

PREFACE

IN the realm of doctrine the Christian Church has always recognized a twofold task: one concerning the Church itself; the other concerning the outside world, the world of doubt and unbelief. Although, at a time like the present, the conflict with unbelief and false ideologies may seem the more urgent one, yet the first task is always fundamental. For how can the Church do justice to her missionary calling in an un-Christian world if she is not herself clear about the content of her message? All down her history the Christian Church has given much thought to the basis, meaning and content of the message she has received—and is bound to proclaim; this process of reflection is what we mean by “dogmatics”.

Dogmatics is not the Word of God. God can make His Word prevail in the world without theology. But at a time when human thought is so often confused and perverted by fantastic ideas and theories, spun out of men's own minds, it is evident that it is almost impossible to preserve the Divine Word without the most passionate intellectual effort to re-think its meaning and its content. The simple Christian may, it is true, understand and preserve God's Word without theology; but for those Christians who are involved in the thinking of their own day, and who, as children of their own day, are deeply influenced by these currents of thought, an all-inclusive and thorough effort to re-think what has been “given” to faith is absolutely indispensable. This is particularly true for those whose calling it is to proclaim this faith to others.

Hence dogmatics serves first of all those who themselves exercise a teaching-office in the Church, as clergy and missionaries, evangelists, pastors and catechists. In addition, it is useful to all those members of the Christian Church who desire to grapple with the religious problems which their faith creates in their own minds. Upon the ladder of reflection on that which is given with the Word of God, dogmatics, as the science of Christian doctrine, holds pride of place. Hence it is not “everybody's business”, but only that of those who are capable of, and in need of, a thoroughgoing effort of thought.

There is no lack of dogmatic works in the Church. But the theological renaissance of the past twenty years has not produced any comprehensive work which expresses the spirit of

this renewal. The monumental work of Karl Barth, which in spite of the five weighty volumes which have already appeared, has not yet covered one-third of the doctrinal material, makes us wonder—even when we take into account the great industry and creative powers of the great theologian of Basle—whether this massive work, in spite of (or on account of) its unusual length, will be able to do justice to all the claims of a comprehensive presentation of Christian doctrine. In any case, there is room for other attempts.

One who for more than twenty years has been lecturing on dogmatics in the usual four terms a year, and so has tried nearly a dozen times to re-cast the doctrinal material as a whole, does not need to fear the charge of “superficiality”, when he produces the result of this work of so many years as a whole, having dealt with it hitherto in single monographs—as Christology, anthropology, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, and of Revelation. Perhaps it is not too much to expect that the comprehensive presentation may succeed in overcoming and dispelling prejudices and misunderstandings which have arisen in the course of the last twenty years, and have led to controversy on points of detail; possibly this general method may achieve results which could not be reached by the method of “frontal attack”.

Owing to my long co-operation with the Œcumenical Movement, I am fully aware both of the needs and the hopes of the World Church. Hence I have been very careful to keep as closely as possible to the external form of dogmatics—to the theological tradition common to the Church as a whole. In the main, therefore, I have tried to follow the order of the *Loci theologici* which, from the days of Peter Lombard onwards, has formed the framework of Christian Dogmatics, and was also in all essentials adopted by that master of Reformed theology, Calvin. Over and over again I have proved that this procedure is fundamentally sound.

In order not to overburden the non-theological reader who is willing to make the effort to think through theological questions, all the more technical historical material has been relegated to special appendices; this has also had the advantage of enabling me to introduce surveys from the History of Dogma which will meet the needs of students, and may perhaps sometimes even be useful to scholars. My thanks are due to Herr Pfarrer R. Rockenbach for the Index. It is my earnest desire that this work of dogmatics (of which the present volume is the

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first of three or four which have already been planned) may help to preserve the knowledge of the Divine Word, and to contribute to its expansion in a world which is fainting for lack of it, and is in such sore spiritual need.

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