

5-1-1973

The Bultmannian Engima -- An Investigation into the Concept of Demythologization

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THE BULTMANNIAN ENIGMA--AN INVESTIGATION
INTO THE CONCEPT OF DEMYTHOLOGIZATION

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of
Western Evangelical Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Divinity

by
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May 1973

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am deeply indebted to many people for their priceless guidance and assistance in researching and writing this study. I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the following: to Dr. Noble V. Sack, my major professor, for his invaluable and constructive criticisms throughout; to Dr. Arthur Climenhaga for reading and making valuable and penetrating criticisms of the study; to the Reverend Leon Dakota Hall, pastor of the Oak Grove Assembly of God, for affording me with unfailing assistance in financial and spiritual matters beyond my power to repay; to my loving wife, Evelyn, for her suggestions, encouragement, and moral support, as well as for her protracted patience as a student's helpmeet in a time of literary need; and to my daughters, Cheryl-ann and Tricia, who have lavished an imperishable quality of affection on me during moments of difficulty which I encountered while preparing this study.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Time and time again throughout the history of Christianity, scholars have challenged the traditional and orthodox Christian faith particularly on the point of hermeneutics. The Church has made vital reactions to such challenges and has incessantly utilized that which could be salvaged from the proposals and conclusions of these adversaries to clarify and formulate its beliefs. This should be the attitude of every Christian theologian as he seeks to exercise his role as a defender of the faith.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Interpreting the New Testament message in such a way that the modern man can readily understand it has been the object of theological concern for a number of years. Evangelicals accept, without doubt, that the New Testament is the word of God spoken through the words of men. But it has been put to question whether it speaks to men, especially the men of today, in direct and straightforward language. Rudolph Bultmann argued that it does not. To make his denial meaningful, he developed his hermeneutical program known in theological language as demythologization.

The problem of this thesis was concerned with

Bultmann's concept of demythologization. Does his view of demythologization offer an adequate polemic for New Testament interpretation?

Some ecclesiastics have tried to deny the problem altogether. They have considered the professional theologian as a threat to the stability of the Church and its understanding of human existence. The theologian has retorted with a word of condemnation to the effect that the Church has become a mere social institution that avoids pertinent and crucial issues.

Needless to say, it has been apparent that no one can afford to ignore the problem or even bypass it as one of those fine points of scholastic distinction. For at the dawn of every age the problem sprouts and an adequate solution is always in demand. It must be faced stalwartly.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Demythologization

This is a method of interpretation developed by Rudolph Bultmann. It is sometimes referred to as existential interpretation since it seeks to explain the Scriptures in terms of human existence here and now. Gogarten explains that demythologization "aims at enabling modern thought...to know once again what Christian faith involves."¹

¹Friedrich Gogarten, Demythologizing and History (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), p. 10.

Bultmann believed that the thought forms of the New Testament were heavily influenced by Jewish apocalyptic and Gnostic redemption myths. To arrive at the real message of the New Testament, one has to embark on a program of demythologization.²

Myth

Myth is a form of theological communication used to express God's truth to man. It is an effort to convey the knowledge of the unknowable to man in his finite condition. Bultmann defined myth as "the use of imagery to express the other-worldly in terms of this world and the divine in terms of human life, the other side in terms of this side."³

Kerygma

This is a term which was made prominent in theological circles by C. H. Dodd. He defined kerygma as the message which the early Church preached.⁴ Bultmann used the term copiously and believed that,

When....the New Testament seeks to present faith as the origin of theological statements, it must obviously present the kerygma and the self-understanding opened up

²Bernard Ramm, A Handbook of Contemporary Theology (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1966), p. 34.

³Hans W. Bartsch (ed.), Kerygma and Myth, Vol. 1 (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1961), p. 10.

⁴C. H. Dodd (ed.), The Apostolic Preaching and its Development (London, 1944), p. 75.

by it in which faith unfolds itself.⁵

For Bultmann, the kerygma occupies the central concern in demythologization.

Existentialism

Existentialism is a philosophical system which was worked out by Soren Kierkegaard, the Danish philosopher of the nineteenth century. According to Francis Schaeffer, existentialism affirms that human experience "is not describable in scientific or rational terms. Existentialism stresses the need to make vital choices by using man's freedom in a contingent and apparently purposeless world."⁶

The twentieth century existentialist philosopher, Martin Heidegger has influenced Bultmann greatly. In his early career, Heidegger spelled out his philosophy from the basic idea of Dasien, a German word which is synonymous to the English word "being."

Existence

Existence is defined as that state which is actual or real. As such it is opposed to that which is imaginary. It is that which has a definite place in reality.⁷

⁵R. Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament, Vol. 1 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), p. 239.

⁶F. Schaeffer, The God Who Is There (Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1968), p. 178.

⁷W. C. Young, A Christian Approach to Philosophy (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1954), p. 247.

In the concept of demythologization, existence is described as inauthentic, corresponding to the life of sin, and authentic, refering to the life that is free from sin. These terms were borrowed from Heidegger's philosophizing and christianized by Rudolph Bultmann.

Being

Being is the present participle of the verb 'to be.' In the light of this everything which exists has being. Hence being is that area of naked existence.⁸ J. Macquarrie in one of his books stated:

A first step toward the clarification of the meaning of 'being' would be to consider the distinctions that are often made, either in ordinary speech or in the history of philosophy, between 'being' and some other words. The very fact that these distinctions are made shows us that 'being' is not just an empty word but that we can have implicitly in mind some determinate meaning when we use it.⁹

Hermeneutics

The term comes from the Greek word hermeneia which means interpretation.¹⁰ It is therefore, according to Ramm,

⁸M. Halverson (ed.), Handbook of Christian Theology. (New York: Meridian Books, Inc., 1958), p. 32.

