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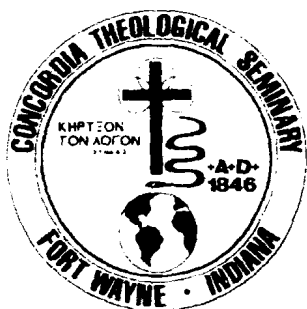
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The Doctrine of Man: Christian Anthropology

Eugene F. Klug

Centuries ago Protagoras confidently claimed that “man is the measure of all things.” But how accurate could that measure be if man did not even know himself? Time has not erased the wringing of the hands, expressed so vividly by Schopenhauer concerning the why and wherefore and whence of man: “How I wish I knew!”

Man has broken into the powerplant of the atom and demonstrated almost unlimited potential with his technological triumphs; but along with his mushroom clouds he has merely lighted up the central problem of human existence, which is man himself. Quite rightly Reinhold Niebuhr assessed the situation in his famous work, *Nature and Destiny of Man*, thus: “man has always been his own most vexing problem.”¹ Herman Dooyeweerd, the Dutch thinker, chimes in, saying that the world of every day experience is not and has not been man’s main problem as much as he is the problem himself.²

Who is this creature who struggles constantly to understand himself, who stands in the midst of miriads of triumphs of all kinds and yet is afraid of his own shadow, as it were? Anatomically man has been described as the most ingenious assemblage of portable plumbing (when it is working); biologically, as the most formidable of all the beasts of prey; psychologically, as noble in reason and infinite in faculties. Just as often he is delineated as a hopeless mess. Garcin, a leading character in Jean-Paul Sartre’s *No Exit*, enlarges on this last point: “So this is hell. I’d never have believed it. You remember all we were told about the torture-chambers, the fire and brimstone, the ‘burning marl.’ Old wives’ tales! There’s no need for red-hot pokers. Hell is —other people!” This fatalistic note in modern existentialistic philosophy is vividly expressed by Samuel Beckett’s characters in *Waiting for Godot*:

Vladimir: “Nothing you can do about it.”

Estragon: “No use struggling.”

Vladimir: “One is what one is.”

Such a sense of futility concerning human existence, of life itself, has plagued man from earliest times. Time and time again poets, novelists, thinkers from various schools have repeated the refrain so often voiced by the ancient Greek thinkers: "For men on earth 'tis best never to be born at all; or being born, to pass through the gates of Hades with all speed."

The Philosophical Views

Yet carefully developed, closely reasoned philosophical systems have attempted to define the nature of man and offer the solution for his perplexity concerning himself and his existence. Idealism (Hume, Kant, Jefferson, Emerson, Whitehead, Dewey) bravely maintains faith in man and his capacities. The concept of sin has no place in this thinking, except perhaps as a kind of negative inertia. The light of reason will in time enable man to emerge from the innocence of nature to a fuller, more mature knowledge, understanding, and virtue.

Naturalism (Huxley, Teilhard de Chardin, and the host of evolutionists) views man as a more highly developed animal. Infinite progress in the future is man's hope. Increase of knowledge will enable him, as the most highly cultured animal, to effect increasing harmonization of the now seemingly hostile forces around him. Louis Leakey and his son Richard have moved gravel around in search of fossil remains in central Africa, meanwhile feuding with each other as to their meaning. With the optimism characteristic of a typical evolutionist the younger Leakey portends: "By searching our long-buried past for an understanding of what we are, we may discover some insight into our future." Amoralistic, naturalism admits nothing like sin, recognizing only that man is influenced and shaped by forces within (heredity) and without (nature), over which he needs to triumph. The mistake of naturalism is obvious: it puts man too low on the scale of creation.

Romanticism represents a reaction against rationalism. In the vein of Whitman, it is highly ego-centric. Man is sinless, something divine. Evil is a minus quality, a mere negation, an unreality. Man is inherently good and needs only to let the power of good come to expression through his own inner mystical resources.

Modern psychology pictures man as caught up in his efforts to try to deal with his predicaments through various mechanisms: withdrawal, activism, or placebos of various kinds

by which to tranquilize his fears. Freud's answer was to rid the self of repression, to deny guilt feelings. Others, like Jung and later contemporaries, urge man's need for confession, to "let it all out," for truth's sake, not for the sake of forgiveness, unless it be forgiving oneself in a kind of self-justification.

