

Preface

During my last visit to the United States, which took place shortly after the publication of the first volume of the *Dogmatics*, a theological colleague expressed the desire that I would develop further the point of view contained in my book, *The Divine-Human Encounter* (*Wahrheit als Begegnung*). He urged that he regarded this view as decisive for the development of theology, and that he wished me to expand it within the whole framework of Christian doctrine. I replied, that I had already made a beginning in *The Christian Doctrine of God*, and that what I had begun in that volume was being expanded in two later volumes.

In this second volume the reader will doubtless perceive still more clearly the logical significance of this point of view for the understanding of the Christian message. The discovery of the “I-Thou” truth in philosophy by Ebner and Buber is indeed, as Heim has put it, a “Copernican turning-point” in the history of thought. Here, however, our concern is not to try to combine the “I-Thou” philosophy with Christian theology, but to emphasize the importance of this truth, which is wholly derived from the Bible, for Christian thought. Hitherto this has never been done within the sphere of dogmatics. The present work is a first, and doubtless an imperfect, attempt in this direction. It shows, however, that it is only on these lines that Christian thought can be saved from the rigidity of ecclesiastical orthodoxy, and the results of Biblical criticism can be made fruitful for the shaping of Christian doctrine. For after the first promising beginnings of the “Dialectical Theology” in overcoming the sterile and false contrast between Liberalism and Orthodoxy, we are unfortunately back again at the point where this contrast dominates theological discussion afresh. The rediscovery of Biblical truth has again, as at the period of the Reformation, led to a rigid fundamentalism and confessionalism, which offers plenty of vulnerable points for rationalistic attacks from the intellectual Left Wing, and makes it appear as though criticism and convinced Christian thought were opposed. The doctrine of Creation and Revelation here offered is based upon the conviction that sound criticism and genuine Christian thinking are not incompatible. Those members of the Church who passively

accept what they have been taught as “revealed truth” seem to be unaware of the fact that their view of “faith” is hampered by an age-long tradition which has misunderstood the meaning of “faith”, regarding it not as “encounter” with the Living Christ, but as the acceptance of “revealed truths”.

The truth which broke through at the Reformation (though later it was again obscured) of the personal character of faith, as “encounter” with Christ, means liberation from the rigidity and ethical sterility of orthodoxy, and sets us free to have a faith which is based on nothing save the Love of God revealed in Jesus Christ. This truth alone can preserve us from sterile “theologizing” and from clericalism, and awaken in the Church a missionary and pastoral spirit. This is the fundamental aim of the present work. I now offer it to the reader’s kind and critical attention.

The fact that in spite of many health difficulties I was able to finish this book before leaving Europe for my journey to the East is due to the assistance of many good friends. Herr Pfarrer Basler in Zofingen, and Fräulein Gertrud Epprecht, Assistant-Minister in Zürich, have shared with me the labours of proof correction, and my son, Dr. H. H. Brunner, Pfarrer in Marthalen, prepared the Index. To all of these, and to several others who remain anonymous, I tender my cordial thanks.

EMIL BRUNNER

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O. WYON

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