⁹J. Macquarrie, Principles of Christian Theology (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966), p. 100.

¹⁰J. Robinson and J. Cobb, The New Hermeneutic (New York: Harper, 1964), p. 7.

the "science and art of biblical interpretation."¹¹

Bultmann refers to his view of demythologization as a method of hermeneutics, since it seeks to interpret the Scriptures in a way that the modern man can understand.

THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The concept of demythologization has raised a storm of fury throughout the Christian world. However, although it has jolted theologians and ministers of the Gospel, the issues to which it has addressed itself have been very pertinent.

The purpose of this study, first of all, was to investigate this problematic approach to biblical interpretation with a view to discovering its abiding difficulties. A cautious attempt was made to underscore its values for evangelical Christian theology.

Another purpose for studying the concept of demythologization was that it appeared to provide an opportunity to meddle in the major doctrines of the Bible which have been the object of searching criticism for years. It also allowed the writer to become acquainted with the key issues that control theological investigation today.

The third and final purpose for studying demythologization was the solid opportunity it provided to "ear-

¹¹Bernard Ramm, Protestant Biblical Interpretation (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1970), p. 1.

nestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3). This was paramount in view of the current subtlety of modern thought.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study was not an attempt to discuss every area of Bultmann's thoughts. It was limited to his concept of demythologization. However, it was realized that difficulties would arise if discussion were restricted to one area of his thoughts since most areas interlock.

The need for caution could not be exaggerated since there was always the error of being overly critical of that to which one was adamantly opposed. The study was limited, as much as possible, to the Christian religion and especially to the New Testament.

METHODS OF PROCEDURE

The major part of this study was more descriptive than argumentative. An attempt was made to trace the background and the climate in which Bultmann's concept of demythologization developed. The philosophical, theological, and historical situation was inspected and developed in chapter two.

In chapter three, the main tenets of demythologization were examined. An attempt was made to stay, as closely as possible, to primary sources since the bulk of literature available on this subject was

enough to present some hazard to creativity.

Chapter four dealt with the demythologization debate as it sought to defend itself against the tyranny or merciless critics. The chapter was also concerned with the search for a usable future for the evangelical theologian in the area of demythologization. Hence, an attitude of tolerance and appreciation was demonstrated wherever it was in demand. Chapter five was used to summarize and conclude the study.

Chapter 2

DEMYTHOLOGIZING IN THE MAKING

The climate in which Bultmann developed had an indispensable bearing on his concept of demythologization. Behind every great thought there have been great men. Thoughts have never originated in an isolated manner. They have always been the product of accumulated minds--minds that have been active night and day over a number of tiresome years.

Although the credit has always been attached specifically to Bultmann for this way of thinking which has influenced the trend of biblical interpretation, one must not forget to survey the previous strands of thought which have induced him in that direction. They have been regions of thoughts which have bridged the gap between previous and contemporary developments.

THE PHILOSOPHICAL ARISTOCRACY

Philosophy has often been a source of great help to theology throughout the centuries. But the one who broached the problem of philosophy and theology has discovered that the former has continually affected the latter to some extent. This does not mean that there has been no possible correlation between the two disciplines, the problem has always been in the adequacy of that correlation.

Thomas Aquinas achieved a measure of success when he fused theology and philosophy, but the relationship did not stand the test of time. In the concept of demythologization, it seemed evident that another attempt was being made to accomplish the same result.

There has scarcely been another period of history that offered such a rich intellectual climate as the years immediately following the 1800's in Germany. It was during that time that men such as Kant, Goethe, Fichte, Schelling, Schleiermacher, and Hegel came on the scene and flourished widely in the area of philosophy and theology.

The works of Kant, Schleiermacher, and Hegel were the determining factors in the course of theology until the early twentieth century. Since then, Kierkegaard's existentialism has dominated philosophical and theological thought. A brief study of some of these men has disclosed their contribution to the rise of demythologization.

Immanuel Kant

Immanuel Kant was born in East Prussia in 1724. His parents were devout Pietists. Kant lived his entire life in East Prussia. He attended the University of Konigsberg, became a tutor to a private family, and in 1755 returned to the University of Konigsberg where he remained for the rest of his life.

As an adult Kant attended church services rarely and only to fulfill official responsibilities. It has

often been understood that when Kant became rector of the University, he duly led the academic procession to the cathedral for the customary service, but deserted it at the door.¹

Kant believed that there have been three possible ways of proving the existence of God by means of pure reason--the ontological, the cosmological, and the physico-theological (argument from design). Kant came to believe that the attempt to establish the existence of God by means of the ontological argument was futile for "we can no more extend our stock of ... insight by mere ideas than a merchant can better his position by adding a few noughts to his cash accounts."²

Kant also found difficulties in the cosmological argument. He believed that the argument took its stand on experience and had as its major premise the principle of causality. Kant argued that the principle of causality had no meaning and no criterion for its application except in the sensible world.³

Kant considered the physico-theological proof to be the most logical of the three. However, he found that this argument was inadequate. Kant's alternative to

¹James C. Livingston, Modern Christian Thought (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1971), p. 64.

²N. K. Smith (trans.), Critique of Pure Reason, by Immanuel Kant (2nd ed.; London: SCM Press, 1958), p. 507.

³*Ibid.*, p. 511.

these arguments was his concept of the regulative use of transcendental ideas. For example, the ideas such as the self, the world, and God should function as regulative maxims to guide scientific inquiry.

