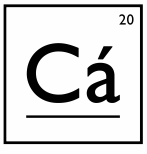

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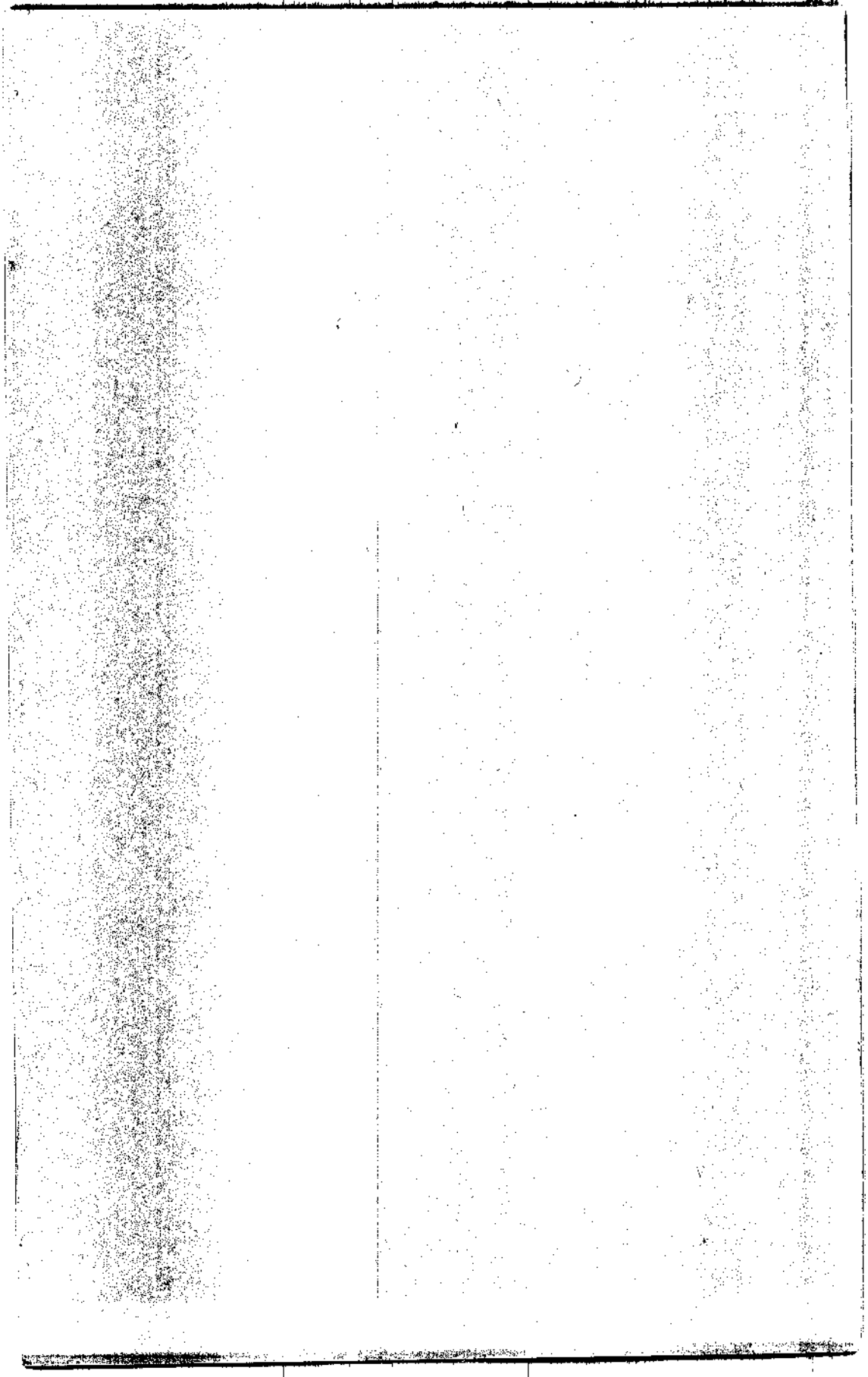

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BULTMANN

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BULTMANN

by

RIDDERBOS

Translated by David H. Freeman

PRESBYTERIAN AND REFORMED PUBLISHING CO.
Phillipsburg, New Jersey

Library of Congress Catalogue Card Number LC 59-15772

Printed in the United States of America

ISBN: 0-87552-581-4

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I NTRODUCTION

Rudolf Bultmann, retired Professor of New Testament, of the University of Marburg, is today the center of interest throughout the theological world.

The cause of his widespread fame is not simply due to what Bultmann has written in the course of the years concerning various major problems which deal with the origin of the New Testament, but rather it is especially due to the manner in which he tries to interpret the message of the New Testament for our generation. Bultmann definitely disclosed his position in a summarizing address entitled, *New Testament and Myth,* which he delivered in 1941 at Alpirsbach to the *Gesellschaft fiir Evangelische Theologie.* This address created a tremendous storm throughout the German theological world, a storm which has still not subsided but which appears rather to be spreading. An increasing number of scholars outside of Germany are becoming occupied with the problems posed by Bultmann, and the number of publications devoted to the latter, both great and small, continues to grow. And to keep abreast of the status of the discussion, in Germany now and again we find collections of the most important and characteristic publications concerning the theology of Bultmann. Nnturally it is possible., as frequently occurs, that this new point of view will presently lose its popularity and be forgotten. On the other hand, we must seriously consider the possibility that this new conception is characteristic and will remain representative for the theological development of the middle of the twentieth century, just as rationalism, romanticism, and idealistic theological movements were characteristic of former times.

Bultmann's theology can be called an existentialistic approach to and exposition of the Biblical message. Existentialist philosophy is very characteristic of the attitude to life of many in our time. The fact that Bultmann's theology is determined completely by philosophical existentialistic conceptions of man, life, and the world, explains to a large measure the great number of his adherents and also the sharp opposition to him. It is therefore meaningful that the non-

professional theologian interest himself in this figure, for his theology is a typical phenomenon of the time. Bultmann does not concern himself with the periphery of modern life, but he operates with unusual competence where the great modern theological and philosophical traditions reach their contemporary focus. It is for this reason that his influence must not be investigated in a trivial manner. Bultmann's theology is a challenge to orthodoxy and, in a certain sense, it is also a challenge to liberalism. That it is a challenge to orthodoxy will appear in the course of this essay.

The statement that it is also a challenge to liberalism is meant in the sense that in Bultmann's theology a new major conception of liberal thought is presented, a conception which breaks with all the various older liberal views and, offers in their place, a new radical reformation to liberal thought. It remains to be seen as to whether or not liberal theology, which, in many respects, is itself seeking new paths, will allow itself to be brought under this banner, or whether it will here and there be brought closer to orthodoxy as expressed in the great ecclesiastical confessions. But one thing is certain, Bultrnann's position signifies a renewal of the conflict between liberal and Biblical thought and therefore, it cannot be by-passed in a depreciating or derogatory manner.

I. BULTMANN'S GENERAL POSITION

Bultmann's affiliation with radical Biblical criticism

VVho is Bultmann? First, a few biographical facts. Rudolf Bultmann was born in a minister's family on August, 20, 1884 at Oldenburg. He studied at Marburg and, with the exception of a short absence (from 1916-1921), was an instructor *(Privatdozent)* there until 1922, when he became a professor, succeeding his teacher, Heitmiiller. Until recently Bultmann worked as a New Testament scholar advancing the liberal tradition of the theological faculty at Marburg. Bultmann belongs to the radical-critical wing of German Biblical criticism. And yet he has given this critism new ways, new paths and new perspectives.

The history of radical Biblical criticism in Germany has undergone various phases. It began in the so-called Enlightenment of the eighteenth century. Some time later, under the influence of the spirit of the time, specific schools arose' in which the main thoughts of the Enlightenment were applied and developed in the sphere of Biblical

criticism. It is well-known, for example, that the so-called Tubingen school, of which F. Chr. Baur was the father, is strongly under Hegelian influence. Later followed the liberal school (H. J. Holtzmann, Ad. Harnack, W. Heitmiiller, Ad. Jiilicher and others) which held sway until far into the twentieth century. For it the kernel of the gospel was the kingdom of heaven that Jesus taught to be a spiritual kingdom of love. Only the preaching of Jesus, and not his person, belongs to the original gospel. To this liberal school there is joined the *history of religion movement,* which placed the emphasis upon religious feeling, and explained Christianity, especially in its supernatural Christ°logical and cosmological manifestation, in terms of the later Jewish and pagan religions of about the beginning of the Christian era (especially in terms of the Hellenistic mystery religions and the so-called pre-Christian gnosticism). Prominent representatives of this movement were, for example, Bousset and Reitzenstein.

Bultmann's "form historicar method

It would take us too far afield to investigate the manner in which Bultmann has been influenced by and differs from these various radical-critical schools. Bultmann has followed the course which they have set. Jesus is for him also nothing but a man whom the later faith of the church has made a deity. However, whereas the liberal theology tried to reconstruct out of the gospels a "life of Christ," free of "the supernatural cadre" in which it had been placed by the Evangelists, Bultmann recognizes that this is not possible. He is aware of the fact that the history of Jesus, as told in the gospels, is from "a" to "z" a supernatural history which at the same time bears the character of preaching. According to Bultmann this preaching does not give us a trustworthy account of what occurred; it represents only the faith of the later church. In this sense Bultmann (even as others) speaks of the gospels as the "theology of the church." And this faith of the later church (and its accompanying "theology") has taken such a thorough hold of what was originally said by Jesus that it is extremely difficult to derive, from this proclamation of faith, a clear picture of what Jesus actually said and did.

