

Religion is the upleaping of the soul towards the infinite; it is a love, a worship of spirit, of spirit in man, in the universe, and he only is the successful teacher of religion who can unfold the spiritual nature, and show to the mind the infinite, the God, in each individual, to be loved, venerated and adored.¹⁰

It is not surprising then that in spite of his 'outsider' status and lack of formal education, Brownson was encouraged by George Ripley and others to take up residence in Boston in 1836 and to attend the early meetings of the "Transcendental Club." Soon, Brownson was actively participating in the flurry of Boston intellectual life.

THIRD STAGE: 1836-1841

The dependence of revelation on empirical evi-

dence that had characterized the first stage of Brownson's Protestant career gave way to a virtual coalescence of revelation with the intuiting subject during the second. The third stage consists of Brownson's attempt to forge a synthesis of his two earlier extremes through his adaptation of the French eclectic philosophy of Victor Cousin.¹¹ Cousin's eclecticism supplied Brownson with the systematic means to attempt a synthesis of subjective experience and objective reality, as well as for analyzing the philosophical and theological systems prevalent at the time, including Transcendentalism.

Brownson valued Cousin's eclecticism for its ability to supply a philosophy designed to explain and verify revealed religion, which had lost its hold upon the understanding. For this reason, Brownson's advocacy of Cousin's eclecticism is unashamedly wholehearted during this period. To his mentor, Brownson wrote:

Your work, Sir, found me sunk in a vague sentimentalism, no longer a skeptic, but unable to find any scientific basis for my belief. I despaired of passing from the subjective to the objective. You have corrected & aided me; you have enabled me to find a scientific basis for my belief in Nature, in God and Immortality, and I thank you again and again for the service you have done me.¹²

Cousin's influence upon Brownson's thought was to be large and lasting.

Cousin's distinction between the reason and understanding (now called the "impersonal reason" and the "personal reason") became the critical apparatus of Brownson's emerging critique of the Transcendentalists. Through Cousin, Brownson regains the importance of the understanding as supplying rational confirmation and articulation of the revelations of the religious sentiment. The impersonal reason reveals that which cannot be derived from external nature, nor willed by the self. It embraces all that was claimed of the religious sentiment, but with an emphasis upon its identification with the absolute, or God. "The reason, though appearing in us, is not our self. It is independent of us, and in no sense subject to our personality."¹³ If the reason is not impersonal, it can reveal no existences outside the self, nor provide for anything other than a subjective authority. Through the impersonal reason the spiritual world is revealed and known.

Following Cousin, Brownson argues that an an-

alysis of the consciousness of the individual reduces all phenomena to three ideas: that of the infinite, the finite, and their relation. These three ideas are primitive epistemic attributes, discernible by, but not originating in, the understanding. Their spontaneous development is owing not to the reflective powers of human philosophizing, but to God. However, Brownson insists, this is not an inference of the absolute from the relative, the infinite from the finite, God from the self and the non-self. The reflective process of the understanding, the subjective and personal side of reason, does not originate or determine the content of the spontaneous impersonal reason, but verifies and explains it. Both the infinite and the finite are given together as primitive data, as the necessary condition for the very process of reasoning. Remove the idea of either the infinite or the finite and any single intellectual act would be impossible. One cannot be conceived without the other.

Furthermore, Brownson concludes, the ideas of the infinite and the finite do not merely co-exist, they are related to each other as cause and effect. The infinite is absolute cause of all finitude. Consequently, the impersonal reason reveals the infinite, the finite, and their relation. All three comprise the primitive data of the intellect and the starting point of all reasoning. All three are present before the understanding begins to act. Existing as the necessary conditions of all reasoning, they reveal God, the external world, and ourselves.¹⁴

The spontaneous reason, as impersonal and objective, is a legitimate authority for that which it reveals. Its credibility, upon which all these claims depend, need not nor cannot be proven. The spontaneous reason is self-evident; as such, it is the least susceptible to proof. Nevertheless, Brownson claims, we may be as sure of the existence of God and the external world as we are sure of our own existence, which likewise cannot be proven. No higher authority is needed, no greater degree of certainty desired. The revelations of the spontaneous reason constitute the sure ground of faith in the claims of Christianity.

Though Brownson continued to identify himself with the Transcendentalists, under Cousin's influence he turns considerably more critical of his peers. Brownson's review of Ralph Waldo Emerson's *Nature* (1836) displays his growing uneasiness with the subjectivism that also had characterized his own thought.¹⁵ In effect, Brownson recognizes in Emerson the logical conclusion of the

principles of his own earlier Transcendentalism and, with the aid of Cousin, begins the movement toward a more balanced and harmonious orientation.