Kant argued that the use of these regulative ideas has nothing to do with the extension of one's knowledge to objects beyond his normal experience. They were simply a system of systematization and unity. The idea of God as a supreme intelligence and cause of the world has led men to conceive of nature as a systematic, teleological whole, under the guidance of causal laws. A conception of this nature has been a spur to scientific investigation. The regulative use of the idea of God has to be both necessary and beneficial.

Kant shared the eighteenth century disregard of history. Therefore the question of the historical Jesus was of little concern to him. For him, the historical question neither could nor need be answered, for the real object of faith was nothing else than the ideal of the Son of God well-pleasing to God. This ideal was enough to justify anyone in the sight of God, for the rightness of one's moral disposition could cover the imperfections of his previous evil deeds. Kant influenced Bultmann at this particular point.

Although Kant's influence on the concept of demythologization has been immeasurable, his contribution existed primarily in the use of his ideas rather than the intrinsic

worth of his own theological doctrine. Kant has helped to sow the seeds of modern religious agnosticism, subjectivism, and illusionism and these have all been pronounced in the concept of demythologization.⁴

The Hegelians

The philosophy of Hegel was perhaps the most audacious attempt ever devised to describe the conflict between Christianity and philosophic speculation. Hegel himself spent a life-time trying to reconcile religion and culture. In this bold attempt he allowed his influence to be felt not only in Germany but, to a large extent, in Great Britain and America.⁵

G. W. F. Hegel was born in the year 1780. He was born at a time when the influence of the Enlightenment period was waning. In his later years he witnessed the birth of the movement known as Romanticism. However, contrary to all expectation, the fact that he was caught up between those two movements was not sufficient to give the kind of satisfaction which he needed. Instead his philosophy took on the nature of synthesizing the thoughts of both movements. By doing this Hegel proved himself as one of the most fertile idealists in the history of Western thought.

⁴Livingston, op. cit., p. 76.

⁵Ibid., p. 144.

It was during his stay at the University of Berlin, 1818-1831, that Hegel rose to unchallenged prominence in Germany, philosophically speaking. His was a prominence that lasted for almost one hundred and fifty years. Hegel was the first philosopher to unite all systems into one self-moving whole. This one system embodied all phases of experience, as well as all phases of thought.⁶

For Hegel religion should not be understood primarily as a feeling of the divine presence. This was the error that Schleiermacher was propagating in the University of Berlin, and nothing disturbed Hegel more. On the contrary, Hegel taught that religion should be understood as a knowledge of God. For him theology was, in its final phase, philosophic knowledge, "a going beyond the images of positive religion to a knowledge of their universal conceptual significance."⁷

Hegel's greatest influence on the rise of demythologizing stemmed from his understanding of eschatology. Lowith writes,

The ultimate basis of Hegel's eschatological system lies in his absolute evaluation of Christianity, according to which the eschatological end and fulness of time occurred with the appearance of Christ.⁸

⁶Wanda Orguski, Hegel: Highlights (New York: Philosophical Library, 1960), p. 1.

⁷Livingston, op. cit., p. 145.

⁸C. Lowith, From Hegel to Nietzsche (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), p. 35.

Hegel's historical consciousness was definitely far-reaching. It entered into the education of both his pupils and opponents. It was more than likely that Bultmann fell under the spell of Hegelian influence.

Hegel and Schleiermacher tried in their own ways to establish the positive Christian tradition on a new philosophical basis. As to their success, time has told the story and has meted out its judgment quite adequately. By 1830, the great theses of these two men began to break down. From Hegel to Nietzsche saw philosophical thought hammering relentlessly in its criticism against Christianity.

The decade which spanned from 1830 to 1840 was largely dominated by the students of Hegel. Hegelian philosophy had left many questions unanswered. This was true of two fundamental issues of the time: theism and social philosophy. These two issues were the cause for a division among the Hegelians. They had no other alternative but to function under two different parties, the Right Wing conservatives and the Left Wing radicals.

The Right Wing party was made up of men such as K. Daub, P. Marheineke, and A. Biedermann. Their persuasion was centered around the idea that speculative idealism, as developed by Hegel, contained the perfect instrument for interpreting the truths of historic Christianity.⁹

⁹Livingston, op. cit., p. 172.

The more dominant party was the Leftist. It was made up of men such as David Strauss, Ludwig Feuerbach, and Bruno Bauer. These men were convinced that Hegel's idea of Aufhebungen gave vent to the emergence of a new religion of man and a dissolution of historic Christianity.¹⁰

The men operating in the Leftist party were extremely radical. They were "all ruthlessly logical and honest and, as a result of their writings, were outcasts who suffered from the loss of teaching positions and withdrawals from society."¹¹ Herr reported that under the hands of these men, Christianity underwent its severest criticisms of all time.¹²

David Friedrich Strauss was born in Germany in 1808 and lived a vicious life until his death in 1874. He attended the theological seminary at Blaubeuren and studied under the famous F.C. Baur. In 1825 he was introduced to the writings of Hegel at Tübingen. In 1831 he went to Berlin to attend the lectures of Schleiermacher and Hegel. A few months after his arrival, Hegel died.

Strauss found no satisfaction in the teachings of

¹⁰Ibid., p. 173. The German word Aufhebungen conveys the double meaning of having "done away with" and at the same time "preserved" on a higher level.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Hugh T. Kerr, Readings in Christian Thought (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1966), p. 227.

Schleiermacher and therefore returned to lecture at Tübingen in 1832. He lectured in philosophy and did so as a zealous disciple of Hegel. Strauss shocked everyone outside the idealist camp when he wrote these words in the preface of one of his books.