Bultmann considers it firmly established that Jesus expected the kingdom of God to be ushered in in the near future. Because of this expectation and preaching he entered into conflict with the Jewish and Roman authorities and died on the cross. The gospels contain words and-sayings ascribed to Jesus which actually have an historical

kernel; however, these sayings are no longer to be established with any certainty. Whether or not Jesus, for example, considered himself to be the Messiah, is not to be established on the basis of any data available to us. Personally Bultmann thinks that Jesus did not claim to be the Messiah, but he acknowledges that others can with as little absolute certainty be of a different opinion. The gospels, according to Bultmann, are not concerned with Jesus but with the faith and the preaching of the church with respect to Jesus. And what interests him as an historian is the question: How did this preaching acquire this form? or in other words: Along what way or in what manner has this preaching grown up or developed into our gospel accounts?

To this end, Bultmann tries to go back from the first three gospels to the form of existence of the gospel tradition before it was brought together into a unity in the gospel story. The results of a very detailed investigation have been published in a voluminous book entitled *Die Geschichte der Synoptischen Tradition.* This method of investigation is called the form-historical *(Form-Geschichtliche)* method. Bultmann excludes the gospel of John from this investigation. In his opinion this book is much less historical in nature than its predecessors. It is a product of a later time in which the author makes use of other pre-Christian motives and thereby clothes the Christian faith in a strong symbolic-mythical form and thus gives an account of the manner in which for him Jesus was at the same time the Word become flesh, the crucified one, and the Son of God. The historicity of the life of Jesus, as recounted in the fourth gospel, is, in Bultmann's opinion, scarcely of any serious value. Nevertheless, Bultmann is extremely enthralled by the manner in which this gospel has brought to expression the Christian faith as faith. Bultmann has written an extensive commentary on this fourth gospel which of its sort is a masterpiece of scholarship and of interpretation. In spite of its high price it has become in a short time one of the most widely read theological works in Germany and elsewhere.

Bultmann and the method of the history of religion

In addition to the *form-historical* method which insofar as it deals with the first three gospels is often involved in very minute and detailed literary criticism, Bultmann makes a very broad use of the so-called method of the history of religion. That is to say, he tries in various ways to show connections between the New Testament and non-Christian religions. In a certain sense one can say that he is

forced to do this; for if the picture that the gospels give of Jesus' birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension is not historical in character, but is the mythological formation of the faith of the Christian church, the question arises as to how this formation has occurred. It is impossible, even for Bultmann, to think that the church simply resorted to fantasy. Bultmann tries to show (following such people as Bousset, Reitzenstein, and others) that this formation is determined in many ways by the religious conceptions everywhere present in the Hellenistic world in which the young church arose. It is for this reason that the Christian faith soon resulted in a syncretism of various conceptions.

When the New Testament speaks, for example, of Jesus, as the Son of God, there are in this description various elements to be distinguished. The original Jewish congregation of Jerusalem would understand by this name nothing more than Jesus' messianic kingship, in which any thought of a supernatural divine essence would still be entirely lacking. For those pagan listeners who were converted to the Christian faith this name would naturally indicate the divine essence, the divine nature of Christ, by virtue of which he was distinguished from the human sphere. It was in this sense that the name "the Son of God" was used by Paul (who according to Bultmann was very strongly under the influence of Hellenistic religions). The name would have still another meaning in certain passages of the first three gospels. Here the Old Testament idea of a king or the Hellenistic conception of a divine essence was not developed as strongly as the mysterious, miraculous power over which Jesus had command, and which placed him upon the same niveau, in the consciousness of the Christian church, as the well-known Hellenistic miracle workers who also called themselves "Sons of God," and were thought of as intermediary beings, God-men, or heroes. These God-men were viewed as the product of a mixture of a divine and a human essence. They appear not only in the Greek tradition but also in the Babylonian, and especially in the Egyptian legends of the kings. Moreover, when in connection with the history of Jesus' birth he is spoken of as being conceived by the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary, we must directly or indirectly bring these stories into relationship with these pagan conceptions. Later on, however, this conception of Jesus as a divine man is entirely surpassed by the previously mentioned conception according to which Jesus was a self-sufficient or an independent divine being who descended from the heavens. This latter conception receives its particular form not from the old Greek religions but from the later pre-Christian gnosticism, according to which a pre-

existent divine being came upon the earth in order to conduct the conflict or struggle against the powers of darkness. In particular the Christology of Paul and John were determined by this gnostic myth. I have paused to examine Bultmann's comparative approach to the name "the Son of God" in order to give an impression of the radical-critical method which Bultmann applies to the content of the New Testament message.'

We have only spoken of the name: "the Son of God." Bultmann follows a similar method when he speaks of the Christ°logical title of Jesus as "the Lord," "the Saviour," and so forth. He employs the same method when he treats the content of such concepts as the atonement, justification, etc. His entire work is determined by this radical-critical view with respect to both the content and the form of the New Testament proclamation. It is on good ground then, that he can be viewed as the most advanced representative of modern Biblical criticism.

The question can arise: How is it possible that Bultmann who in fact carries out the well-known extreme Biblical criticism (D. F. Strausz, W. Wrede and others) suddenly exercised an enormous influence, upon the orthodox as well as the liberals? We now encounter what is specific in Bultmann's approach. His thesis is that the heart of the gospel can be united with this radical-criticism; and this can be done, not in the sense of the older liberalism, which he rejects, but in the sense of an entirely new conception, which, on one hand leaves untouched the great redemptive event in Jesus Christ of which the New Testament speaks, and which, on the other hand, joins with the life and world view expressed in the new philosophy of existentialism.

Bultmann and existentialism

To understand this thesis it is necessary to penetrate deeper into Bultmann's theological background. Bultrnann is in all respects a modern man. He has placed a very sharp distinction between himself and the ethical rationalism which the older liberal school proclaimed, in its moral and social optimism, as the kernel of the gospel. The content of the gospel does not consist in timeless truths or eternal

1• Compare his treatment of the basic formula of the World Council of Churches in which Christ is spoken of as Lord and Saviour. It is quite understandable that from his standpoint, Bultrnann regards this formulation as inappropriate and unclear. Compare *Glauben und Verstehen* II, 1952, pp. 246 ff.

verities, even less in a metaphysical system (of which he seems to possess a thorough aversion as a student of the well-known systematic theologian Wilhelm Herrmann). Its content consists of the actual change and emancipation which the gospel calls forth in the whole of human existence, as soon as man obeys the call to *Entscheidung* (decision). In this actual, existentialistic interpretation is clearly to be seen the influence of the Danish theologian •Sören Kierkegaard. Nevertheless, it is especially modern existentialist philosophy, in particular that of Martin Heidegger, one of Bultmann's former colleagues at Marburg (to whom he dedicated the first part of his collected writings *(Glauben und V erstehen),* which has left the deepest mark upon his theology. From this existentialism he derives the actualistic idea that man truly exists only when he chooses his freedom in responsibility. He is also of the opinion that the judgment of human being *(Seinsverstandnis)* as made by this existentialist philosophy, is in its deepest sense no other than the picture that the New Testament gives of man, as long as man lives outside of the faith in Christ.

It is very noteworthy that Bultmann judges this *Seinsverstiindnis* of the New Testament as being closely related to the pre-Christian gnosis, which is thought to have had an enormous influence upon the general attitude toward life in the Hellenistic period, and which he thinks can be described in the categories of the modern existentialistic theory of man (Bultrnann himself names Jaspers, Heidegger, and Kamlah). In the following we must occupy ourselves with the consequence of this acceptance of existentialist philosophy for Bultmann's judgment of the tenor of the New Testament proclamation.

Bultmann and Barth

The development of the relationship between Bultmann and Karl Barth is also noteworthy. While today Barth sharply opposes Bultmann's theological program, in former times both felt very much attracted to each other. What enthralled Bultrnann in dialectical theology was the emphasis and the inexorability with which it tried to bring man in his totality under the authority of the Word of God. The new theology, on the other hand, felt sympathetic to Bultmann's form-historical interpretation of the gospel, in which the New Testament, including the Gospels, was again understood as *kerygma,* as the preaching of Jesus as the Christ. Thirty years later Barth wrote that as he now consciously opposes Bultmann, he feels a certain homesickness for the wonderful springtime in the beginning of the twenties when

he and Bultmann, with their supporters, for the most part people of an entirely different spiritual origin, formed a united front. "In those days we could," Barth continues, "see in the concept kerygma something like a banner for our struggle. We could then understand Bultmann and we could expect to be understood by him in our intention to gain better appreciation and understanding of the New Testament message."

It is strange that Barth and his followers did not see through Bultmann's own theological aims. It is strange that they allowed themselves to be deceived by Bultmann's interpretation of the gospel as an actual "message" and "call to decision," without having understood the radical violation or enfringement of its content, implied in Bultmann's "translation" of this gospel. It sounds a little naive of Barth when he now asks whether or not Bultmann then emphasized so strongly the necessity of this "translation" of the New Testament message and also when Barth declares: "In this time we were strangers to this emphasis (perhaps except in the case of Gogarten) and if it was then present in Bultmann we did not observe it." As if Bultmann's standard work on form-criticism: *"Die Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition,"* of which the first edition appeared in 1921, was in this respect in any way lacking in clarity! In his more recent publication concerning Bultmann, Barth writes that Bultmann's attempt can have a great influence because of coming theological generations who no longer have beheld Egypt with their own eyes, the period of Ritschl, Harnack, Troeltsch and what preceeded it, and who no longer can realize the significance of "our Exodus." Without wishing to elevate his own appearance as the measurement of all things, Barth cannot help thinking how the Israelites began to murmur for the flesh pots of Egypt, and how after they had had enough of the manna from heaven they began to yearn for ordinary food. And, therefore, Barth utters the pious wish that if the theology of the second half of the twentieth century should become an *enthmythotogisierende* and an existentialistic interpreting theology," he hopes the people will not be punished. It is clear that Barth could hardly disclose his displeasure with regard to the development of his former collaborator in the periodical *Zwischen den Zeiten* in a more radical manner.

Compare Karl Barth, Rudolf Bultmann, *Ein versuch* ihn zu *verstehen. Theol. Studien,* Heft 34, 1952, pp. 9 ff.