After praising *Nature* for its beauty and power, and welcoming it as “proof that the mind is about to receive a new and a more glorious manifestation,” Brownson proceeds to point out what he regards as a weighty philosophical problem:

He [Emerson] seems seriously to doubt the existence of the external world except as an [sic] picture which God stamps on the mind. He all but worships what his senses seem to present him, and yet is not certain that all that which his senses place out of him, is not after all the mere subjective laws of his own being, existing only to the eye.¹⁶

Brownson appreciates Emerson’s subordination of nature to spirit and understanding to reason, but distinguishes himself from Emerson’s tendencies toward idealism and an underestimation of the understanding.

The difficulties Brownson detected in *Nature* continue to plague Emerson’s *Divinity School Address* (1838). Growing more severe in his criticism, Emerson, says Brownson, mutilates the mind by ignoring the process of reflection, that is, the understanding.¹⁷ Exclusive reliance upon the reason leads to irrationalism and a false sentimentalism. Precision and balance is called for; a synthetic approach must reconcile the polarities. If religion is to be sustained as anything more than a vague, intangible sentiment, it must be sustained by the understanding.

The reason, Brownson argues, is surely the only light and criterion of certainty; but the reason also “vouches for the truth of the senses as decidedly and as immediately as it does for its own conceptions [intuitions].”¹⁸ Without the testimony of the senses there is no ground for confirming the intuitions of reason. Hence, Brownson has begun his transition toward positivist objective criteria for the immediate intuitions of the reason. Having recognized himself in Emerson’s writings, Brownson begins a movement away from subjectivism,

entertaining the problem of the philosophical synthesis of subject and object that would occupy his mind and recast his conception of revelation.

Brownson had gained from Cousin the beginnings of an objectivization of the revelations of the religious sentiment through the doctrine of the impersonal reason, as well as the importance of the understanding, or personal reason, as supplying rational confirmation and articulation of those revelations. Though he would realize that he had yet to fully recover the ontological status of the object, a recovery that would signal the end of his Transcendentalist period, he had begun to extricate himself from an exclusive reliance upon either the objectivism of his Universalist period, or the subjectivism of his earlier Transcendentalism.

FINAL STAGE: 1842-1844

The final period of Brownson’s Protestant career marks the refinement of his attempted synthesis through the adaptation of Pierre Leroux’s doctrine of “life by communion.”¹⁹ Brownson’s adaptation occasions a shift from naturalism to supernaturalism, for Brownson employs Leroux’s doctrine to demonstrate that the origin and ground of religion is not found in a religious sentiment or spontaneous reason natural to humanity, but in a supernatural object. The reality of the supernatural object is nowhere inferred, however, for Brownson has converted his attempt to establish the conditions for the possibility of revelation to a demonstration of the intelligibility of its assumed facticity.

Brownson assimilates Leroux’s doctrine of “life by communion” by arguing that the true philosophical point of departure is not found in the being of either subject or object, but in the manifestation of being. This manifestation is called “Life,” for to be is not necessarily to live, but to live is to manifest.²⁰ As subject, one is not capable of manifesting oneself except in communion with that which is not oneself, namely, an object. One is merely latent potentiality in oneself and must be assisted by that which is not oneself:

His whole life... is jointly in himself and in that which is not himself, in the *me* and the *not-me*. His life unquestionably consists in the manifestation,



*“If religion is to be sustained
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it must be sustained by the
understanding.”*



or actualization, of his latent capacities. As this manifestation, or actualization, is but the echo of the intershock of the *me* and the *not-me*, or of his communion with that which is not himself, it follows that he can live only so far as he has an object. His life, then, is at once subjective and objective.²¹

Only through communion with the object, the not-me, can the life of the subject be manifested. Only God can manifest himself by himself alone, for he is self-existent being.

Partaking of the nature of the subject and the nature of the object, the life of each individual is comprised of communion with that which is not itself. Each individual communes with God, nature and other men as his object. But with God he communes only indirectly, for finitude cannot commune directly with infinity without the mediation of an object. Nor can he commune directly with nature, for the mediation of the body through sensation is required. His only direct and immediate object is other men. Humanity, therefore, lives in solidarity; all belong to the same body, having similar natural powers, capacities, and weaknesses.