Existentialism (Sartre, for example, rather than Kierkegaard) paints a gloomy picture for man, holding out no hope really, other than that of using his freedom to act. To do this in closest connection with what appears to be right and relevant to life's problems at any given moment is to achieve authentic existence, or being, or self-realization. This is one's redemption, if redemption is to be spoken of at all. Sin or moral wrong simply do not exist. Albert Camus portrays existentialist thinking perfectly through the mouth of his leading character in *The Fall*: "Since finding my solution, I yield to everything, to women, to pride, to boredom, to resentment, and even to the fever that I feel delightfully rising at this moment. I dominate at last, but forever. Quickly I crush everything, people and things, under the weight of my own infirmity, and at once I perk up."³

Marxist socialism preaches that man is not inherently evil. The only evil is estrangement from nature, self, or others. God does not fit into the picture. In dialectical materialism God simply is out of style. The sources of alienation are especially money, with its corrupting greed impulse, and self-aggrandizement through the accumulation of wealth. The goal for man is the non-acquisitive life in which workers, so goes the theory, enjoy work again, gain control over nature, disclaim all class distinctions, political competition, and strife. Each worker seeks the good of the state, or the greatest number, the proletariat, according to the Marxist "gospel."

A pathetic sort of optimism courses through these philosophical views of man. He simply becomes more wrapped up in himself and travels further from the truth. None of these natural philosophies deals adequately with the moral issues and problems, especially the fact of man's moral failure before God. The idea of sin is repugnant and offensive, especially original sin. The fall itself is counted as absurd. Even considering it to be significant in a legendary sort of way, as Niebuhr and most modern theologians do, does not help matters at all. Man, as a result, resembles some modern-day Don Quixote, the knight of doleful countenance, with a barber's dish for a helmet, a sway-back nag for a charger, and a rusty sword in his hand, riding off in all directions, fighting battles that really do not

count, against imaginary foes (or windmills) that are not there, for a lady fair who does not even exist. There is no helping a man who refuses to see himself as God sees him, who continues to think that his "destiny is in his own hands" (Alexis Carrel).

The Biblical View

If we ask the Bible the question of what is man, the answer comes through loud and clear, as from a two-manual organ with all stops pulled. Both testaments, Old and New, key in on man's nature. Actually, however, the Bible's great theme is God, not man first of all. Man is the secondary concern of Scripture's revelation; God is first and primary. Thus Holy Scripture, the inspired Word of God, focuses attention on man vis-a-vis God. There is no puzzle here anent man's nature and meaning. Man is the background and foil against which we see God's creation, plan, activity. God, the source of life, is wondrously concerned about man and his relationship to the Creator. "History," notes Walther Eichrodt, "is a movement effected by God, which challenges man and gives him his destiny and his task."⁴

God's concern for man is present from the beginning, even after the fall. "Adam, where art thou?" sounds the voice of God in the garden (Gen. 3:9). "Where is Abel thy brother?" God asks the angered murderer Cain, who had spilled his brother's blood (Gen. 4:9). "Where wast thou when I laid the foundation of the earth?" is God's question out of the whirlwind to Job (38:4). "Whither shall I go from thy spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence?" David sings in praise of God's all-seeing providence (Ps. 139:7). "Where?" and "Whither?" echo again and again through Holy Scripture. God is asking the questions, and thus man is given to understand his place or station, his existence and being, before God. Both man's greatness and his *Angst* stem from God's intentions and vigilance concerning man, from man's accountability before God, and not *vice versa*. This is a vital point, since it sharply distinguishes between Christian theology's approach to the question concerning man's nature and that of human philosophy, psychology, and biology. In these disciplines man stands before the mirror, and sees and studies himself. He grants the idea of ego or personality to himself. As an afterthought he introduces the idea of God. The answers he gets are no more satisfying than the questions he asks; he creates "God"

in his own image.

How different is the witness of Scripture! Now it is not man asking about himself, but God asking about man. The answer to the question of who he is, or what he is, is not in what man thinks or knows about himself, but in what he is in the judgment of God. Self-understanding is thus embraced in the understanding of God, God's intent and purpose for man. Though of lowly origin, dust and clay (Gen. 2:7; Job 4:19), and, since the fall, like grass that withers and like flowers that fade, to be lost in the ground from which they sprang (Ps. 90:5,6; 103:15,16; Is. 40:6,7,22), man is still the most elevated part of God's creation, fearfully and wonderfully made (Ps. 139:14-18) in the image and likeness of his Creator, with dominion over the created realm (Gen. 1:26,27; Ps. 82:6). How different is this view from man-oriented anthropocentric investigations which lead either to the virtual apotheosis of man, as in idealistic thinking, or the naturalistic denigrating of man to animal status. It is little wonder that man is troubled by what he sees, or rather by what he does not see; for as man increases in knowledge of and power over nature, he advances not an inch in knowledge of himself.