The author is aware that the essence of the Christian faith is perfectly independent of his criticism. The supernatural birth of Christ, his miracles, his resurrection, and ascension, remain eternal truths whatever doubts may be cast on their reality as historical facts....that the dogmatic significance of the life of Jesus remains inviolate: in the meantime let the calmness and insensibility with which....criticism undertakes apparently dangerous operations, be explained solely by the security of the author's conviction that no injury is threatened to the Christian faith.¹³

In this book there is an analysis of how biblical interpretation developed up to the time of Strauss. The book also examined the mythological view point and gave the reasons why this view point was so long opposed.

Strauss felt that the New Testament theologians rejected the concept of myth because of its association with pagan religions and the fallacy that myth was primarily a primitive concept. Strauss also believed that scholars were influenced by the idea that the New Testament was written by eyewitnesses. He was quite sure that the entrance to the gospel's history was through the decorated portals of mythus and the exit was similar to it,

¹³David F. Strauss, The Life of Jesus Critically Examined (London, 1906), p. 29.

while the intermediate space was traversed by the crooked and toilsome paths of natural interpretation.¹⁴

Strauss believed that the supernaturalists and rationalists did an injustice to New Testament studies in that they have read their own presuppositions into the thought forms of primitive Christianity. He writes,

In consistency with these opinions, this writer applies the notion of the mythus to the entire history of Jesus; recognizes mythi or mythical embellishments in every portion, and ranges under the category of mythus not merely the miraculous occurrences during the infancy of Jesus, but those also of his public life; not merely miracles operated on Jesus, but those wrought by him.¹⁵

Myth, for Strauss, was a method of understanding in the pre-scientific and pre-historic mind. It has always been the language of natural religion. Strauss recognized that there were both negative and positive criteria for determining the presence of mythical material.¹⁶

There has been no difficulty in detecting the influence of Strauss on the concept of demythologization and on Bultmann as a whole. It was Strauss who first raised the question of the historical Jesus. It was he who first talked about the possibility of separating the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith. The fact that this topic has remained at the core of modern theological discussion

¹⁴Ibid., p. 64.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 65.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 87.

revealed the nature and scope of its influence today.

One has to resist the temptation of understanding Strauss merely as a theologian. He was as much a philosopher as he was a theologian. He said,

In my theology philosophy occupies such a pre-dominant position that my theological views can only be worked out to completeness by means of a more thorough study of philosophy, and this course of study I am now going to prosecute uninterruptedly without concerning myself whether it leads me back to theology or not.¹⁷

Albert Schweitzer highly recommended Strauss for his first Life of Jesus. He believed that it was the most perfect thing in all of learned literature. However Karl Barth thought differently. He was of the opinion that Strauss was significantly "bad news" for modern theology "for he confronted theology with a series of questions upon which it has not, right down to the present day, perhaps, adequately declared itself."¹⁸

Barth argued that the influence Strauss has on academic theology was surprisingly low. However, there has probably been no other man in the nineteenth century outside the Church who could boast of a greater influence in intellectual circles on the Continent than Strauss.

Ludwig Feuerbach was another radical idealist who has left his print on modern thinking. He was not only a

¹⁷D. F. Strauss, Deutsche Revue, p. 71.

¹⁸Karl Barth, From Rousseau to Ritschl (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959), p. 386.

follower of Hegel but also his student for approximately two years. His contribution was in the area of anthropology. He felt that, at best, the Christian religion did nothing else but to reveal man's own deepest self-consciousness. For him religion was just the dream of the human mind. However, "even in dreams we do not find ourselves in emptiness or in heaven, but on earth, in the realm of reality; we only see things in the...splendour of imagination and caprice."¹⁹

Feuerbach therefore saw the necessity of a change and his suggestion was that one ought to change imagination into reality. If God must continue to be the object of religion, man must look on Him as the projection of his own finite and, to a greater extent, infinite self-consciousness because,

The object of any subject is nothing else than the subject's own nature taken objectively..... Consciousness of God is self-consciousness, knowledge of God is self-knowledge. By his God, thou knowest the man, and by the man his God; the two are identical.... God is the manifested inward nature, the expressed self of a man--religion the solemn unveiling of a man's hidden treasures, the revelation of his intimate thoughts.²⁰

According to Feuerbach religion ought to make a man aware of his self-alienation. It ought to reveal man's

¹⁹L. Feuerbach, The Essence of Christianity (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1959), p. 39.

²⁰Ibid., p. 27.

uniqueness. Feuerbach believed that whatever existed at the basis of the resurrection of Jesus Christ posed no great problem.

Man, at least in a state of ordinary well-being, has the wish not to die. This wish is identical with the instinct of self-preservation.... It has therefore been said that all proofs of immortality are insufficient, and even that unassisted reason is not capable of apprehending it, still less proving it. Such a certainty requires an immediate personal assurance, a practical demonstration. This can only be given me by the fact of a dead person, whose death has been previously certified, rising again from the grave; and he must be no different person, but, on the contrary, the type and representative of all others, so that his resurrection also may be the type, the guarantee of theirs. The resurrection of Christ is therefore the satisfied desire of man for an immediate certainty of his personal existence after death.²¹

In like manner, Feuerbach explained the Trinity as an alienated reflection of a beautiful human truth--the truth that man finds satisfaction with himself only when he realizes that he is a whole man. Authentic religion is found only in true communion. He writes,

God the Father is I, God the Son Thou. Participated life is alone, true, self-satisfying, divine life....this....is the true secret, the supernatural mystery of the Trinity. The third person of the Trinity expresses nothing further than love of the two divine Persons toward each other, the unity of the Son and the Father, the idea of community.²²

Feuerbach definitely foreshadowed the ideas that have been commonplace in existential philosophy. His influence on demythologization has been seen from the stand-

²¹Ibid., p. 135.