Signaling the end of his Transcendentalist phase, Brownson now limits the role of reason, rejecting altogether an immediate intuition or apperception of God or revealed religion. To hold to the position that the religious sentiment is an ontological principle of human nature is no sure ground for establishing the existence of God or his revelation to humanity. If the religious sentiment is an ontological principle of human nature, then it is subjective and has no authority outside the sphere of the subject, that is, nothing objective can be inferred.²²

The self cannot think without the concurrence of the object, nor can the subject be its own immediate object:²³ Rather, the *me* is known indirectly, mediately, that is, as an element of thought and only in relation to that which is not-me, namely, the object. What is established through the concurrence of the object is a fact of consciousness, not an ontological principle such as the religious sentiment. Moreover, this consciousness of the self is always of the self as subject. One can think oneself only as the subject of an act, as a cause in relation to an effect.²⁴ The consciousness of the self as subject in the phenomenon establishes no ontological principle, but is simply the result of a higher degree of perception, that is, the result of an apperception. All thoughts are

apperceptions, for all thoughts include a view of both the thinking subject and the object thought.

The *me* is only disclosed to the self as the subject of an act. But this does not imply that the *me* is not real substantive being, for being must precede doing, ontologically. But the being is only revealed in the doing. Thought, by definition, contains both subject and object. In every phenomenon, the self finds itself as subject, and that which is not itself as object. The *me* and the not-me are found in every thought. But the object is not a product of thought, but precedes thought as one of its necessary conditions: “The object I think then really is; and is, not because I think it, but I think it because it is, and could not think it, if it were not.”²⁵ If the object is thought, it really is, and is, not as the product of thought, but as one of its necessary conditions.

In the act of thinking one can be as certain of the object as of the subject; the certainty of the reality of the object is posited as strongly as with respect to the thinking subject. Consequently, the certainty of the object is equal to the greatest degree of certainty that can be acquired, namely, that of one’s own existence. Therefore, according to Brownson, humanity believes in God, nature and other human beings on the surest possible basis: “Because they think them, and cannot think without thinking them.”²⁶ No metaphysics or logic can add anything to this.

The Transcendentalists maintain that the idea of God, the belief in or knowledge of his existence, is constituent of human nature. The idea of God is said to be an “intuition of reason,” or an innate idea arising from an impersonal or spontaneous reason.²⁷ But if the religious sentiment is an ontological principle of human nature it is subjective and has no authority outside the sphere of the subject, says Brownson. An innate idea in the sense of belief or knowledge is contradictory, for belief or knowledge is a fact of one’s life, not an element of his nature or being.²⁸

Nor is an idea ever an intuition of reason, argues Brownson. An idea can only function as an object of an intuition of reason; it is objective, not subjective. Literally, the term “reasoning” should be used to indicate an operation of the mind, the power of intelligencing. “Reason” indicates the object of the power of intelligencing. According to Brownson, it implies the world of objective, absolute and necessary ideas “in the original

Platonic sense.”²⁹ Ideas are the objects of human knowledge, not categories of subjectivity, nor intermediaries between the subject and object.

The objects of human knowledge form two classes, the Ideal and the Actual. Both are equally real, Brownson contends. The Ideal is the world of ideas, of reason—including the abstract, universal, necessary, permanent, immutable, absolute, and infinite. The Actual includes the concrete, particular, contingent, transient, variable, relative, and finite. Though the Actual is insufficient in itself and depends upon the Ideal, it is only in the Actual that the Ideal is revealed and known.³⁰ Consequently, the role of human perception is limited. The transcendental is not immediately intuited, for Ideas are objects of knowledge only as they are embodied in the Actual. The transcendental is by no means in the subject, as the Transcendentalists contend. The infinite and absolute God is not to be found in the subject.

Though humanity is created with the capacity of perceiving the Ideal in the Actual, Brownson concludes, he is conscious of only a small number of perceptions; he forms few thoughts or apperceptions. Each of these thoughts contains a third element in addition to subject and object, namely, the Form. The intershock that results from the meeting of the subject and the object produces the Form that the subject takes of the subject and the object together. The form, therefore, is the product of the subject, but only in conjunction with the object, and it is the object that is perceived, not the form.

Under the form of every thought, that is, in every fact of consciousness, is found the subject and the object, the me and the not-me. These surely embrace all of reality; they are essential to the production of any conceivable thought. All of reality is comprised of God, humanity, and nature. Therefore, it may be concluded that God, humanity, and nature undergird every form as its necessary conditions. No thought can possibly take place apart from the combined activity of all three.³¹



Nevertheless, though one is an intelligence, one is only a finite and limited intelligence, incapable of com-

prehending the infinite, the Ideal, that lies at the bottom of one's thoughts. As finite and limited, reason is always susceptible to inadequacy and error.³² Hence, the infinite, the Ideal, cannot be established on the basis of a religious sentiment natural to humanity, nor through a reification of subjective activity defined as a spontaneous or impersonal reason. The design of these doctrines, Brownson claims, is simply to exclude all that may be embraced as revealed religion.