BULTMANN'S THEOLOGICAL PROGRAM

The so-called mythological character of the New Testament.

What is the content of the most discussed theological program of Bultmann, especially as found in his writing *Neues Testament and Mythologic?* In the first place, according to Bultmann, the New Testament is, in more than one respect, of a mythological character. And if the New Testament proclamation is to be made intelligible for modern man, this mythological character must be removed. In particular this is true of the New Testament view of the world and of the history of redemption. Under the former is included not only everything that the New Testament presupposes as consisting of three levels (heaven, earth, hell), but also that the earth is the work place of supernatural forces or powers: God and his angels, satan and his demons. Accordingly the entire conception of the history of redemption in the New Testament bears a mythical character when viewed as the outcome of a struggle between supernatural powers, a struggle in which the Son of God descended from heavenly regions to dispute with the devil, to bring forgiveness, to inaugurate a new world era by his resurrection, and then, by returning to heaven, to bring the cosmic fulfillment of his redemptive work.

All this is mythological language which modern man cannot employ and cannot speak, since science has given him another world picture. It is not a question of faith but of a legitimately acquired insight, and to require of the faithful that such be abandoned would demand that the believer sacrifice his intellect. Since the cosmos does not exist in a three-fold structure, and since the position of the earth in the cosmos is now known, it is impossible to speak of ascending into heaven, descending into hell, God's dwelling in heaven, Christ's coming in the clouds of heaven, and of believers being snatched into the air to meet him. Our knowledge of natural laws leaves behind the entire faith in demons and spirits in the sense of the New Testament. Sicknesses, spiritual disturbances, etc., are not caused by the working of demons but are due to natural causes. The miracles of the New Testament are also rendered out of date in the sense of miracles *(erledigt* is the term which Bultmann repeatedly uses in this connection). A person cannot use electric lights, radios, television sets, modern medicine, and clinical discoveries, and at the same time believe in the world of miracles and spirits of the New Testament. But the acceptance of such conceptions is not *in* the least characteris-

tic of the Christian faith. It has nothing to do with the offense and foolishness of which Paul speaks in I Corinthians. As a *sacrificium intellectus,* it bears rather the character of "work" than that of "faith." The scientific conception which man has formed of the world is connected with the conception that he has of himself. Inasmuch as he has learned to recognize himself as a part of the surrounding "nature," he cannot see how something supernatural (i.e., spirits or demons) can operate upon this natural organism and work therein as a natural force. And in as much as he has learned to distinguish his deepest essence as "spirit" from "nature," he understands even less how his own spiritual attitude and responsibility could be determined by supernatural forces. Therefore, he cannot accept the idea that his existence has become subject to death either by his own guilt or through that of another. Nor can he accept this idea that he can be saved by vicarious satisfaction. For him death is simply a biological necessity which precedes all guilt or sin because it is given with the biological organization of man. And how could a man who had become a divine being redeem or propitiate sins through his blood? What could the acceptance of death signify for such a Son of God? One who knows that after three days he will rise again is not greatly discomforted by the thought of dying.

For this reason, the common conception of man and world cannot be united with the notion that the ressurrection of Christ has released a vital power which can be shared with others. It is inconceivable to a modern thinker that it is possible for one who is dead to be brought again into physical existence; for modern man has learned to understand the organization of the human body. Modern man can conceive of God's action only as an event which intervenes and transforms the reality of his own "essential" life; that is to say, an event in the reality of his existence as spirit. He cannot conceive of the acts of redemption insofar as they are concerned with man as a natural reality and with the natural reality of the whol6 cosmos. It is at the same time implied that the conception of Christ, as a pre-existent heavenly being, and of the removal of man into a heavenly world of light, and the clothing of man in a heavenly body, is not only rationally unthinkable but also is meaningless; it says nothing. Modern man does not understand that his salvation exists in such a situation and that therein his veritable life, his selfish authenticity comes to completion.

The main question is then: Is the New Testament valueless for modern man or can one distinguish here between form and content? Incidental corrections are of no help. The theologian, and the minister who wishes to win his congregation, must be honest. To this end he must, before everything else, give a proper conception of the essence of myth. What is really at the root of the mythical manner of thinking? The essence of mythical thought is that it describes the unworldly and divine as worldly and human. It describes that which is not-of-the-world as having taken place in-the-world; for example, it conceives of God's sublimity as spatial. The proper meaning or significance of myth is, however, not simply that it purports to give a specific theory of the cosmos; it is much more. In general, it is the objective expression of the manner in which man becomes conscious of his existence in the world. It is like a reflection upon a screen; it is a product of what man, in a certain period, under the influence of specific circumstances, experiences and feels with respect to his own existence. In short, it gives expression to a specific concept concerning human existence. It is for this reason that, according to Bultmann, one ought not to seek any knowledge of the cosmos in a myth. A myth does not furnish knowledge of the objective world, but rather supplies us with knowledge of the way in which man *understands* "himself" in this world. Myth requires thus an anthropological, still better, an existentialist interpretation. And the New Testament itself provides the occasion for such an interpretation. The various conceptions of God, Christ, creation, heaven, and hell are not compatible with each other. They reflect in themselves the human feeling toward life (Bultmann speaks mostly of a *Seinsverstiindnis),* an attitude which feels itself determined in its action, and a moment later feels itself to be free. In this connection it conceives of sin in one moment as destiny or fate; and then again in the next moment as guilt. In a word, this attitude expresses its position in the world in various, sometimes contradictory, "mythological" conceptions.

In the last analysis, it is not a question of how far the objectivizing conceptions employed by mythological language contain elements of truth; the quesion is how far they give expression to a concept of human existence *(Existenzverstandnis)* which is or which is not acceptable to us. To investigate this we must remove the mythological attire from the New Testament proclamation. We must *de-mythologize (entmythologisieren).* Now this has been tried fre-

quently in the past. Very often, however, such attempts have resulted in killing the kernel and the essence of the New Testament kerygma. Bultmann deems it illegitimate simply to eliminate New Testament mythology by setting it aside. What we must do is to interpret this mythology; namely, we must seek to understand it in its proper and essential meaning.

What is the essence of the New Testament message and of its mythological form? It is not that of a timeless truth or of a universal religious life which strives to get beyond the world. Its essence is rather a powerful and concrete *event* by which God has allotted salvation to man and which he sends in the person of Jesus Christ. The question which one raises in connection with the New Testament is: Can a person who no longer thinks in mythological terms find divine redemption, kerygma, within the redemptive act, described in the New Testament as a mythical event, and within the person of Jesus, conceived of as a mythical divine person? To answer this question it is necessary to examine the conception of human existence reflected in this mythological conception. We shall then be able to determine whether or not it will enable a person whc does not think in terms of myth to understand his own existence correctly.

The bask features of the New Testament message

To define the New Testament Christian *Seinsverstiindnis,* Bultmann takes as his starting point the 'distinction that the New Testament makes between "life according to the flesh" and "life based on faith." The former does not merely signify being bound to matter, to the human body; but it has a much wider meaning in the New Testament. "Flesh" in the New Testament means the sphere of the visible, the "available," that which is at man's disposal *(da,s Verfiigbare),* and, as such, it means the sphere of the perishable. This sphere is a power or force when man lives "according to the flesh," that is to say, when man permits himself to be led astray and to seek his happiness and freedom within the realm of the perishable. To the "life according to the flesh" belongs not only the desire for the material but also all effort and attempts to obtain for oneself a basis for life within the framework of human possibilities. To it also belongs the "work of the law," on the basis of which man tries to place himself in a position of safety. This life "according to the flesh" is the basic form and summation of human sin. It is a false glory, the strengthening of oneself on the basis of what is available. It is at the same time

man's misery. For this "concern" to find one's life signifies in its very basis the loss of life. On the basis of this "life according to the flesh," man can never arrive at his "self," his end or function as a man, his own proper "existence." He lapses into the sphere of the divisible and perishable, from which he thinks he cannot derive his security and safety. It is this attitude which causes him to experience the world, a world which could signify God's world (creation) as ungodly; a world which would deceive him on all sides. This attitude causes the thought to arise within him that he is surrounded by objective ungodly and hostile "powers." Thus arises the conception of the mythical demonic powers. It is in this manner that death acquires the character of punishment, for the end of this "life according to the flesh" is death, the wages of sin. In contrast to the "life according to the flesh," the New Testament — and this is the really Christian note of the New Testament message — teaches of a "life based upon faith," a life rooted in God's grace. The New Testament teaches that it is the invisible, that which is not at man's disposal, which is significant for life. It is to this faith that the gospel calls man. He ought to decide *(sich entscheicien)* for this faith. This grace is a sin-forgiving grace; it frees man from the past, in which he was imprisoned. It opens the future, which is not to be understood in a temporal sense, but as the world of freedom in which man is separated from the world. Man no longer expects anything from the world. By abandoning all self-acquired certainties, he gives himself radically to God, thereby finding himself, his real existence, and his freedom. Undoubtedly, all this occurs or appears in the New Testament in a mythological form; namely, as the eschatological message which proclaims the end of this world and the entrance of the new world of God's salvation. But according to Bultmann, the transition to this mythological stage is understood even in the New Testament when, for example, John *says* that the time of salvation, judgment, and eternal life has already become the possession of the faithful. The essence of this eschatological *Seinsverstiindnis* is not a physical transition from the one world to the other but is a different attitude of faith with respect to the world. Likewise Paul spoke of the Holy Spirit as a mysterious something in man, the possession of which guarantees the resurrection. But basically under the concept of the Holy Spirit, Paul understood the practical possibility of a new life implied in faith. The Spirit does not work as a natural force and is not a possession of the faithful. The Spirit is the factual possibility of the life which must grip man in the decision to which he is called by the gospel.