²²Ibid., p. 67.

point that demythologization has emphasized the anthropological aspect strongly.

Even though Bultmann argued, according to T. C. Oden, that his "anthropology is not that of Feuerbach, which recognizes nothing over against man,"²³ Feuerbachian thought has still been a thorn in the flesh of modern theology.²⁴

The Existentialists

In the last decade of the nineteenth century, Hegelian idealism began to wane. Historical positivism and metaphysical agnosticism began to reign powerfully. The philosophy known as existentialism also began to witness the dawn of its belated glory.

In the meantime other forms of philosophizing also found favour. Arthur Schopenhauer taught that the world was the manifestation of blind intelligent will and therefore was as bad as possible. Augustus Comte taught that the effort of man to know anything besides mere appearances was vain. He discarded in his concept of positivism the idea of the inner relation of things. He discarded all belief in spiritual realities, for these were antiquated theology and metaphysics as far as he was

²³T. C. Oden, Radical Obedience: The Ethics of Rudolph Bultmann (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965), p. 144.

²⁴R. Banks, "Ludwig Feuerbach," The Evangelical Quarterly, XLIV, 1 (1972), pp. 30-32.

concerned.

Herbert Spencer separated the knowable from the unknowable. He relegated the unknowable to that in which investigation was futile. He limited himself to building a theory to account for the origin and inward life of the knowable. From his doctrine of the knowable his philosophy could properly be called agnosticism. From his view of the origin and growth of the world his philosophy could be called evolution.

These systems had their sway although they were devoid of all religious consciousness. The result was that they issued in a terrible spirit of agnosticism to Christianity. Fortunately, there were other systems of philosophizing that operated in harmony with the Christian faith.

In the last decade of the nineteenth century existentialism, as developed by the Danish philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard, began to react. Hegelian idealism was its first target.²⁵ Kierkegaard's work was a sustained attack on all forms of rational theology, whether it was the moral idealism of the Kantians or the absolute or speculative idealism of the Hegelians.

Kierkegaard believed that his generation was given over to a pseudo-optimism which destroyed the nature of

²⁵J. O. Urmson, Western Philosophy and Philosophers (New York: Hawthorn Books Inc., 1960), p. 200.

Christianity. He therefore felt that he should approach the religious problem from a different dialectical standpoint than that of Hegel's. He stayed clear of the Hegelian dialectic of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis, for this, to him, was a never ending process. His dialectic was strictly existential. It began with the individual as he was confronted with the possibilities of existence. It was not necessarily a logical dialectic.

Kierkegaard read and listened to many sermons. He made it his business to sit at the feet of reputable preachers and to criticize their sermons mercilessly. This did not interfere with his spiritual life in any respect. Kierkegaard was a very worshipful believer. He was at variance with his counterparts because they demanded too much emphasis on scholarship. This was the heart of the problem as he understood it. The spirit of the age pressed the ministers of God to be prosecuting attorneys for Deity instead of being men with a burning message from God.²⁶

For Kierkegaard all rationalizing from the pulpit was mere confusion, for such sermons did not really establish certainty for the listener. He was strongly convinced that religious certitude was not a consequence of proofs.²⁷

²⁶Soren Kierkegaard, The Concept of Dread (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1944), p. 92.

²⁷Soren Kierkegaard, Sickness Unto Death (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1941), pp. 167-169.

He felt that an argumentative sermon was a witness to the spiritlessness of the Christian pulpit. His suggestion was that when a minister delivered a sermon, the content should be born out of his own life.²⁸

In a different setting Kierkegaard believed that man was free to shape his own life. This freedom was that which constituted the precariousness of man's existence. Kierkegaard did not go as far as Sartre who, later on, pronounced the idea that existence preceded essence. He did not believe that man was responsible to no one for his decisions. On the contrary, he entertained the idea that man's existence was exposed to the scrutiny of a living and righteous God.

According to Kierkegaard man lived his whole life in the sphere of decisions and as such he was on trial for eternity. He could only find security in that moment of encounter with God in Christ. This could only be accomplished through faith. Man must not think that he could escape the vicissitudes or involvements of this mundane life because history has always been the stage on which he stood trial for eternity.

Kierkegaard argued that truth was subjectivity. He was convinced that the facts of life and history took place in time independently of being known by any particular individual. He advocated the idea that there was no

²⁸Ibid.

objective revelation if this was understood as a direct visibility of God. He believed that this would be bordering on paganism. God could only be discerned in the inwardness of the individual with the eyes of faith. This has been one of the areas in which Kierkegaard has influenced the rise of demythologization.²⁹

Kierkegaard also influenced philosophy at the point where philosophy began to turn attention to an analysis of existence itself. Heidegger and Sartre have altered Kierkegaard's concepts and have proclaimed that there has been no God, but their phenomenological description of the human situation found its source in Kierkegaard.

Kierkegaard was one of the most seminal thinkers of his day. The nineteenth century largely overlooked his prophetic protest but the twentieth century thinker has not been able to bypass his incalculable influence on human thought.³⁰

Another existentialist of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was Martin Heidegger. His influence on Bultmann and demythologization at large could not be overemphasized. Bultmann wholly theologized Heidegger's philosophy and used it to propagate his understanding of the Christian faith.

