

Inaugural Address

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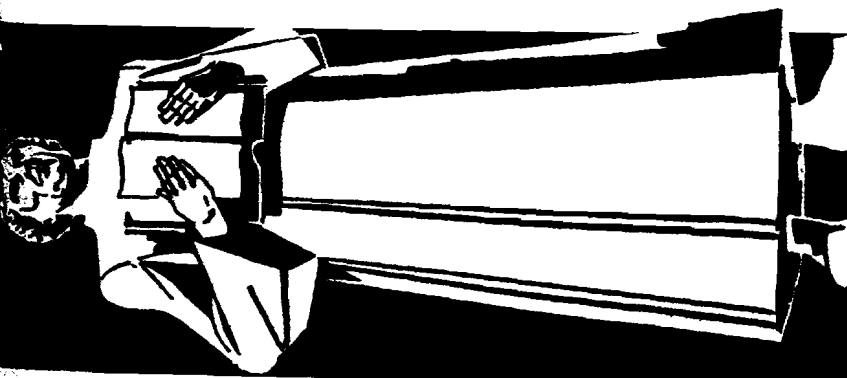
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Man: 1971

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ANTHROPOLOGY, THE SCIENCE of man, has become the contemporary concern of mankind. Not metaphysics or theology, not even the behavioral sciences, but anthropology, a word about man. The old metaphysics, the not so old critic says, bound man to his world in a macro-microcosmic structure. The old theology, and for the contemporary critic most theology seems to fall within the category, bound man to a non-temporal, non-spatial, other-worldly being who could only with the greatest difficulty submit to definition and was constantly being subjected to varying kinds of existence proofs by theologians who felt uneasy without them and philosophers who felt uneasy with them. Only anthropology, recognizing as it does the unique contribution of existentialist thought to a maturing understanding of human freedom, could set man free and view him as a creature who is totally "open to the world."

Interestingly enough, anthropology has never been *per se* inimical to theology. Wolfhart Pannenberg observes that modern anthropology, rooted and oriented as it is to man's openness to the world, has its historical roots in Biblical thought. And of course he is correct! Christian theology lays the foundation of all genuine anthropology by insisting that man bears the *Imago Dei* and is freed from a world in which he is but a pawn to become the world's *dominus*. As Max Scheler has pungently stated it, the unique freedom of man to move beyond his world is his precise capacity to move into openness to and with the world. Biblical anthropology insists that man simply is not bound to a cosmic necessity nor a biological-sociohistorically acculturated existence. Man finds his *Bestimmung* elsewhere—to phrase it in the now passé Tillichian theology, in the onomous relationship and understanding.

Only man, of all the creatures, is truly open to his world. Man *has* a world; other creatures *belong to* the world. Man has not merely been assigned a place, even the choicest or supreme place, in the cosmic order. Man experiences the world, of which he is admittedly a part, from the remarkable vantage point of self-reflection and other-relatedness. Pannenberg once again helps us understand that man's openness to the world does not lie in the fact that the whole world—in contrast to a few objects—can become human environment; rather openness to his world means that man is always directed to the "open." He can always go that very significant step beyond what he has and has experienced. He is open beyond his conceptual grasp of the world at any given moment; in fact, his searching mind never permits him to come to rest with any picture of reality he is capable of contemplating! Furthermore man's openness to his world permits no coming to final terms with his transformation of nature

into any given culture. Man finds no ultimate satisfaction even in his own creations and constructs. This is creative richness. And this fact constitutes the new *differentia specifica* of homo sapiens. Contemporary anthropology can be neither appreciated nor properly assessed apart from the recognition that basic to the human creature is what Arnold Gehlen rather appropriately denominates man's almost innate sense of indefinite obligation. Somewhat simply and a bit unscientifically put, man is ever striving, never satisfied.

Man, it must be insisted, is free from the world and open to the world. It must also be insisted that man is never totally outside what St. Paul calls the elemental constitution of the world. Man can be master of his world. He can change, remake, reorder, and now supposedly destroy his world. But until he attains that dreadful summit of human capability, he is as the Scriptures state it very much *in* the world. And as long as he is in his world man is dependent upon it! Pannenberg speaks in this connection of human drives and impulses quite similar to those belonging to the animal. He then posits the concept of infinite dependence which builds the bridge he wants to have extend beyond the finite. And the entity upon which he would have man infinitely dependent is that being upon which our language has bestowed the name, God. Man's ultimate *Bestimmung* is thus determined by God. Anthropology reaches its zenith in theology.

Whether Pannenberg is correct at this point is open to debate. Let's rather return to what might not inappropriately be called a *Voraussetzung* of contemporary anthropology: man is, in his state of openness to the world, nonetheless conditioned by, restricted to, and therefore in a certain sense limited by the very world over which he exercises his freedom of openness and decision. Now contemporary anthropology is not only rooted in Biblical thought; that same theological stance emphasizes that the world includes not only the divine presence but is itself totally dependent upon him! Man is driven by this presence who has determined human *Bestimmung*, but who in unponderable grace offers man a spiritual destiny totally unattainable, and in fact unseekable, without his grace. It is, furthermore, *in* his world, in the concrete historical world, not in phantasy, vision and esoteric private consciousness or atemporal moment, that God is known to man.

The task of theology is to communicate God's presence. He confronts man in Jesus Christ, in his Word. He calls man to trust in his Word. Again, this takes place in man's world, in the concrete, the historical, the visible. In a sense, theology has always been anthropocentric: it is a word about God's creation, redemption, and salvation of man. It is time that anthropology, whether contemporary or not, realize that it is actually theocentric: a word about man's openness to the world in which God continues to come to man

in judgment, but above all in compassion, grace and restoring forgiveness. In short, what *Man: 1971* requires is what Everyman requires: openness in freedom to the world which is God's creation and in which he speaks his word of redemption and reconciliation in Christ, which, as Kierkegaard would say, truly determines human existence.