The question arises whether or not this analysis of human existence can be discovered in another way; specifically whether existentialist philosophy, which is concerned with temporal human being, has not reached the same results. Is Bultmann's interpretation of the New Testament consciousness of existence actually different from that of modern existentialists (Karl Jaspers, Martin Heidegger, Wilhelm Kamlah)? Is it different from what modern existentialists teach concerning the *Geschichtlichkeit des menschlichen Daseins* (the historicity of human existence)? Bultmann does not hesitate to admit without reservation that he interprets the New Testament in the category of existentialist philosophy. For as long as he is concerned simply with an appraisal of *natural* human existence *(the- being-of-man-without-Christ)* there is no real distinction between the New Testament and existentialism. Heidegger's existentialist analysis is only a secular philosophical exposition of the New Testament view of man. This philosophy teaches that man, existing historically *in-the-concern-f or-him-self -aroused-by-anxiety ,* must choose again and again in the moment of *Entscheidung* (decision) between the past and the future. That is to say, man must know whether or not he will lose himself to the world of visible objects, the world of the masses, or whether he will acquire his own "actuality" in the abandonment of all certainty and in the unconditional surrender to the future over which he has no control. One can go even further. There is no basic difference between the New Testament and existentialism in the appraisal of human existence, and there is also no such difference in the satisfaction of the needs of human existence. What the New Testament calls "faith," "surrender" and "love" is not a mysterious supernatural quality but the attitude of real humanity, what philosophy calls the surrender to what is not at man's disposal. The New Testament affirms, in a certain sense, the affirmation of philosophy that faith and love form the natural attitude of man, when it thinks of the believer as a *new creation,* as a person who is brought back to his own proper human existence in conformity to his creation.

The difference between the New Testament and existentialist philosophy must be sought elsewhere. The question is whether man is able alone to free *himself* from his factual lapse into this world, and to turn back to the proper meaning of his existence, i.e., surrender, love etc. According to philosophy man need only acquire an insight into this situatIon in order actually to return to his own

proper self. According to the New Testament such a return is possible, however, only through the emancipating deed of God which takes place in the redemptive act executed by Christ.

Philosophy ascribes this possibility to the "natural" man because every man is basically everything which he must become. The New Testament in contrast describes the situation of the natural man as a desperate situation. Man without Christ is not alive but dead. What philosophy ascribes to man as a factual possibility is according to the New Testament only an illusion, a vain glorious illusion of *Eigenmiichtigkeit.* In the language of the New Testament this means that man is a sinner, for this existing in his own power, this illusion of being able to exist independently, is the sin against God. Only the love of God as the encircling, enabling power can free him from this past, and give him the ability to reacquire his actuality as man. And it is this freeing of man, so that he becomes himself, which is the event that takes place in Christ, the revelation of God's love. The question remains: Is the New Testament message, that man acquires his freedom only as a gift of God in Christ, also included in the category of mythology? In the last analysis one must say that the specific or unique characteristic of the New Testament, distinguishing it from philosophy, is to be understood only mythologically? In other words, can the faith, the surrender which, according to the New Testament and existentialist philosophy, is necessary for man, really exist only as faith in the love of God revealed in Christ? This calls in question the intelligibility of that which is, for Bultmann, the very core of the New Testament message.

The significance of God's redemptive work in Christ's death and resurrection

It is incontestable for Bultmann that in the New Testament the history of Christ is a mythical history. Jesus Christ, as the Son of God, as a pre-existent divine essence, is a mythical figure. He is, however, at the same time an historical person whose life ended on the cross. The historical and the mythical are interwoven in an unusual manner. The question is whether the mythological manner of speaking would not simply express for our faith, the supernatural *importance* af the historical person and his history. The issue is clear enough with respect to the utterances concerning his pre-existence and virgin birth. Faith here speaks in the language of mythology concerning the significance of Jesus. Such a concept is incomprehensible from the

standpoint of the possibilities of this world. Mythically stated: He is of eternity, he is the Son of God.

The same argument is pertinent to Christ's crucifixion. This center of the Christian kerygma also appears in mythological form. The pre-existent Son of God is crucified; he is the sacrifice whose blood atones for our sins, and frees us from death. And this mythological conception, in which ideas of sacrifice and a juridical theory of satisfaction are mixed is useless to us. Even the New Testament does not exhaust the meaning of Christ in the pardon of former sins. Rather, the New Testament would say that the cross of Christ frees the believer from the *power* of sin and opens for him the way to a sacrifice or dedication of his life. To believe in the cross does not mean that we see a mythical event which took place in the external world. It means that we accept the cross of Christ as our own and permit ourselves to be crucified with Christ. When purged of all mythological content, the cosmic and eschatological significance ascribed to the cross in the New Testament, is reduced to the fact that the cross has a dimension which extends to all men ("the cosmic dimension") and that it becomes, again and again present ("the eschatological dimension"). Basically, mythological language wishes only to give expression to the lasting significance *(Bedeutsamkeit)* of historical events. The preaching of the cross confronts a person with the question as to whether he will also permit himself to be crucified with Christ, abandoning the flesh and surrendering himself to the "invisible," to what is not at man's disposal.

How can we know, however, that the historical event of the cross has this lasting redemptive significance? Does this depend upon the meaning of Jesus' person? For the contemporaries of Jesus this was certainly so.

They experienced the significance of the cross on the basis of their personal connection with the person of Jesus. For us this is no longer possible. And in the New Testament the crucified one is not proclaimed in such a manner, and the significance of his cross is not derived from his historical life. It was derived from the fact that the crucified one is at the same time the resurrected one. The cross and the resurrection in the New Testament proclamation belong with each other and constitute a unity.

What can we do with the mythological story of the resurrection? We can no longer accept it as a miraculous event which supplies us with the objective proof of Christ's significance. It is true that it is so thought of repeatedly in the New Testament (Acts 17: 31). And Paul

also tries to establish with certainty the resurrection as a historical event by enumerating the eye witnesses (I Corinthians 15 : 3-8). But this argumentation is fatal. The return of the dead to life is a mythical event; the resurrection cannot be established by witnesses as an objective fact, a guarantee of faith; the resurrection itself is an object of faith. It can be an object of faith only because it appears in our existence and makes the significance of the cross clear. Christ's death on the cross is not limited to himself, but in the surrender of faith it is repeatedly effectual in the acquisition of freedom, in putting off the works of darkness, in the return of man to his proper self. The resurrection is, therefore, not a mythical event, but it establishes itself in the concrete life of the believer. Faith in the resurrection is nothing but the faith that the salvation of God works itself out in the cross. It is not faith in Christ which is primary, rather it is faith in the cross which comes first. It is not because the cross is the cross of Christ that it is the redemptive act, but because the cross accomplishes redemption, in our existence, the cross is the cross of Christ. Otherwise the cross would be the tragic end of a noble man.

The question — How do we know that the historical event of the cross has divine redemptive significance? — can in the last analysis find no other answer: because it is proclaimed together with the resurrection, and because in this proclamation, the crucified one is encountered by us as the resurrected one. Faith in the Word of the resurrection is the real faith in the resurrection. *The fact of the resurrection is nothing other than the origin of the faith in the resurrected one,* in which the proclamation has its origin. The fact of the resurrection, as the resurrection of Christ, is *not* an historical event. The only historical fact that can be approached is the belief in the resurrection of the early disciples. The matter in which this originated can be made intelligible only to a certain degree from an historical point of view, e.g., visionary experiences, etc. The faith in the resurrection is important, however, not in its historical origin, but as the *(eschatological)* event repeatedly brought about by the proclamation of the Word. Faith and the Word by which faith becomes effective, belong to the eschatological event. In the proclamation both the cross and the resurrection are present. The encounter with the resurrected one occurs only in the proclaimed Word.

Does this interpretation of the New Testament's proclamation remove all remnants of mythology? Not, if every utterance concerning the action of God is to be understood in a mythological sense. Such a redemptive action of God, is, however, no longer a miraculous

supernatural event, but an event that is carried out in the closed historical border of space and time: in the person of Jesus, as a concrete historical man; in the sober proclamation of the person and the fate of Jesus of Nazareth; in the apostles, intelligible in their historical humanity; in the church, as a sociological phenomenon. But all such events are at the same time eschatological events, because there occurs, indemonstrably for science, but certainly for faith, the transition from the "the life according to the flesh" to "the life in freedom." The fact that this is not demonstrable insures the scandalous character of the Christian proclamation and insures it against the reproach of being mythological. The divine is not human, the heavenly is not earthly as in myth, but the presence of God in history is maintained in its paradoxical character. This is the unmythological sense or meaning of the great *kerygma:* "The Word became flesh."

III. CRITICISM

In General

Anyone carefully viewing Bultmann's program to *de-mythologize* the New Testament ought to be truly aware that it contains a frontal attack upon the manner in which the church of all ages has confessed its faith. And anyone who takes cognizance of Bultmann's larger theological works, his analysis of the first three Gospels, his book on Jesus, his commentary upon the Gospel of John, his writing on primitive Christianity, and his miscellaneous publications, is only confirmed in this impression. Undoubtedly, in the subjective sense of the word, Bultmann is not a a ruthless critic like many of his modern predecessors. He desperately attempts to retain the kernel of the Christian faith. In Bultmann there is evidence of the tremendous struggle between the Christian faith and modern scientific thought. He rejects any compromise between faith and science, in which the results of the latter are denied or remain unreconciled to the content of faith. The thought of Bultmann can be viewed as a reaction against neo-orthodoxy, as the latter has developed since the end of the first world war, especially in Western Europe. Neo-orthodoxy is a spiritual and theological movement which because of the catastrophes afflicting humanity, no longer found any good in the rationalism, moralism, and emotional mysticism of modern theology. It turned again to the gospel — and this was its weakness — without concerning itself with the relationship between the Christian faith and modern

science. Neo-orthodoxy thought that both could work next to each other without interference. Bultmann is a disturber of the peace. Without apology Bultmann would again bring into the theological spotlight the half-buried doubts and the unsolved questions concerning the relation of faith and science. Bultmann does not wish to attack the Christian faith as an unbeliever. He would base his criticism upon the foundation of faith and wishes to be one with the church and to serve its ends by making its preaching acceptable to those who have become alienated. This pastoral motive is unmistakable in his work. He is passionate in his repeated assurances that what he points out to be kernel of the New Testament kerygma is really its nucleus. One must not forget the admirable refinement with which Bultmann seems to appreciate all facets of the New Testament proclamation in their positive significance, and his great knowledge and competency in the field of New Testament science. Equally worthy of note is the respect he acquired during the rule of Hitler. And if we consider all this, one can to some degree comprehend his tremendous influence. Moreover, Bultmann's recognition of the necessity to conquer any dualism between faith and science is, in spite of many difficulties, an imperative demand.