The question concerning man's nature and destiny is so very vital in every way. It impinges on every point of life and existence: man's vocation and work; marriage and family; government and social structure; education and culture. These all take their stamp and shape from the nature of man. Precisely for this reason the testimony which Scripture gives concerning man is extremely important, as God speaks concerning man's origin, meaning, destiny—answering the questions of whence, why, and whereto.

Whence Man

The question of man's origin is answered by the Bible on its very first pages, though not exclusively there. With united voice the inspired writers of Holy Writ account for man's existence through God's wondrous creation of him out of the dust of the ground (Gen. 2:7), much as a potter shapes a clay vessel (Jer. 18:6; Is. 64:8), but with the breath of life, so that man becomes a living soul by divine inbreathing (Gen. 2:7). How could the *gift* of life be more powerfully taught? Physically tied to the ground or to matter around him, by the creative power of God man becomes a living, beautiful person who throbs with life,

formed from the elemental creation around him (Ps. 139:13-16). Biologically like the animals, psychologically or personally like God who made him, man stands in a unique place before his Creator and in the created realm. A sharp line is drawn between his coming into being and that of all other animal life. Man is not just one in the multitude of animal forms, but a very special creation. The animals were created in groups; not so man. The creation of man and woman in the image of God was a special, distinct act for each.

Some have tried to distinguish sharply between image (*zelem*) and likeness (*demuth*), as though the first referred to man's bodily and rational faculties, and the second to his spiritual likeness with God. There is no solid linguistic evidence supporting such a division; scripture uses the terms interchangeably (cf. Gen. 1:26,27; 5:1; 1 Cor. 15:49; Col. 3:10). Both mean the same thing, referring especially to the fact that man desired what God desired. Thus there was true knowledge of God in the mind, full conformity of the will to God's will, and uprightness of the soul in all its faculties. In this way man was patterned *after* his Maker (*Abbild*); he was not *of* God's essence (*Ebenbild*). This was a blissful condition; there was no fear, no sorrow, no evil, no terror, only perfect harmony with God and His created realm. This image, or likeness with God, was lost by the fall; man by nature was now ignorant of God, hostile to Him and His will, disdainful and incapable of things spiritually sound (1 Cor. 2:14). Only by his regeneration, or conversion, that is, by faith, are these new qualities once again *begun* in man, in the new man, the man of faith who has been transformed, not in essence, but in the sense of passing new qualities of the mind, soul, will. Of these the Apostle Paul speaks in Ephesians 4:24 and Colossians 3:10. God has, in spite of man's fall and loss of the image (likeness), shown His loving intent for the sinner in seeking his redemption and reclaiming him as a child of God.

Why Man?

Man's destiny or purpose, under God, as the foremost of all the creatures which God made, was a most exalted one. Scripture details it in a threefold manner. First, God created man for His own enjoyment. Starting from the "very good" which expresses God's pleasure over man's creation in the first chapter

of Genesis, there is a consistent witness throughout the Scriptures to God's delight "in the sons of men" (Prov. 8:22-24, 30ff.). Man is created as God's intended counterpart by virtue of His delight in him, as an artist sculpts or paints by virtue of his pleasure in his craft. Even with the fall in the picture, this attitude of God towards man does not alter—even though by sin man became the target of God's just wrath. At the announcement of the Savior's birth, for example, the angels sang of God's "good will toward men" (Lk. 2:14). In a similar way the apostle Paul wrote of the kindness and love of God shown toward man through the Savior's coming (Tit. 3:4; 2:11). These verses, along with the whole New Testament (and the Old Testament Messianic promises), focus clearly on the gracious intent of God to send His only begotten Son for man's redemption, to restore men to the adoption of sons (Gal. 4:4,5; 2 Cor. 5:19). It is hard to conceive of a more wonderful truth in connection with man's destiny and purpose than that man was made and intended by God to give joy to God Himself.

Included in this purpose was God's intent to commune with His creature, man. Man's whole nature, different from the other creatures, was made for communication. The animals have brains, certain faculties, and remarkable instincts. Man is a communicating *person*, with soul and mind, and not just brain and body (cf. Wilder Penfield's *The Mystery of the Mind* and Mark P. Cosgrove's *The Essence of Man*).⁵ Woman was placed at his side by God's special creation as a helpmeet, with whom he might communicate; and both were made for communion with their Creator in a manner totally unique among all creatures. Even after the fall, though now in different manner, God still has graciously revealed Himself to man, addressing him in his own language. Man rightly has been termed the "seeing eye on the body of creation" (Wilhelm Vischer) by virtue of his unique place in God's purposing.

