

PREFACE

In the year 1946 the first volume of my *Dogmatics* appeared under the title of *Die christliche Lehre von Gott*.¹ Its intention was to sum up in three or four parts my work in the field of Biblical Theology. In 1950 followed the second volume, *Die christliche Lehre von Schöpfung und Erlösung*.² Since then no less than ten years have passed. I therefore owe my readers an explanation of the reasons for the delay in the appearance of this present and final volume, *Die christliche Lehre von der Kirche, vom Glauben, und von der Vollendung* (The Christian Doctrine of the Church, Faith, and the Consummation). As these reasons are partly of a practical and partly of a personal nature, it will be understood if I indulge in a rather longer introduction than usual.

The Protestant theology of the last decades received its decisive stimulus from the rediscovery of the message of the Reformers, which was in turn due in no small measure to the rediscovery of the great Danish writer Sören Kierkegaard. Whereas the preceding epoch had been dominated by the questions of the philosophy and history of religion, this change restored to its central position the question of the nature of faith.

The quest of the Biblical doctrine of faith was pursued, in fact, in two clearly distinct camps, which yet remained in constant communication with each other. In the one camp the problem of faith was taken up in close dependence on the traditional church creeds. Here above all others it was Karl Barth who, by having recourse to the exegesis and dogmatics of the classical Fathers of theology, undertook to restore the "true doctrine" to the Church in new formulations. In the other camp, of which Rudolf Bultmann must be called the guiding spirit, attention was directed, not to the "object of faith", to doctrine, but to the act of faith itself. In this group, faith's understanding of its own nature, and in consequence the fundamental questions of interpretation, have become the cardinal problem.

If I am to indicate my own standpoint between these two

¹ E.T. *The Christian Doctrine of God*, Lutterworth Press, London, 1949; Westminster Press, Philadelphia

² E.T. *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption*, Lutterworth Press, London, 1952; Westminster Press, Philadelphia

theological camps, then I must say that it is represented by what I described as early as 1937 in my discussion with objectivism and subjectivism in my book *Wahrheit als Begegnung*¹ as the guiding norm of all theological doctrine. It was natural and necessary that this teaching should be developed principally in this concluding volume of my *Dogmatics*. It gave me quite a new insight into the unique character of the fundamental phenomenon of the Biblical message, the unity of truth and fellowship.

As a preliminary study for the first part of this volume on the Church there appeared in 1951 my *Das Missverständnis der Kirche*.² The reception of this book showed how hard it is to make a critical examination of the customary conception of the Church. In this preliminary work it became clear to me how the situation of the Church as time goes on makes such an examination a more and more urgent necessity.

There was a second point where it seemed to me that the theme of this volume required additional preparatory work. The World Conference of Evanston 1954 had the Christian Hope as its theme. As a participant in the preparatory theological studies, I became aware that the problems of eschatology required a clarification which would free them from traditional ideas and place them in direct relation to the centre of the Biblical faith. My book *Das Ewige als Zukunft und Gegenwart* (1953)³ originated from my efforts to fulfil this task.

Both books have been assimilated into the present volume in an abbreviated form, their material having been reconsidered and reshaped. Since both for the problem of the Church and for that of the Christian Hope the understanding of faith is fundamental, it is comprehensible why the question of faith became the central theme of this work. The nature of faith is not to be understood by starting from the creed of the Church, but by starting with the Biblical witness. The chief concern of this concluding volume is to vindicate the Biblical concept of faith in contrast to that supplied by the tradition of the creed. From this beginning there followed quite of itself the new understanding of the Ekklesia as fundamentally different from everything covered by the concept "Church", and of the Christian Hope as fundamentally superior to all mythological and

¹ E.T. *The Divine-Human Encounter*, Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1943; S.C.M. Press, London, 1944

² E.T. *The Misunderstanding of the Church*, Lutterworth Press, London, 1952; Westminster Press, Philadelphia

³ E.T. *Eternal Hope*, Lutterworth Press, London, 1954; Westminster Press, Philadelphia

apocalyptic ideas; a superiority which results from this Hope's sole dependence on Jesus Christ as this is expressed, for example, in the Pauline witness in Romans 8: 38-39, which consequently became the guiding motif of this section.

The fulfilment of my promise to complete the last volume of my *Dogmatics* had to be postponed as a result of an invitation which came to me in 1953 to collaborate in the setting up of the International Christian University in Tokyo, and there, as tutor in "Problems of Christianity", to undertake a missionary activity in academic and intellectual circles. I felt a deep personal compulsion to obey this call, since a first visit to Japan in the year 1949 had shown me what great historical significance a Christian Japan would have for the world of today. For this reason it was a fascinating task to help in the schooling of a new generation of academically trained Christian laymen.

It was not till after my return home in the year 1955 that I was able to resume work on my *Dogmatics*. The years had not indeed passed for me without leaving any trace. A medical veto on the continuance of work at my accustomed tempo, and my own self-imposed obligation to fulfil at last my promise to my readers, brought me into a difficult situation. How much more difficult my work was made by a slight stroke which prevented the use of my right hand, can be easily gathered. This impediment was made the more troublesome by the fact that hitherto I had been accustomed to develop my thoughts in writing. To use the help of dictation in creative work was at first a very strange experience for me. I have so much the greater cause for gratitude that in Frau Dr. iur. H. Guanella-Zietzschmann, a faithful hearer of most of my lectures and sermons, and a friend of our household of many years' standing, I found a fellow-worker whose admirable gifts of intuitive understanding and unprecedented appetite for work made possible the writing of the manuscript. I should like also at this point to thank very heartily my dear former scholar, Fräulein Pfr. G. Epprecht, who at great expense of time together with Frau Dr. Guanella prepared the manuscript for the printer and corrected the proofs. What in these last years and indeed in the whole time of my theological work the quiet support and company of my dear wife has meant, I should mention merely for the benefit of those readers who do not know us personally.

This book is dedicated to Christoph Blumhardt. It was he, the prophetic witness to Jesus, who in the days of my youth by direct personal contact and, later, through men like Kutter and Ragaz, rooted me deep in the life-giving power of the Holy

Spirit. I have always loved and honoured him as one of those in whom the divine light shone forth, and in gratitude I regard my theological work as the harvest of his sowing.

Finally I should like to thank the English translators and to express my appreciation of their superb work, which so completely belies the Italian saying: "Any translation is a falsification".

EMIL BRUNNER

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