²⁹M. Heinechen, "Soren Kierkegaard," A Handbook of Christian Theologians (New York; 1965), p. 142.

³⁰W. Kimmel and G. Clive (eds.), Dimensions of Faith (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1960), p. 34.

Heidegger was born in 1889 in Germany. He began to study Catholic theology at first but later on shifted his interest to philosophy. When he was twenty-six years old he became a docent at the University of Heidelberg and in 1922 he was made full professor at the University of Marburg. During his career at Marburg he became a colleague of Rudolph Bultmann who held a chair in the department of New Testament theology.

Heidegger left Marburg in 1928 and became a full professor at the University of Frieberg. Five years later he was promoted to the position as rector of the University. He then openly expressed his support for the National Socialist party. He was finally suspended after the second World War for his sympathy with the Nazi regime.³¹

The basic question with which Heidegger dealt in his philosophy was the question concerning Being. For him there was some distinction between Being and being. The former is that which is, while the latter is that by which it is or that which keeps it from becoming non-being.³²

It must be understood that Heidegger was not

³¹J. Macquarrie, Twentieth Century Religious Thought (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1963), p. 353.

³²P. Achtemeier, An Introduction to the New Hermeneutic (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), p. 37.

using the terms Being and God interchangeably. This was certainly not his intention. As far as Heidegger was concerned God did not exist. His existentialism was purely atheistic. Achtemier explains that Heidegger "does not become a theologian, and any attempt to equate what he means by Being with what the Christian means by God can only lead to a basic misunderstanding."³³

Heidegger wanted to know what kept everything from falling into nothingness.³³ He wanted to know what it was that characterized all things that were. He wanted to know the reason why there "is" something and not nothing. He felt confident that it was being that made the difference. Heidegger's problem was therefore ontological.

In order to understand Being as such, Heidegger deemed it necessary to approach human being for the answer. John Macquarrie writes,

Just here the tendency becomes obvious that the self-understanding of the average man is rooted in daily tasks, in that which is concrete being, and not being as such. This phenomenon is the inference of our human being in the world. And this our being-in-the-world is the specific mode of our being here. In order to disclose Being as such, first of all we must recognize man's being-in-the-world as his fundamental nature.³⁴

³³Ibid.

³⁴John Macquarrie, Studies in Christian Existentialism (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1965), p. 105.

For Heidegger Being is that by which beings are manifested. Being is in itself essentially nameable. The word has the basic meaning of "letting appear" or "causing to be seen." This is what being precisely is. Being therefore needs man (there-being) for its expression. Language lies at the heart of being and is therefore man's response to the essential nature of Being.³⁵

Heidegger did not believe as other philosophers that language is the arbitrary creation of man. He felt confident that language is the response forced upon man by the very nature of Being as it opens itself to man. Language is something that speaks in man. Man must understand Being in order to realize himself as a man. Hence man is responsible for his own existence.³⁶

Heidegger believed that no man exists in a vacuum. Man lives in relation with other beings. For him man only becomes man as he traffics with his environment, and this has been a structural element in his nature.³⁷

Heidegger believed that man not only lives in relationship to other beings but that he also exists in relationship to himself. Man is capable of standing off and looking at himself with the understanding that he knows and understands himself. Self-understanding, as far as

³⁵Achtemeier, op. cit., p. 31.

³⁶Ibid., p. 32-33.

³⁷Ibid., p. 34.

Heidegger was concerned, is another way in which man makes himself a man.³⁸

Other structural elements in man, as Heidegger saw them, are his power to understand, and his power to express what he understands. Without these structural elements, man would not have had the capacity to communicate. For, as Heidegger put it, "the essence of man rests in language and it is language alone which enables man to become that kind of living entity which he is as man."³⁹

Heidegger spoke about the "fallenness of Being" and one must guard against equating this with the biblical concept of the fall of man. Heidegger was not building his concept upon any biblical premise. By the term he meant that man lives his life, not in accordance with his true being but rather in reliance upon other beings. He believed that man's starting point should be Being and his attempt to put Being aside results only in an inauthentic life. This inauthentic life meant that man lives his life in alienation of his true self.

When man learns to open himself to his own true being, Heidegger believed that he has made a decision for authenticity. He saw authentic life as one in which being decides to be the self it is. It is the voice of

³⁸Ibid., p. 35.

³⁹Martin Heidegger, Unterwegs zur Sprache (Pfullingen: Verlag, 1960), p. 241.

conscience summoning the individual to the task of achieving its authentic self.

However, Heidegger wanted to make it understood that authentic life was not a once-for-all accomplishment.⁴⁰ Such has been the kind of thought in which Bultmann's concept of demythologization was grounded as he sought to frame the message of the gospel in terms understandable to the modern man.

THE THEOLOGICAL HYPOCRISY

Theological thought in the late nineteenth century was definitely hypocritical. Men pretended to be Christian theologians but were bent on destroying the fundamentals of the Christian faith. The situation has remained the same in the present twentieth century. During the Reformation period the Bible was central in theological discussions. After this period, the attitude towards the Bible became hardened into a fresh mood of scholastic investigation and new understandings of the Christian faith were promoted.⁴¹

Men began to question the authenticity of the orthodox stand. Never before was this done so severely than in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early

⁴⁰C. Michalson, Christianity and the Existentialists (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956), p. 103-106.

⁴¹H. T. Kerr, Readings in Christian Thought (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1966), p. 227.

twentieth centuries. It was during this time that a theological battle accrued between the Liberal school of thought and the Fundamentalists. It was the Liberal school which provided the greatest influence on the development of demythologization.