Scripture speaks very pointedly of man's unique equipment as a specially created being. His God-given attributes included, first of all, his spiritual nature, that by which he was most distinguished from the rest of created things. Here was the source and fulcrum of his moral sense. The Hebrew term is *ruach*, equivalent to the *pneuma* of the Greek New Testament. It is regularly used of man only, not of animals; it designates the highest of inner properties in man and is immortal. The life principle in man is regularly identified with the Hebrew term *nephesh*, or the Greek *psyche*; and while it is sometimes also used

of animals, its standard application is to man, particularly when it refers to the center of the human personality. At that point it is indistinguishable from *ruach* or *pneuma*. The "heart" of man (*leb* in the Hebrew) denotes the hub of man's volitional and emotive powers; hence it is not used of animals in general. In a passage like Ezekiel 36:26, "a new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you," it is virtually identified with the spirit. Man's body (*basar* in Hebrew, *soma* in Greek) is a vital part of his created being, in no way denigrated in Old or New Testament. While it, too, like the soul, has been deeply affected by the fall into sin, it shall one day put off those shackles and be resurrected in glory.

Thus, man's body is no mere "prison house of the soul," as the Greeks taught, and as dualistic philosophy, within or outside of Christian theology, has held. Body and soul (or spirit) are man's constitutive make-up by God; both are vitally tied to his person. Yet each is distinct, with its own properties; so while it is within the property of the body to be destroyed, it is not the soul's to die. The picture Scripture gives is one of disarming simplicity and sobriety, free from all idealistic notions and abstruse speculation, also every vestige of nihilism. Man was intended by God to be a holy, perfect creature with perception and understanding, fit for rule over this created realm, a noble creature, whose body throbbed not only with life but with a living soul, or spirit, capable of fulfilling every function as God's trusted steward over the created realm. Man's destiny and endowment were wisely and wondrously planned by God.

For the sake of genuine fellowship God placed man under His divine will (Gen. 2:16). We may wonder at the strangeness of the test in connection with the trees in the Garden of Eden, but the fact is that man was to will freely the righteousness and goodness with which he had been constituted by God, for only a freely willed obedience would then have been true obedience and holiness. It was to be man's true beauty and glory (*Schmuck und Ehre*). He was to regard his Creator as Lord and God, with due respect, and obey Him willingly and eagerly, not as a mere puppet, of course, but as a free, responsible agent under his Creator. It is important to note that, even after man's fall, God's holy will remained the same; and so God's word to Abraham was the same as it had been to Adam in his purity before the fall: "I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect" (Gen. 17:1).

God also entrusted the earth to man as his habitation and do-

main, "to dress it and keep it" (Gen. 2:15). Thus God's estate was given as a bequest to man; he was to populate it, settle it with his descendants, and rule over it with all its mysterious resources and powers. This would afford him a full and rewarding life. Work itself thus was designed as a happy activity, not a negative, demeaning sort of drudgery as it became in the aftermath of the fall. Building, agriculture, scientific pursuits, cultural activity, technology, industry are all still in man's dominion; but now, at the same time that he engages in them, he corrupts them, even as he is corrupt through sin. "The hatred of work," states Dorothy Sayers in *The Zeal of Thy House*, "must be one of the most depressing consequences of the fall."⁶ Nonetheless man's progress, in spite of his fallen nature, is one of the amazing records of history; and we might rightly wonder what his mastery might have been had he kept his first estate, pure and untarnished by sin. God gave man the earth not for irresponsible exploitation but as a sacred trust (Gen. 2:15; Ps. 24:1). Man was to deal carefully and discreetly with his entrusted possessions; he was personally endowed with gifts that uniquely prepared him for the high trust.

Whereto Man?

Man's end or goal, the "whereto," is set into a similar perspective by both Old Testament and New Testament. Life and death both issue from God, according to Scripture, though the latter only as a result of sin. Because of sin man faces death with puzzlement and horror, releasing his hold on life very grudgingly and with lament (Ps. 30:9). Man's fear, of course, is connected with man's knowledge of God's anger over his sin. Not to be overlooked, however, because of God's promise of salvation, are the triumphant notes, the brave "yets," as man faces the inevitable (Ps. 73:23-26). He can face it with the confidence of Job (Job 19:25-27).