Many Christians are involved in an un-Christian dualism. The question is, however, how far has Bultmann succeeded in solving the problem without doing violence to faith and to the established results of science.

Two methods can be employed. The *result* of de-mythologizing can be brought to light. One can try too, to test the validity of its theological and philosophical premises. We must not shun the second approach. Yet it is important to realize what is at stake in the conflict for and against Bultmann's *Entmythologisierungsprogram.* One of Bultmann's severest critics asks what remains in Bultmann of the Christ of the Apostle's Creed. He concludes that Jesus Christ "was not conceived by the Holy Ghost, not born of the Virgin Mary. He did suffer under Pontius Pilate, he was crucified, he did not descend into hell and did not rise again on the third day from the dead; he did not ascend into heaven and does not sit on the right hand of God the Father, and will not come to judge the living and the dead." These words are devoid of any literal meaning, they are mythological, and do not denote any historical objective reality. This is true not only of Christ°logy but is equally true of the Trinity, the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ, justification as the free pardoning from the guilt of sin, and the work of the Holy Spirit. All this is merely an "objectifying" imagination; it is of sole importance that we under-

stand how faith can speak therein concerning itself. Very illustrative of this method is, for example, Bultrnann's existentialistic interpretation of what the New Testament speaks of as the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is not a divine person or a power which enters our life and is the possession of believers, but he is the "factual possibility of the new life" which one can acquire in faith. Bultmann writes emphatically that this is the demythologized concept of the "Spirit."

It is not necessary to take a complete inventory of all articles of Christian faith *that are put aside* in this manner. It is more fruitful to point out the general motives out of which proceed the total destruction of the content of the historic confessions of the church. In the first place we shall criticize Bultmann's mythological conception of the New Testament redemptive history; in the second place, we shall criticize his existentialist interpretation of it.

A. BULTMANN'S MYTHOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF THE HISTORY OF REDEMPTION

His definition of the mythical

To understand Bultmann's theological position in its entirety it is important to comprehend his conception of myth and of mythical thinking. Bultmann does not offer any systematic conceptual definition of these notions. In a more or less casual manner (in a note) he says the following: "the mythological is the manner of representation in which something which does not belong to this world, the divine, appears as something human; in which something belonging to the transcendent world appears as if it belonged to this world. For example, God's exaltation or elevation above the world is thought of as a spatial distance." 1

This definition does not excel in clarity. One might presuppose that Bultmann merely intends to indicate the anthropomorphic character or manner of speaking concerning God which characterizes the entire Biblical revelation. Not only does the Bible attach itself to human representations in general (for example, when it speaks of God's eyes, his nose, and so on), but in part it also assimilates the

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1 "Mythologisch ist die Vorstellungsweise, in der das Unweltliche, Gtittliche als Weltliches, Menschliches, das Jenseitige als Diesseitiges erscheint, in der z.B. Gottes Jenseitigkeit als raumliche Ferne gedacht wird," *Kerygma und Mythos* I, p. 23.

human conceptions current during the time when the Bible was written. For example, it speaks on the basis of conceptions which people then had concerning the structure of the cosmos (The cosmos was thought of as having three levels: heaven, earth, and the underworld. Compare Philippians 2: 10). No one would deny that these conceptions bear a character determined by their own time and, as such, are not binding even for a person who would subject himself to the Scripture as the Word of God. They are not binding because in these utterances the Bible would not give us a revelation or instruction concerning the structure of the cosmos. The aim of the Bible is quite different. This characteristic of the Biblical manner of speaking can with the advance of science be brought to a still clearer light, for example, as occurred in the discovery of the movement of the earth around the sun. Closer study of the ancient Eastern world of thought can help us to have a better understanding. It is not always easy to say where the line should be drawn, but it is necessary to draw it in accordance with the Scripture's intended meaning and in compliance with the nature of its authority. In any case, it is clear that Scripture does not speak in the language of science. Its mode of representation bears in many respects a pre-scientific character. Therefore, its utterances may not be comprehended in a scientific cosmological sense, for example, when heaven is spoken of as being above the earth. In this respect the Bible certainly needs "interpretation." It must be made clear that its utterances frequently are made in the form of specific pre-scientific representations concerning the cosmos.

Anyone who analyzes Bultmann's •definition of "myth" and takes notice of the manner in which he operates with it, soon reaches the *conclusion that what Bultmann intends is quite different and much more comprehensive. He is concerned with much more than the inadequacy of our language to speak and to conceive of God. His interest goes beyond conceptions which are derived from an outmoded view of the world. What Bultmann considers to be mythical in the so-called Biblical world picture and in the New Testament view of history is, that the New Testament view of the world, man, and history does not recognize a closed causal order, essential in the scientific view. In one of his recent "concluding" publications, Bultmann has again expressed himself quite clearly. Mythical thinking relates certain appearances and events to supernatural divine powers. In contrast scientific thought can deal only with the closed relationship of natural causes and effects. And this is true not only of science of nature, but also of the scientific conception of the personal life of man. A person who has out-grown mythical thought knows himself

as a unity and recognizes his feelings, thoughts, and volitions, ascribing them to himself and no longer to the in-working of demonic or divine powers. Bultmann recognizes that the current scientific view of man and the world is no longer that of the nineteenth century. Yet, he considers it naive to seek to use as a support of faith in miracles the fact that modern atomic theories have relativized the law of causality. This new development of science is completely unrelated to such questions. Bultmann agrees with the summary statements made by Hartlich and Sachs of the concept of myth. Hartlich has advanced the following two theses: What is mythological is that which oannot really happen because (1) it is not ascertainable according to the general rules of science. Therefore miracles, including New Testament wonders, are impossible! (2) it is in conflict with the necessary conditions for the unity of the personal life. The medium of which God makes use is only the (human) spirit, in the sense of that which is understandable. What is not spiritual (in the sense of human spirit) cannot be the intermediary of the divine being.' It is in our opinion clear that this definition of what is mythical and what is real does not concern simply a manner of *representation* but includes much more. It is not a question of what results of natural science are more or less firmly established. But it intends to imply the belief that "the world" and "history" include only that which can be controlled — sooner or later — by natural science. Bultmann operates therefore simply with an empirical (derived from experience) concept of nature and of history. We shall subsequently see the position that can be ascribed to the action of God. In any case this action is carried out entirely and wholly within the lawful structure of natural events and, concerning that which influences human personality, entirely and wholly within the boundaries of that which can be contemplated as intelligible and motivated and contemplated on the basis of the possibilities of the human spirit. God's action never "breaks through" the "natural" course of things, the closed world-order as a natural phenomenon. Let it be observed in passing that all this talk of breaking through the natural world order and intervening therein presupposes a deterministic view of nature and as such is prejudiced terminology. The main point is that this conceptual definition of what must be considered as "mythical" is based upon an absolutely deistic view, which considers God and the world to be two independent mutually non-intervening "entities." This is not the place to examine in detail the

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1 Compare *Kerygma and Mythos,* II, 1952, pp. 180, ff.

philosophical premises assumed. The issue that needs to be discussed at this point is: Can it be said that such a view does not denature the New Testament proclamation and destroy its preaching? Can it be said that such a view interprets the New Testament in an accurate manner and brings to life its proper intention?

Myth and the New Testament concept of God

In our opinion the *entmythologisierung* of the New Testament, based upon this concept of myth, plays havoc with the very heart of the New Testament message. It is not only a certain view of the world, nature, history, and the human personality which is in question. For the New Testament concept of reality (nature, history, etc.) is only a matter of inference. What is here in question — and what makes Bultmann's interpretation of the New Testament fundamentally unacceptable — is his New Testament concept of God, or rather of the preaching of the entire Scripture with respect to God. In Bultmann's theology, the world and human personality retain their own independence and are completely shut off from God. At the very most, only something which occurs within this closed order can be *understood* by faith as an act of God. In the New Testament, however, *God is the Lord* of the world, not only because he is its creator, and because from moment to moment he leads or directs the history of the world according to his council, but in particular because, in Christ, God acts in a unique manner with the world. He descends into history so that the coming of Christ is the middle point of an entire redemptive history which embraces the life of the world from the beginning to its end. And this all occurs not because of the world but because of God and for the honor of his name. The entire view which the New Testament (even as the Old) gives of the world, man, and history bears a theocentric character. It is for this reason that the *de-mythologizing* of the New Testament, proposed by Bultmann and his followers, signifies a destruction of this view of God. It can correctly be said that at the same moment in which one eliminates "myth" from the New Testament, not only is there no longer any room for Christ as the son of God, but the very conception of God is different; namely, God becomes a distant, non-active, majestic God.' In contrast the New Testament speaks of a living God who acts in the his-

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1 Compare *Regin Prenter, Mythos rind Evangelium in Kerygma und Mythos, II,* p 83.

tory of the world and enters into human existence. This and this only is the legitimate interpretation of the Johannine expression, "the word became flesh and dwelt among us." This is also the meaning of the name Immanuel: "God is with us." Anyone exchanging this for Bultmann's conception loses hold of the kernel of the New Testament kerygma; he loses hold of the revelation of who God is and how God acts.