Albrecht Ritschl

Albrecht Ritschl was born in the year 1822. He was the son of a pastor and general superintendent of the Lutheran Church in Pomerania. He grew up in a home that was true to the Reformation ideal.

Ritschl studied at the Universities of Bonn, Halle, Heidelberg and Tubingen. At Tubingen he became involved with the Hegelian treatment of the New Testament. It seemed as though this was the type of influence that Ritschl longed for because he began to lean heavily on Hegel's thinking. However, he soon discovered that there were discrepancies in Hegel's speculative idealism and that was the end of Hegel's influence on him.⁴²

Ritschl continued to lecture in theology at the University of Gottingen and remained there for twenty-five years. He was asked to be a member of the faculty of the University of Berlin four times but he turned down the invitations. At the height of his power he developed a tre-

⁴²Paul Edwards (ed.), The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Vol. 7, (New York: The Macmillan Company and the Free Press, 1967), p. 202.

mendous interest in the doctrine of Justification together with that of Reconciliation.

The climax of Ritschl's career was brought about by the publication of his great work on Justification and Reconciliation. This was the area of study which highlighted his prominence in Germany and throughout the Protestant world.

Latourette made reference to the cool, energetic, and masterly temperament of Ritschl and remarked that the man was "wholesome, radiating confidence....intensely disliking sentimentality and rejoicing in controversy. Ritschl was dull in the lecture room....and made himself felt " chiefly through his pen.⁴³

Ritschl was not afraid to attack those who desired to relinquish the Bible as well as those who considered that attention should be fastened exclusively on biblical data without any help from philosophy or the history of dogmatics. He found satisfaction in following a median path as far as theology was concerned. H. Foster writes,

Through one of the most crucial periods in the intellectual history of Christendom, he was the theologian's theologian, who worked more effectively than anyone else to save the openness, the honesty, and the relevance of Christian thought.⁴⁴

⁴³K. S. Latourette, 19th Century Europe, Vol. 2, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing Co., 1959), p. 27.

⁴⁴H. Foster, "Albrecht Ritschl," A Handbook of Christian Theologians ed. M. Marty and D. Peerman (New York: The World Publishing Co., 1965), p. 49.

Ritschl had difficulty in defining religion and did not hesitate to adopt Schleiermacher's regulative concept of religion. In this way he was able to clarify the proper relation of faith to philosophy, science, and morals. He was also able to provide for a critical relation of Christianity to the other religions.

Ritschl's concept of personalistic theism was very offensive to a theologian such as Schleiermacher. He explained this concept as the content of religious concern which was fully clarified in the Christian affirmation of the individual person as God's child and image, exceeding in value in the world.⁴⁵

Ritschl did not consider the traditional understanding of sin to be authentic. The idea that subsequent sins were referred back to the first seemed to blindfold the present responsibility for them. If this were correct he argued that the traditional concept was worse than useless.

For Ritschl God could never be known by intuition or by metaphysics. God could only be known by being posited as a moral need. He said,

Knowledge of God can be demonstrated as religious knowledge only when He is conceived as securing to the believer such a position in the world as more than

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 55.

counterbalances its restrictions. Apart from this value-judgment of faith, there exists no knowledge of God worthy of this content.⁴⁶

As far as Ritschl was concerned God could never be known in Himself. He could only be known by His effects upon men. Only a revelation of Himself to individuals as a guarantor of man's victory over the natural world was a source of any knowledge of God.

Ritschl was not a historical positivist who desired to separate the Jesus of history from the Christ of faith. This was contrary to his thoughts. However, he believed that authentic and complete knowledge of Jesus' religious significance depended on the way in which one reckoned himself as part of the community which Jesus founded. This religious faith took no unhistorical view of Jesus. It was quite possible to reach a historical estimate of Him without divesting oneself of this faith or this religious valuation of his person. It was therefore possible to discover the full compass of Christ's historical actuality solely from the faith of the Christian community.⁴⁷

Ritschl believed that the affirmations of faith found their root in immediate personal concern. He believed that they were existential and belonged to the area of the

⁴⁶A. Ritschl, The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation (Edinburgh, 1902), pp. 2-3.

⁴⁷Ibid.

subjective consciousness rather than the objective. At this point Ritschl felt free to disagree with the Reformation concept of faith as trust. He believed that the intrinsic intellectual structure of faith was inseparable from the subjective movement of feeling and will which faith essentially was.⁴⁸

The importance of Ritschl's work has been so noticeable in modern investigation, that one cannot but give him a place among modern Christianity in general. He came to the scene when the Christian faith was facing its most crucial period and effectively saved the openness, and relevance of theology. It was more than possible that demythologization found in him an essential aid.

Wilhelm Herrmann

Wilhelm Herrmann was probably the most distinguished systematic theologian of the Ritschlian school.⁴⁹ He has made a deeper impression on Bultmann and the rise of demythologization than anyone apart from Heidegger. He was born in 1846 in Germany and attended the University Marburg where he remained for the rest of his life.

On the one hand, Herrmann was very much opposed to doctrinal orthodoxy for he saw it as a contradiction

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 105

⁴⁹Alan Richardson (ed.), A Dictionary of Christian Theology (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1969), p. 155.

of genuine Christian faith. On the other hand, he was reluctant to adhere to the creed of the Liberals for he had no desire to reject special revelation completely. He therefore took a stand, like Ritschl, between Orthodoxy and Liberalism.