Scripture accounts for death in man's existence as a direct result of his fall into sin. It was man's fateful mistrusting of God's command and Word, and his deferring to Satan's deceitful promise, which brought this now feared consequence upon him. Man's futile attempt to run and to cover himself from guilt, which had fallen upon him like a cloud, finally ends with the tearing apart of body and soul and the corruption of the grave. But mortality was not man's original lot; he dies because of the stain or mark of sin upon him. Death marks the final end

on this earth for man in his sorry, broken relationship with his Creator. Death is a steady drummer, and none escapes this appointment (Job 7:1-6).

Meanwhile man exists in *Angst* and passes through life troubled in mind and body, if not reconciled with his God. We know from Scripture, and from experience itself, that God has not withdrawn life from man, nor left him entirely alone. Solicitously God cared for Adam and Eve, even after the fall (Gen. 3:21), especially in preparing for them the way back to Him through His glorious promise of a Helper or Savior (Gen. 3:15). This *protevangelium*, or first Gospel, was so cheering and so real for our first parents, that when Eve bore her first son, she exclaimed: "I have the man, the Lord." This is the literal translation of Genesis 4:1 and betokens her earnest trust of God's promise.

The New Testament takes up the theme of the Old Testament concerning man's life of pain and death as a result of sin. By nature man stands under the same curse with Adam whose sin is in each of us. Original sin is the root sin, the sin of origin, and it is in every human being since the Fall; we bear Adam's sin and Adam's guilt upon us (Rom. 5:12-19). Man has lost his righteousness before God and come short of His glory (Rom. 3:22f.). He is enslaved by sin (Rom. 6:17) and, as a result, inherits sin's wages—death (Rom. 6:23).

But the New Testament especially takes up the joyous theme of salvation, notably so in the inspired writings of the Apostle Paul. God has provided for man's redemption. Eternal life is God's gift, freely given through Jesus Christ, our Lord (Rom. 6:23; 3:24). God did not leave man to languish hopelessly in his sin. He sent His own Son into the flesh and under the Law for man's sake, that we might again become God's adopted children (Gal. 4:4,5). Of this happy truth the angels sang as the announcement came to the shepherds: "Unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, which is Christ the Lord" (Lk. 2:11). It was a salvation Christ worked out through His vicarious suffering and death, the Sinless One for all sinners, His death for all, for our life, that in Him we might be new creatures again (2 Cor. 5:15-17).

Thus Christ, who is the second Adam whose death removed the offence of the first Adam through whom all were made sinners (Rom. 5:15), is "the brightness of God's glory, and the express image of His person" (Heb. 1:3). He purges us from sin and delivers us from death and the devil by becoming a partaker

of our flesh and blood and tasting death for us (Heb. 2:14,15). With the Apostle John we can now joyfully exult: "Now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:1f.). Through Christ the believer becomes fellow-heir with Christ (Rom. 8:17), an heir of salvation (Heb. 1:14), and comes to a station more lofty and exalted, in a sense, than was Adam's state in the first place; at least, it is no less so. For now that Christ has become the first-fruit of them that slept by His resurrection (1 Cor. 15:20f.), so also we, in the resurrection of our mortal bodies, shall put on immortality and be clothed with a spiritual body, whereby "as we have borne the image of the earthly, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly" (1 Cor. 15:49). In the resurrection Christ "shall change our vile (lowly) body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself" (Phil. 3:21). Into this wondrous inheritance of everlasting communion with God in heaven—an inheritance lost in the fall—Christ earnestly desires to bring all men, for He "will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4).

Nothing uncertain, therefore, is connected with God's gracious purpose towards man, for, as Paul says, "whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren" (Rom. 8:29). The promise is unto faith, as Luther states: "Glaubst du, so hast du," "if you believe, it is yours."

With this point the Bible closes its story of man and the Creator's gracious, saving purpose for him. We can only say, standing back in awe and amazement, that there is nothing amidst all the contradictory pictures and philosophies which men themselves have proposed which can compare with the truth, grace, and glory of God which now is ours in the face of Christ Jesus in whom we believe.

FOOTNOTES

1. Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1964), I, p. 1.
2. Herman Dooyeweerd, *The Twilight of Western Thought* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1960).

3. Albert Camus, *The Fall* (New York: Knopf, 1961), p. 142.
4. Walter Eichrodt, *Man in the Old Testament* (Chicago: Henry Regner, 1951), p. 27.
5. Wilder Penfield, *The Mystery of the Mind* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975); Mark P. Cosgrove, *The Essence of Human Nature* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977).
6. Dorothy Sayers, *The Zeal of Thy House*, in *Religious Drama*, ed. Marvin Halverson (New York: Meridan, 1957), I, p. 274.