What we have said is equally true of Bultmann's interpretation of New Testament Christology. When he says that the statements concerning Christ's pre-existence and his virgin birth simply express in a mythical way the importance of Christ's historical person for our faith, Bultmann does not have any other foundation for this affirmation than the dogma of a closed world-order that will not admit of an "intervention from abOve." Of course it is true that Bultmann and his followers' appeal to exegetical considerations: The task of *demythologizing* is given to us by the New Testament itself insofar as certain New Testament *mythologoumena* do not agree with each other; for example, the idea that Christ is born of a virgin is in conflict with the idea of Christ's pre-existence.2 But it is not all evident that pre-existence and the virgin birth are in conflict with each other. Paul speaks in Philippians 2 of Christ's divine pre-existence and of his becoming a man in one breath. The idea of the virgin birth points to the way in which the Son of God assumed his human nature. What gives offense is not the inner contradiction of the idea but the idea itself, that of the pre-existence of a historical person as well as that of the virgin birth. The basis for criticism is not found in exegesis but in a modern dogma. Moreover, this modern dogma of the absolute separation of God and the world and the rendering independent of the world with respect to God, is in conflict with the essence of the New Testament kerygma because the latter is motivated by faith in the sovereignty of God over the cosmos. This de-mythologizing of Christology is therefore a destruction of Christology because it not only affects the New Testament view of the world but it also does violence to the New Testament revelation of God.

Myth and the witness of the resurrection

What we have said is equally clear with respect to Bultmann's view of the resurrection of Christ. According to the definition proposed

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1 Thus, for example, Hartlich and Sachs, in opposition to Barth, *Kerygma and Mythos II,* p. 114.

2 *Kerygma und Mythos I,* p. 24.

by Hartlich and Sachs, which Bultmann accepts, the mythological is that which cannot really happen because it cannot be established by the general laws of science. Miracles are impossible, the resurrection of Christ must be viewed as impossible. For it cannot be established as an objective fact by any number of witnesses. In Bultrnann's opinion the Pauline argumentation in I Corinthians 15 : 3-8, where the eye witnesses are summarized, is fatal. It would make the resurrection a *beglaubigendes Mirakel.* Instead of the resurrection as an objective fact Bultmann posits the faith in the resurrection as the origin of the Christian kerygma.

Karl Barth in his severe criticism of Bultmann's interpretation of the New Testament proclamation of the resurrection 1 has correctly pointed out that this conception is controlled by a concept of reality that rests upon a superstition; namely, upon the superstition that only that which is objectively ascertainable by historical science can actually occur in time. Bultmann, Barth writes, rejects the report of what occurred in the forty days after Jesus' resurrection, because he cannot arrange its content insofar as it concerns the living Christ (and not only the faith of his disciples) under the "historical facts," in his limited sense of the word. Bultmann is, according to Barth, certainly right in this. No one can scientifically establish the resurrection of Christ. But Bultmann is incorect when he draws the conclusion that the event portrayed did not occur. Why is it impossible for such an event to happen? Events can occur which are much more certainly real than anything which the "historian" as such can establish, and according to Barth we have evidence that the resurrection of Christ is just such an event.

This criticism is justified. It exposes the concept of reality on which Bultmann's de-mythologizing process proceeds. The latter is not only in conflict with the preaching of the New Testament, which because it is based upon a totally different conception of God also is characterized by an entirely different concept of reality, but this de-mythologizing also encloses the origin of the Christian proclamation and of the Christian Church in an impenetrable and mysterious obscurity. If Christ be not risen then the Christian proclamation and the Christian Church did not start with the resurrection but with the faith in the resurrection. The resurrection did not give rise to faith during this forty day period, but faith gave rise to the resurrection. Or again to employ the words of Barth: "Nothing happened between Him and them; there was not a new and basic meeting between Him and them

1 Kirchliche Dogmatik III, 2, p. 531-537.

which in its newness was all decisive and out of which their faith arose. To be sure, at one moment they really penetrated to the mystery of the cross — but they were *alone*. Their faith did not have any basis upon which it was founded as faith before anything else. **It** stood sovereign in itself. The "deed of God" was thereby identical with the fact that they believed. And that it happened that they believed is the real content of the Easter history, the Easter time, that is the content of the Christian proclamation, the ground of existence of the church and of the sacraments. Jesus himself was not risen.

These words are of significance because they are appropriate to let us see the nature of the historical puzzle which this interpretation of Christ's resurrection involves us in. **If** Christ did not rise from the dead and this story is a myth, the question confronting us is how this myth originated. It is undeniable that this "myth" originated several days after the death of Jesus. A very abrupt change had to take place in the thoughts and deliberations of the disciples with respect to their dead Master. To think of this as the mythical formation of the significance *(Bedeutsamkeit),* which the disciples abruptly ascribed to Jesus' crucifixion without any new fact as its basis, a fact which originated outside of themselves, is a postulate that is dictated by Bultmann's concept of reality, but which is at the same time absolutely unintelligible from an historical point of view. It is especially incomprehensible if one remembers that this resurrection witness, in the primary sense of an eye witness, (compare Acts 1 : 21, 22, ff.) was the starting point and center of the Christian proclamation and formed the foundation of Christian certainty.

Moreover, if after the passage of time such a new and spontaneous certainty occurred in his 'disciples with respect to Jesus' death, how can this assume the form of faith in the resurrection? Undoubtedly, Peter, John, Paul and all the 'disciples lived in a different concept of reality than Bultmann and his followers, and they were more susceptible to belief in such wonders, about which Hartlich and Sachs (with the approval of Bultmann) must declare, upon the basis of their definition of a myth, that they could not really happen. But this does not prove that we can ascribe to these disciples individual or collective hallucinations. What is here called myth was related to or concerned with an historical person, a person whose death had been witnessed three days before. In this respect the situation differs from that of heathendom, which concerns itself with various primeval heroes, or with a mythical figure whom no one had ever seen. And, in addition, what was projected or rendered objective was not only reality for the faith of the disciples, but it was also reality for their

eyes, ears, and hands. In other words if this faith is considered to be a spontaneous occurrence without any factual basis upon which the disciples based their certainty, then it is not enough to point to the peculiar and uncritical nature of their world picture and conception of reality, in addition one must in this case also conclude that they were under the sway of an abnormal psychological condition. It is a puzzle how one can then consider this faith and the proclamation based upon it as the permanent starting point of the Christian faith. It is a puzzle that such an interpretation would be more attractive to a modern man than the proclamation of the real resurrection of Christ.

And finally when Bultmann and his followers speak about this mythological projection or objectivization they appeal repeatedly to the conception of the first Christians, as children of their time. It is impossible for us to enter into all the details involved at this point.' It is clear, however, that this so-called historical explanation fails exactly where it ought to possess the most demonstrable force, i.e., in its explanation of the faith in the resurrection. It is just in this decisive and central starting point of the Christian kerygma that the explanation of the *history of religion* in our opinion fails entirely. For the disciples were Jews, and it is an undeniable fact that to Judaism the figure of the dying and resurrected Messiah was entirely alien. There is no point of contact in contemporary Jewish conceptions in which the disciples could seek the return of Jesus from death to life. And yet some such point of contact must be present if the method of the *history of religion is* to hold. Of course one can appeal to the Greek conceptions concerning the "dying and rising Gods" such as they are found for example in some Hellenistic cultus-myths. But, even laying aside the fundamental difference in nature between these cultus-myths and the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, it is clear that the faith of Peter and John and of the church at Jerusalem in Jesus as the risen Savior was not derived from Greek myths. One might contend that after Jesus' death various religious motives entered which were foreign to the congregation of early Christians. But this cannot remove the fundamental fact that before such was possible, the dis-

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1 In this connection I would like to make mention of my writing ***Paulus en*** *Jezus* 1952, p. 83 to 129 (English edition ***Paul and*** *Jesus,* pp. 80 to 130, 1958, Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, Nutley, N.J.). In this work I have treated the absolute untenability of this affirmation with respect to the New Testament proclamation of Jesus as the Son of God, the Lord, who descended from the heavens, the creator of the cosmos. In this conection I have treated Bultmann's appeal to the pre-Christian gnostic myth.

ciples, and with them the early church at Jerusalem, already lived in the certainty of the resurrection of Christ.

If the faith and the preaching of Jesus as the resurrected does not rest upon the reality of his resurrection from the dead, we are faced with an historical riddle. The miracle is removed, but a riddle is set forth in its place. One denies the resurrection of Christ and posits the unexplainable mythical figure of the Christ of the early church in its place. But this has nothing to do with an exposition of the New Testament, nor with an interpretation which could not eliminate the real character of the New Testament proclamation. What is maintained by Bultmann in our opinion is nothing but a faith in the impenetrability of the natural world-order, a thesis which is in flagrant conflict with the central message of the New Testament.

Myth and the act of God in Jesus Christ

The question which finally remains and which is frequently put to Bultmann is whether in his theology there is still room for any action of God with relation to the history of the world and to man. If in accordance with scientific thought both the world and human personality can be understood only as a closed unity, then what remains of the kernel, or essence of the New Testament proclamation, which according to Bultmann consists in the salutary action of God in Jesus Christ?

In one of his later publications' Bultxnann has treated this question in detail. He contends therein that one should not conceive of divine action as an intervention in the relationship of the natural, historical, or psychological life. To do so is to think mythologically. One can conceive of it only as something which leaves the causal world-order untouched, and is carried out within the natural relationships as a hidden action visible only to faith. This is the paradoxical thing about faith, namely, that it understands an event, ascertainable in its natural and historical coherence, as an act of God.

One can ask if such a deed has any objectivity outside of faith. Is it not rather entirely and completely carried out in the sphere of subjectivity, so that it has no other reality than an experience of faith? Bultmann denies this. He describes the action of God as an *encounter* which takes place in the proclamation of the Word of God and this

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I Die Rede vom Handeln Gottes, in *Kerygma und Mythos II,* pp. 196 ff.

confronts man with a decision. It is known as such through faith and has its origin and validity in the New Testament. The action of God, in this repeated issuing forth of God's Word, becomes the occasion for faith, the motive to the decision and surrender which brings man to his proper "self."