At this point Brownson begins a soteriological application of Leroux's doctrine of life by communion by arguing that the whole subject, finite and sinful, receives the objective embodiment of revelation in the mediatorial. "God-man," Jesus, as the necessary condition for the possibility of knowing God. Christianity, Brownson argues has assumed as its point of departure not a supposed divinity of humanity as the Transcendentalists have claimed, but human sinfulness and depravity. Retrieving and revamping a Calvinist dogma of his youth, Brownson claims that this condition necessarily involved the entire race, for Adam, as the "federal head of humanity," could not have sinned without involving all his posterity. The direct and immediate object of one's life is other persons. If the first human sinned, the pollution is necessarily transmitted to posterity by virtue of the fact that the first human is their object. The preceding generation always forms the object of the life of the succeeding generation. Through both natural and moral generation the race becomes depraved, for sin is transmitted through communion.³³

The sinful, then, can only commune with the sinful and cannot be transcended except by communion with a supernatural influence. But as finite and natural, humanity cannot commune directly with the infinite and supernatural; as sinful, humanity cannot commune with the holy God. A mediator is needed who intercedes to become the object of the race. Communion with God is found in the Life of Jesus (in Brownson's philosophical sense). It is insufficient to claim with the Transcendentalists that Jesus is merely superior to the rest of humanity by virtue of his ideal embodiment of absolute religion. Jesus' coming is an expression of the grace of God.

The literal person Jesus, Brownson contends, is Christianity: "To reject him historically is to reject Christianity."³⁴ Jesus, as Mediator, infuses Life into the race by communing directly with God—a task impossible for finite and fallen humanity. Likewise, the Mediator

must come from God, for the Mediator must be both divine and human or no true communion is possible. He must literally possess both divine and human Life.

The originality and distinction of the life of Jesus becomes evident when one recalls that life is at once subjective and objective, that to live is to manifest in communion with an object. He is literally the Mediator because he lives a supernatural life in immediate communion with the divine. God becomes the direct and immediate object of Jesus' life, which Jesus in his humanity communicates directly to the race. Jesus' derived Life is literally infused into the race through his followers, who in turn become the object with whom others commune. Likewise, life is communicated to succeeding generations, reversing the effect of Adam's sin.³⁵ Only by means of the divine life infused into the race through Jesus is reconciliation and growth possible.

CONCLUSION

Having experienced and articulated positions ranging from an empiricist objectivism to a pantheistic subjectivism, Brownson gained the ability to recognize the tendencies toward these extremes in the thought of his contemporaries as well as in his own thought. The dualities that he labored to reconcile in his third and fourth periods were not simply intellectual options presented to him by conflicting schools of thought; they represented the extremes of his own thought during his first and second periods.

Derived from Leroux's doctrine of life by communion, Brownson's emphasis on the mediation of Jesus provides his thought a harmonizing incarnational and sacramental principle allowing a greater integration of thought. The doctrine provides him with an epistemological justification for the appropriation of the revelation of God as embodied in Christ and communicated through history. In other words, what applies epistemologically to the object, ultimately applies to revelation as fully embodied in Jesus. It is the Life of Jesus that becomes the chief medium and source of revelation.

Divine revelation as embodied in the mediatorial Life of Jesus and communicated through his communion with the race is everywhere asserted by Brownson and assumed as fact, not as the result of philosophical necessity. In other words, Leroux has afforded Brownson more than a doctrine to be incorporated into his thought,

but the conviction that only given the fact of revelation can its intelligibility be demonstrated. The attempt to establish the conditions for the possibility of revelation has been converted into a demonstration of the intelligibility of its assumed facticity.

Though Brownson certainly does not lose all confidence in reason, the shift to the assertion of revelation as fact limits the role of reason as the means of appropriating revelation. The appropriation is not merely epistemological, but involves the whole person who receives the objective embodiment of revelation in the mediatorial life of Jesus. In turn, it is the embodiment of revelation in Jesus that functions as the chief medium of revelation and becomes the incarnational and sacramental principle that reconciles the supernatural and natural.

