

## PREFACE TO THE GERMAN EDITION

WHAT is Man? This question is the point at which the passionate interest of men and the divine message of the Bible meet and come into conflict. Primarily, man regards himself as the natural centre of his life and of his world. Even where in theory he thinks that he has overcome this 'naïve anthropocentrism,' in practice, in life itself, he does not cease to assert himself as this centre. A world with as many centres as there are human beings—that is the cause of all the chaos and disintegration in the world of men. The message of the Bible, therefore, is this: God, not man, is the centre; this truth must be expressed not only in theory but in practice. Hence this message is not concerned with 'God in Himself,' but with 'God for us,' the God who manifests His nature and His will in the Son of Man, in order that in man this centre may once more become the true centre. The great obstacle to this, however, is that view of himself held by man; to overcome this 'misunderstanding' of man about himself, to which he clings as a supreme good, is the revealed will of God, and the act in which this resistance is overcome is faith. The understanding of man's being is decided in faith or unbelief; in the fact, that is, whether God or man is the centre.

Thus in itself the truth of faith involves discussion, the Gospel is essentially—not accidentally—controversial. It is an attack on man who is his own centre. Divine truth wrestles with human falsehood, and man conceals himself behind his 'self-knowledge' in order to defend himself against the Divine claim. Hence a Christian doctrine of man must be beaten out on the anvil of continual argument with man's own view of himself. If faith simply means that human thought and will finally capitulate to the truth and the will of God, then theology can never be anything other than an attempt, in some way or another, to 'transcribe' this controversy between the Word of God and the thought of man. Hence all genuine theology is dialectical and not orthodox. It is aware that its 'transcript' reflects the imperfection of our human effort of thought as

much as the glory of divine truth. Above all, it is aware that its task is never finished.

Thus this book also is an unfinished piece of work, and would still be so even if I were to work on it for many more years. Its first beginnings lie in the past, more than fifteen years ago, when it became clear to me, under the deep impression made by the anthropological work of Kierkegaard, that the distinction between modern Humanism and the Christian faith must be made at this point: in the understanding of man. Acquaintance with the thought of Ebner, Gogarten, and Buber helped me further along the path which I had begun to follow. Here too, however, I learned still more from the new light thrown on the teaching of the Reformers; I learned most from Luther, for I came to see that in this question, of all the Reformers his teaching is the most Scriptural and the most profound. Yet as I probed more deeply into the subject I saw that it would be impossible simply to re-affirm the Reformation position and to go no further. I saw too why this was inevitable. In the central anthropological question of freedom versus unfreedom, in particular, the inadequacy of the teaching of the Reformers was evident. There is a great deal to learn from Augustine the thinker which escaped the notice of Luther the fighter. Above all, it became plain to me that the whole ecclesiastical tradition was burdened with certain fundamental axioms, wrongly regarded as Biblical truth; it is these ideas, regarded as axioms, which frequently provide a handle for attacks on the ecclesiastical doctrine on the part of its opponents. In the attempt to reformulate the Christian doctrine of man I took it for granted that I should utilize the results of Biblical criticism, and also, even though less directly, of modern discoveries in the field of natural science. Since we are now at the beginning of a theological era of increasing rigidity in orthodoxy, it is particularly important to preserve the faculty of criticism, although this too has its own peculiar dangers.

The book which I here present has passed through a number of preliminary stages. The germ of the whole was an article on *Law and Revelation* which I published in March 1925 in *Theologische Blätter*; the second stage was a lecture on *Christian Psychology* which I gave in the winter of 1927, which, completely

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recast in 1934, forms the foundation of the present work. A chapter on Biblical psychology in my small book *God and Man* provided a preliminary outline for the structure of the whole; but most of the other papers which were published, both before and afterwards, turned on the question of anthropology, especially those entitled *Die andere Aufgabe der Theologie* (the Other Task of Theology) and *The Point of Contact* (*Anknüpfungspunkt*).

With the publication of this book I hope that I have redeemed the promise made in the foreword to the second edition of *Natur und Gnade*, namely, that only a completely theological anthropology, which begins with the great central truths of the Christian faith—the Trinity, Election, and Incarnation—and is directed towards the final Redemption, will be in a position, without causing new misunderstandings, to show clearly my concern, as against Karl Barth, namely, man's responsibility. It is that alone, and not any weakening of the doctrine of the *sola gratia*, which causes me to hold fast to the Biblical doctrine of a general or "natural" revelation of God, in spite of all that may be said to the contrary. The fundamental idea of my book is this: that even the unbeliever is still related to God, and therefore that he is responsible, and that this responsibility is not put out of action even by the fullest emphasis upon the generous grace of God, but, on the contrary, that God requires it. This fundamental idea is illustrated in a number of ways throughout the book as a whole. It is concerned with a Biblical doctrine of man, whom the Word of God—as a word of judgement and of promise—addresses and apprehends. One 'theme with variations' will always be exposed to the reproach of repetition—especially if there are a good many of them. In my justification I would point to the illustration of the winding tunnels in our Swiss mountain railways, which continually present us with the same view seen from another aspect and from a greater height. The same, if said in a different context, is not simply the same.

Owing to my conception of the task of theology, all technical discussions are relegated to the notes and the appendices. Real theology is not only for experts, but it is for all to whom religious questions are also problems for thought. Hence I have

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tried to deal with difficult theological questions in such a way that they can be followed by those who have no special theological equipment. There are many ways of faith to Him who alone is the Way; theological reflection also may be such a way, although it certainly is not the way most people would choose. Among all the problems of theology that of anthropology is one of the most important. It is only through the study of this question that many a person comes to understand the Christian message itself, simply because he has learned to think more deeply about himself. Even thought may lead us into 'the cell of self-knowledge,' but this real self-knowledge is the point at which faith comes into being. Rightly understood, therefore, to begin at this point is genuine missionary effort.

In conclusion, there are two things I wish to say. I would like to express my cordial thanks to all those who have helped me, especially those who have helped me in the arduous labour of proof correction. And I would like to ask the reader to forgive me for not saying what I had to say in briefer compass. In spite of all my resolutions to the contrary this has developed into a big book after all, and yet I have left a great deal of material untouched. May the readers of this book regard its length as a parable showing that, in the last resort, we human beings cannot fully express even that vision of the truth which we have seen.

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