In this way, Bultmann tries to maintain the theological character of his position, in opposition to existentialist philosophy, which does not take into account the activity of God. Bultmann believes that it is at this point that there is a fundamental difference between existentialism and the Christian faith. Bultmann has been accused at this point of being inconsistent, and not without reason. If one would apply radically Bultmann's proposed *de-mythologizing,* what basis remains for conceiving the Christian proclamation (kerygma) as a Word of God intervening in this world? It thus becomes necessary for theology to engage in an *Entkerygmatisierung (de-kerygmatizing).*

To sneak of the Word of God, of the unconditional content of the Christian proclamation, is nothing more, according to this conception, than the mythical expression of the fact that every man in order to reach his deepest being, must surrender himself to that which he has no control over and in which he can alone become free. And this fact does not need any justification from the New Testament. Existentialism has discovered this, as is evident for example from the philosophy of Jaspers. Human self-judgment in faith in the New Testament is thus nothing which is absolute. It is not anything about which we can learn only by a special revelation. The New Testament only tells us in its own manner what we could learn in other ways. No matter how valuable this may be it cannot be thought of as being an absolute Word of God. To think such is the myth of the Christian kerygma.1

One can appreciate the fact that Bultmann2 at least at this point breaks with his own schema, but it is not to be denied that his own program, and certainly the previously described definition of the concept myth, offers every occasion for this annexation of the Christian faith by existentialism. According to this program, the action of God, according to the New Testament the proper object of faith, is no longer to be separated from the actual act of faith. Only that which faith understands to be the action of God can be considered. The question arises as to why a different interpretation of this gift of

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Cf. F. Burl, *Entmythologisierung oder Entkerygmatisierung der Theologie; Kerygma and Mythos* II, pp. 85-101.

2 K. Barth, *Rudolf Bultmann, Emn Versuch ihn zu verstehen,* 1952, p. 40.

freedom, such as the one found in existentialism, cannot be iustified with equal right. It is true that Bultmann tries to retain the connection with the action of God in Christ Jesus, by stating that we encounter truly the Word of God in the Word preached to us only when it is at the same time the Word which had its inception in the apostolic proclamation. But this does not make any fundamental difference, because the apostolic preaching itself does not rest upon any other reality than that which is comprehended in faith, as such. For example, it does not rest upon the resurrection of Christ which took place in history. Bultmann speaks here gladly of the "paradox" of faith that is identical with its object. In our opinion one can, in spite of Bultmann's protest, hardly speak of anything else than a complete subjectivization of divine activity. That the activity of God exists external to faith, preceeds faith, and has laid the permanent basis for faith lies outside the limits of this theology. To maintain the latter it would have to belong to the sphere of the objectively ascertainable, in which nothing can be established except the closed-order of natural reality. The only thing that remains for divine activity is that it be considered as being called *hic et nunc,* through faith that is evoked in the Word of God to the *Entscheidung* (decision).

It is apparent that Bultmann's theology is not only subordinate to secularized scientific thought but it is also orientated to a philosophy which thinks it has found the highest form of reality in what is called the "existence" of the human spirit. The most basic difference between the New Testament and Bultmann's interpretation of it rests, therefore, not only upon the fact that the New Testament does not permit itself to be investigated and interpreted according to the standard which Bultmann and his followers call "myth," but also upon the no-less important circumstance that the existentialist exposition of the New Testament does not touch upon its real proclamation. This needs to be shown in some detail.

B. BULTMANN'S EXISTENTIALIST INTERPRETATION OF REDEMPTIVE HISTORY

The great reduction

Bultmann would probably never have reached such a radical restriction of the content of the New Testament proclamation if, in his eyes, the entire revelation of God was not resolved in the truth concerning human existence. All theology and Christology can according to him be expressed in the categories of anthropology (the theory con-

cerning man) and of soteriology (the theory of human redemption). For example, when in his *Theologie des Neuen Testaments,'* he gives the analysis of Paul's preaching — which is the clearest formulation of New Testament kerygma — Bultmann states that, since Paul did not begin with the supernatural "essence" of Christ, nor with a speculation concerning his "natures," but only with the salvation which God accomplishes through Christ for man and the world, one can best develop Pauline theology if one explains it as the theory of man. In support of this contention Bultmann repeatedly appeals to the reformers, especially to the statement of Melanchthon: *"Hoc est Christum cognoscere — beneficia eius cognoscere"* (To know Christ, means to know his good deeds).

In a peculiar manner Bultmann employs this conception as a principle of New Testament exposition. In general, according to Bultmann, we cannot understand anything unless we bring to it a certain preconceived concept *(Vorverstöndnis).* Such a *Vorverstandnis* is needed in order to understand the New Testament. It is true that this comes to us from God and one can say that in order to learn who God is and what he does, man must go to the revelation of God; and yet in order to be able to know God as God, man must possess a certain concept of God, a certain searching for God. And this is accompanied by a certain judgment of man concerning his own existence. Otherwise stated, in the search for God, (in the manner in which a man thinks and speaks about God) there comes to life the manner in which he knows himself and has learned to understand both himself and the world. The search for God is determined by this existential self-judgment. In such listening, therefore, we simply allow the New Testament to teach, correct, and instruct us. And therefore any *exposition* of the New Testament which could be something more than an historical work is basically nothing else than the exposition of the New Testament judgment of human existence.2

All this undoubtedly contains the important truth that an accurate knowledge of God is accompanied by a correct knowledge of one's self and that the activity of God in Jesus Christ can be correctly understood only when it is shown how this changes, converts, and affects man in his existence. In this sense one can speak of an "existentialist" exposition of the redemptive facts. For example, in the

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1 1948, p. 188.

2 Cf. Bultmann's *Das Problem Der Hermeneutik* in: *Glauben und Verstehen* II, 1952, p. 211-235.

Heidelberg Catechism, reference is frequently made to Christ's humiliation and exaltation in the life of the believer, as something that did not happen just once, outside of him and for him, but also as something which accomplishes its purpose in the believer and bestows its fruits upon him, so that one can speak of suffering and dying and being buried and rising again with Christ. (And one can add that any exposition of the New Testament and of the kerygma of the action of God has not yet been reached unless it brings man to a true knowledge of himself, to the correct hearing of the Word of God.)

If Bultmann sought only to reject a purely objectivistic exposition of the New Testament and was concerned only to retain an existentialist interpretation, understood in this sense, he would earn the thanks of all the children of the Reformation. For it is in this way that the reformers, Melanchthon, Calvin, and Luther, actually taught us to exegete the New Testament and the entire Holy Scripture. The big difference between Reformation exegesis and that of Bultmann is, however, that what was for the reformers simply a result and consequence, is for Bultmann the entire affair. For the reformers, the Bible was always in the first place the book that contains the knowledge of God, and only in a derivative sense was it the book supplying knowledge of man. The objection that the Bible does not give us any speculative knowledge concerning God's essence and attributes and that its interest does not lie in the view of the natures of Christ and so on, is not relevant. No matter how much the New Testament and the entire •Scriptures speak to us concerning God and Christ in relation to the world and to man, this does not remove or abolish the fact that the Scripture is still the book that speaks to us of the great deeds of God and of the history of his redemptive work. And it views man in this light; it indicates in this light his place in the cosmos, and the nature of his miseries, and the possibility of his redemption. This order cannot be reversed without doing violence to Biblical revelation in its very kernel and essence.

Bultmann's existentialist exposition of the New Testament signifies therefore a grandiose reduction of its content, both in breadth and in depth. Of God's entire activity in the creation, redemption, and final end, nothing remains in Bultmann's conception but the actual speaking of God to the individual man. Bultmann has no room for the activity of God with the world, for faith in God's great plan of salvation, for the entire cosmos which he created, sustains, and rules, and which in Christ he saves and transforms into a new creation. The natural historical reality appears here as a given which develops according to its own closed-order and no man knows whence it came,

why it is here, or to what end it is proceeding. Only in the actual encounter with the Word of God does man understand himself in his creaturehood and in his safety in God's hand. Bultmann would maintain the historical character of the activity of God as the kernel and essence of the New Testament kerygma in opposition to the old liberal theology. But what remains in this existentialist schema is nothing other than the actual speaking of God, when he by his word again and again calls the individual person to decision *(Entscheidung).* According to Bultmann these moments of decision contain the existential significance of that which the New Testament describes in mythological form as the highest point of God's actions. Can one still call this an interpretation of what the New Testament understands by the great deeds of God in Jesus Christ? Undoubtedly the New Testament combines with the great redemptive facts a new Christian *(Seinsverstiindnis),* e.g., when Paul speaks of his being in Christ, dying with him, rising with him, and of the life according to the spirit. But the New Testament with unmistakable clarity makes this new being dependent upon that which happened once and for all, in the fullness of time, in the coming of Christ, his death, resurrection and ascension. So firmly is this dependent upon the latter doctrine that a new life without the latter would be mere imagination and vanity. "If Christ is not risen then is our preaching without content and our faith is without content" (I Corinthians 15: 14, 17). Bultmann attempts to deny this. His whole affirmation is directed to show that even if Christ did not rise, preaching and faith are not without content. Bultmann rejects Paul's appeal to the factuality of Christ's resurrection as "fatal." It must, therefore, be evident that this existentialist treatment of the New Testament is not a legitimate interpretation but is an elimination of the kernel and essence of the Christian proclamation. This doctrine in I Corinthians is not a peripheral matter with which Paul wrongly concerned himself, but it deals with the meaning of the entire New Testament kerygma. For Paul and all the witnesses of Christ, tbe redemptive sacrifice of Jesus and his resurrection from the dead is always the condition and basis for the reality of our salvation. Our salvation does not depend upon an existentialist conception of the word of God's love and redemption. Christ's expiatory death, his resurrection, in short, everything which in the New Testament is called the great works of God, the *magnolia Dei,* is not any a posteriori expression of a new self-judgment of "the New Testament man," but this new self-judgment bases itself upon the reality of the great works of God. This order cannot be reversed without doing violence to the

proclamation of the very essence of the New Testament. Such a reversal reduces the great world of God to the small world of man. And the great works of God in Jesus Christ are enclosed within the boundaries within which a secularized existentialism operates.