The role of Jesus as the objective and mediatorial embodiment of revelation is the key element of Brownson's refined synthesis, allowing him to succeed to his own satisfaction in establishing the conditions necessary for the possibility of revelation, thus justifying Christian belief. Brownson would soon follow this course into Roman Catholicism, appealing to the Church as the historical continuation of the incarnation and the means whereby the sinner is afforded the ability to live in communion with the mediatorial life of Jesus. Brownson's career as a Roman Catholic would involve further refinement of his synthesis, especially as influenced by the Italian ontologist Vincenzo Gioberti. The 1861 condemnation of ontologism, with which Brownson fully acquiesced, seems to have settled the issue for him. He died a Roman Catholic in 1876, but not before gaining a reputation as one of the leading American Catholic lay apologists and publicists of the nineteenth century.

NOTES

1 Bruce Kuklick, *Churchmen and Philosophers: From Jonathan Edwards to John Dewey*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 156.

2 Though valuable, Brownson's own accounts of his conversion are highly anachronistic. See, for example, *The Convert*; or, *Leaves from my Experience* (New York: Dunigan and Brother, 1857); *The Works of Orestes Brownson*, 20 vols., Henry F. Brownson, ed. (Detroit: Thorndike Nourse, 1882-1887), 5: 1-200.

3 See Anne C. Rose, *Transcendentalism as a Social Movement, 1830-1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 45.

4 See Russell E. Miller, *The Larger Hope: The First Century of the Universalist Church in America, 1770-1870* (Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association, 1979), 98ff; and David Robinson, *The Unitarians and the Universalists* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1985), 61-65.

5 Orestes A. Brownson, "A Sermon on the Salvation of All Men," *Gospel Advocate and Impartial Investigator* 6 (August 30, 1828), 274.

6 Brownson, "Letters to an Unbeliever," *Christian Register* 12 (November 30, 1833), 190. For Brownson's review of Constant's *De la Religion*, see "Benjamin Constant on Religion," *Christian Examiner and Gospel Review* 17 (September, 1834), 63-77.

7 See Brownson, "Spirituality of Religion," *The Unitarian* 1 (September, 1834), 411.

8 *Ibid.*, 408-409.

9 *Ibid.*, 406.

10 Brownson, "Children's Books," *Boston Reformer* 3 (1836).

11 Of particular importance to Brownson were Cousin's *Cours de l'Histoire de la Philosophie Moderne* (1815-1821) and *Fragments Philosophiques* (1826). For Brownson's reviews of these works see "Cousin's Philosophy," *Christian Examiner and Gospel Review* 21 (September, 1836), 33-64; "The Eclectic Philosophy," *Boston Quarterly Review* 2 (January, 1839), 27-54, also found in *The Works of Orestes Brownson*, 20 vols., ed. Henry F. Brownson (Detroit: Thomdike Nourse, 1882-1887), 2:535-552; and "Eclecticism-Ontology," *Boston Quarterly Review* 2 (April, 1839): 169-187.

12 Brownson to Victor Cousin, (November 15, 1836) as reproduced in Daniel R. Barnes, "An Edition of the Early Letters of Orestes Brownson" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Kentucky, 1971), 135.

13 Brownson, "Cousin's Philosophy," *The Christian Examiner and Gospel Review* 21 (September, 1836), 44.

14 *Ibid.*, 50-51.

15 Brownson, "Nature," *Boston Reformer* 3 (September 10, 1836), no page numbers.

16 *Ibid.*

17 See Brownson, "Mr. Emerson's Address," *Boston Quarterly Review* 1 (October, 1838), 506; and "Emerson's Essays," *Boston Quarterly Review* 4 (July, 1841), 291-308.

18 "Nature," (no page number).

19 Of particular importance to Brownson was Leroux's *De l'Humanite: de son Principe, et de son Avenir: ou se trouve exposee la vraie definition de la Religion* (1840). For Brownson's review of this work, see "Leroux on Humanity," *Boston Quarterly Review* (July, 1842), 257-322; *Works*, 4:100-139.

20 See Brownson, *The Mediatorial Life of Jesus. A Letter to William Ellery Channing, D.D.* (Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1841); *Works* 4:152-154.

21 "Leroux on Humanity," 116.

22 Brownson, "Parker's Discourse," *Boston Quarterly Review* 5 (October, 1842), 388ff.

23 See Brownson, "Synthetic Philosophy," *United States Magazine and Democratic Review* 5 (December, 1842); *Works*, 1:61.

24 *Ibid.*, 61-73.

25 *Ibid.*, 62-63.

26 *Ibid.*, 66.

27 See "Parker's Discourse," 395ff.

28 *Ibid.*, 402.

29 "Synthetic Philosophy," 116.

30 Ibid., 124-125.

31 Ibid., 70.

32 Ibid., 70-71.

33 *Mediatorial Life*, 153-156,

34 Ibid., 157.

35 Ibid., 161.