The view of man

This existentialist approach to the gospel loses sight of its proper content: God's great works in Jesus Christ. In addition it cannot do justice to the New Testament view of man. The New Testament speaks of man as *sub specie Dei* and not of God *sub specie hominis.* What man is, is derived from what he is for God; what man must do, is derived from what God demands of him; what sin is, depends upon what he owes to God; how man should truly exist, depends upon the goal that God has for him. This is the New Testament's *Vorverstiindnis,* necessary for the understanding of man. It is for this reason that the question of man's search for God is not of primary interest. On several occasions it is discussed but mainly in order to bring to light the erroneous path in which man seeks God (Acts. 17 : 23). The reality upon which the New Testament repeatedly bases itself is that man does not seek God. Instead he seeks his own happiness. It is for this reason that man lacks a correct knowledge concerning himself and the world. Because man does not know God, he does not know himself, he does not know the world, and cannot understand himself, in the world in a correct manner. For this reason his self-knowledge *(Selbstverstiindnis)* cannot be a preparation for the encounter with God in his Word. When a man learns to know God he becomes aware of the illusion in which he lives with respect to himself and the world.

Of course Bultmann admits that man must allow himself to be taught with respect to himself by the Word of God, but he does not mean by this that man cannot of himself come to a correct insight into his existence and into that which is necessary to save himself from his lost condition. In Bultmann's opinion the existentialist analysis of human being, especially as given by Heidegger, is nothing but a "secular philosophical exposition of the New Testament view of human being."1 The difference between this philosophy and that of the New Testament does not lie in the diagnosis of a human being,

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1 Neues Testament find Mythologie, in: *Kerygma und Mythos* I, p. 35.

but rather in the different judgment concerning the possibility of its liberation.

It cannot be more clearly shown that Bultmann's interpretation of God's redemptive work is not orientated to the New Testament but to a modern secular philosophy. For the conception which one has of the redemptive work of God is determined by the conception which one has of the apostasy of human existence. Bultmann states that anyone who is shocked by his interpretation of the New Testament in terms of Heidegger's categories should rather be startled more by the fact that philosophy had already seen what the New Testament sets forth. But the question is whether or not this is true. In our opinion it cannot be true because the New Testament in its judgment of man takes God as its starting point. It gives revelation concerning man because it gives revelation concerning God. But for Heidegger in his analysis of human being, the proper "self" of man is the measure or standard of all things. Its falsity is also disclosed if one examines closely the interpretation which Bultmann gives of the New Testament's human self-knowledge *(Seinsverstandnis).*

Bultmann posits the thesis that what Paul calls "the flesh" is really nothing but what existentialism teaches concerning the historicity of existence *(Geschichtlichkeit des Daseins).* What is common to both is that man knows that he is placed in a world surrounded by the superior power of the relative and the perishable, a world in which he feels that his own selfhood, his real actuality, is perishing or declining; a world out of which he can free himself only if he abandons all certainties and merits, and abandons himself to a future over which he has no control. For this reason there is, according to Bultmann, no basic difference between the New Testament and philosophy with respect to the manner in which human existence reaches its emancipation. What the New Testament calls "faith," "surrender," and "love" is not a supernatural quality but it is the attitude of real humanity at man's disposal; this is called, in philosophy, the surrender to "what is not utilizable." The point of difference is simply whetller or not man himself is in a state to detach himself or free himself from his factually being-in-the-world, and whether he is free to return to the proper or authentic meaning of his existence — freedom — or whether he must turn to God for aid. In our opinion, at the background of this entire description there is a view of man different from that of the New Testament. In place of the Biblical opposition between sin and grace, there is here substituted in essence the non-Biblical and anti-Biblical opposition between *nature* and *freedom*. Naturally Bultmann knows very well that sin occupies a central place in the New Testa-

ment. In this connection the concepts "sin" and "grace" recur frequently; for example, when he says that human self-assertion in the relative and the Perishable is the essence of "sin," and that "grace" designates what is necessary in order to bring man to his freedom. The question which one must again ask is whether or not what is here called sin and grace represents the New Testament opposition. In our opinion this not the case. In conformity with his analysis of existentialism, Bultmann seeks human misery in being involved in this world of relativity; only when man is free with respect to the latter does he reach his authentic "self." *Entweltlichung* (freeing-one's-self-from-the world) is therefore frequently employed by Bultmann. God's grace consists in the fact that it enables man to accomplish this. The "sin" here in question is actually the sin of man against himself, against his own spiritual nature. And the freedom to which man must return is nothing but the escape beyond the relative, the visible, the utilizable. But this is something different from what the New Testament calls "repentance" and "love of God." Certainly one can describe this as "surrender." But this always means in New Testament: surrender to the will of God. What deceives man in his essence is therefore not the relativity of his existence in the world. It is rather his alienation and apostasy from God as he has revealed himself and his Word. What sin and misery is cannot find its determination in the relativity of being-within-the-world and in the desire to maintain one's self therein, but it can be discovered only in man's personal relation to God and his revealed will. Being converted to God, according to the New Testament, is not the same as surrender to that over which man does not dominate, to the sphere of the absolute in which man can alone be himself. All this displays much kinship with the Greek, gnostic idealistic thought, in which the authenticity of man consists in his deity. It is not related to the New Testament view of man, which is not determined by any antithesis within the human as such (visible as versus invisible, or the perishable versus the eternal). The New Testament is determined by the antithesis which man therefore can never describe, as in existentialism, as a natural antithesis but only as an ethical and religious antithesis.

From this it is established that Bultmann's interpretation of the New Testament cannot do justice to the character of sin, as guilt with respect to God. It can only conceive of it as a power whose function is to bind us to the relative, the visible, and so on. For this reason Bultmann does not know what to do with the substitutionary expiation in Christ's crucifixion, with the idea of the expiatory sacrifice, and in general with what the New Testament calls the "uniqueness"

of the justifying work of God in Christ's death and resurrection. All this is for him mythology, not only because it is opposed to his scientific view of the world, but because in his existentialist conception of man, sin, and freedom, it can find no place. The only thing that Bultmann can expect from the activity of God is freedom from the power of sin (in the above described sense of the word), as this repeatedly occurs in the encounter of the individual man with the Word of God. For this it is not necessary that there be any preceeding unique *(Einmalig)* activity of God in Christ. What occurs in the act of God in Christ is no reconciliation which once and for all happened; it is nothing other than that which can bring us to the surrender of the decision *(Entscheidung).* For this reason Christ cannot be a mediator; but he can be only the great example whom we must follow.

CONCLUSION

Existentialism, Bultmann, and the New Testament

Bultinann's conception is a grandiose attempt to effect a synthesis between the Christian faith and immanence philosophy (the view of life which seeks to find the absolute within the limits or boundaries of the human spirit), here conceived of in its existential form. The point of contact between the gospel and philosophy is therefore not sought in a human sense of duty nor in the knowledge of eternal verities, nor in man's feeling of independence but only in that in which man properly exists, namely, in his actual decision to be free and not bound by the relativity of the surrounding world.

Now insofar as the existentialist philosophy considers this self-surrender (which at the same time is a self-maintenance or affirmation of the man as spirit) within the reach of man himself (as is the case with Karl Jaspers and his disciple, F. Bun), one can say that God is entirely superfluous or, perhaps better, that man, in coming to himself again and again, "reveals God." For it is correctly said: when everything lies within the "micro world" (of the human spirit) God becomes a creation of man.' The case of Bultmann is different to the extent that in contrast to existentialism, man is brought to his decision and to his freedom only through the claim or address of God's Word. It is at this point that Bultmann joins the Christian faith to existen-

1 J. Sperna Weiland, *Geloof en Geschiedenis, Vox Theologica,* 22e Jaarg., 1952, p. 185.

tialism and insofar as one would qualify his conception as Christian, he must find his basis here.

It is difficult to escape the question whether Bultmann, because of his refusal to speak of the action of God except in this manner, introduces something essentially new into this existentialist philosophy. Undoubtedly Bultmann judges this to be the case and, in addition he is rejected by the "pure" existentialist philosophy on this point. However, when all the actions of God are removed insofar as they do not take place in the actual encounter between God and man, which must bring man to the true "existence," the Place where God is operative in the faith of man, appears to have become very very small. And what remains of God's action is simply that which is necessary to bring man to his authenticity. And one raises the question as to whether or not God does not simply exist by the grace of human existence. For if the divine resurrection of Christ is only the product and can be only the product of human faith, how can the resurrection of man, who had fallen in the world, still be understood as the result of divine action? Is it not simply because such a resurrection is possible because of the spiritual character of human existence? Would it still be possible if man was not man, i.e., spirit, for God to act as God? It **is** not necessary here to draw extreme conclusions. It seems apparent to us that what has been said is sufficient to warrant the conclusion that only a complete acceptance of an anthropocentric philosophy can make it possible to accept and to offer this conception as a legitimate interpretation of the gospel. **It** is mysterious or puzzling how the divine revelation as presented to us in the Old and New Testament and of which the Pauline expression "for of him, and through him, and to him, are all things" forms the great content, can be equated with a view which ascribes to God no other power or deed than that which is necessary to make man, *man.* If anywhere, it seems legitimate that here we can speak of a myth, the myth of man and his existence as the standard and goal of what is on earth and in heaven.

$2.00

P&R PRESBYTERIAN AND REFORMED PUBLISHING CO.
Box 817 · Phillipsburg · New Jersey 08865

ISBN: 0-87[illegible]81-4