Herrmann did not want to make theology a science. Liberals, as far as he was concerned, were New Testament scholars who gave themselves to historical inquiry and as a result left the person of Christ wholly problematic. He believed that, apart from the historical Jesus, Christianity was nothing more than a subjective mysticism. In one of his important works he wrote,

We Christians know only one fact in the whole world which can overcome every doubt of the reality of God, namely, the appearance of Jesus in history, the story which has been preserved in the New Testament.⁵⁰

Herrmann felt that the biblical record of the life of Jesus has produced enough certainty to any man since it spoke of one who lived completely for the establishment of the kingdom of God. This kingdom of God was a society comprised of men who loved God and their fellow-men as well.

Herrmann saw no point of contradiction in believing in the transcendence of God. Unlike Troeltsch and

⁵⁰ Wilhelm Herrmann, The Communion of the Christian with God (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1906), p. 59.

others he was forced to reject the possibility of a science of religion since this would make religion an objective affair. A science of religion would also cause one to miss the inner reality which alone made religion comprehensible.

For Herrmann, Jesus was central for faith. He was the one through whom God was fully understood by man. The doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation were meaningful and were not to be taken lightly. He blamed the Liberals for casting aside these fundamental doctrines.⁵¹

Herrmann believed that God revealed Himself in goodness. He believed that, as Smart put it,

The child meets God in the goodness of his parents. But only in the perfect goodness of the man Jesus is God perfectly revealed, so that our faith remains always dependent upon the Jesus who meets us both in the Scriptures and in those whose lives have been shaped by what they found in Him.⁵²

Herrmann wanted to stay true to the New Testament and the life of Jesus. He cared little for critical scholarship. He believed that the sinlessness of Jesus was enough to put any historical critic to flight. Christ's life was a life that was incomparable. It was a life that set before men the consistent and clear portrait of what life ought to be like.

Christian faith, as far as Herrmann was concerned,

⁵¹W. Herrmann, Gesammelte Aufsätze (Tubingen: J. C. B. Mohr Publishers, 1923), p. 12.

⁵²J. D. Smart, The Divided Mind of Modern Theology (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1967), pp. 34-37.

was a response to the grace of God. It became possible only as man was confronted with the inner life of Jesus. It has, therefore, been a fallacy to base Christian faith on the resurrection. Faith based on the resurrection event has always been exposed to jeopardy. It has always been a frail foundation to base faith on a historical record, for this offered only approximate certainty.

Herrmann believed that the historical record of Jesus might appear doubtful, but the essential content of His inner life possessed the power to reveal itself to the conscience as an undeniable fact. Herrmann's description of faith appealed to the conscience of Bultmann and had some influence on his concept of demythologization. Knudsen writes,

A good illustration of Bultmann's position is his attitude toward his former professor, Wilhelm Herrmann. He discovers tendencies in this liberal theologian which go beyond liberalism. These he has taken up in his own theology. Herrmann is lauded for his idea of the purity of faith. Faith is not a state which can be described from outside, nor is it founded on anything outside itself. Faith is inherently a directedness (an intention) toward something beyond it.⁵³

Adolph von Harnack

Of all the teachers under whom Bultmann studied, none was more eminent than Harnack. He was born on May 7, 1851 in the Baltic city of Dorpat in Livonia, a

⁵³R. D. Knudsen, "Rudolph Bultmann," Creative Minds in Contemporary Theology (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1969), p. 138.

province of Russia. His maternal grandfather was a professor in the University of Dorpat where he acted in the capacity of rector for many years. His paternal grandfather was a tailor from East Prussia.⁵⁴

In 1872 Harnack left home in order to complete his studies in the University of Leipzig. In 1874 he began his career as a church historian and he enjoyed this very much. By 1888 he had established himself as a teacher, researcher, author, and critic.

Harnack's three volumes of History of Dogma⁵⁵ were a bombshell in nineteenth century thought. They produced a great amount of controversy among the churchmen of his day. The objections were centered around the idea that Harnack doubted the traditional views concerning the authorship of the four Gospels. The churchmen also condemned Harnack for denying the Pauline authorship of Ephesians and the Petrine authorship of the first epistle of Peter.

Harnack was blamed for being critical of miracles and the account of the Virgin Birth. Actually the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ and even the sacrament of baptism found no place in his logic.

⁵⁴Paul Edwards (ed.), The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Vol. 3, (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1967), p. 414.

⁵⁵Adolph von Harnack, History of Dogma (London, 1894), p. 1.

Harnack's writings had a wide circulation in Germany and other parts of the globe. Few works of modern theological literature have created as much excitement and stirred up as much fury as Harnack's What is Christianity. This book has been a masterly statement of the liberal point of view for laymen in the Church.⁵⁶

In the book What is Christianity, Harnack placed great stress on the life of Jesus. His beliefs centered around the idea that the teachings of Jesus contained three circles of thought, each of which included the whole proclamation. They were: (1) the kingdom of God and its coming, (2) God the Father and the infinite value of the human soul, and (3) the better righteousness and the commandment of love.⁵⁷

Harnack believed that the essence of the religion of Jesus could only be ascertained when the historian has stripped away the temporary expression concealing that which has permanent value. The Jewish and Hellenistic forms in which the Christian message was formed never contained the essence of Christianity. One should distinguish the essence from the temporary elements. The Christian religion has always been simple and sublime. It meant one

⁵⁶A. Harnack, What is Christianity (London: Williams and Norgate, 1912), p. 1.

⁵⁷J. Dillenberger and C. Welch, Protestant Christianity (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1954), p. 209.

only, namely, eternal life in the midst of time by the strength, and under the eyes, of God.⁵⁸

According to Harnack, when Jesus preached the kingdom of God, He was referring to the immediate rule of the Father in the hearts of His children. What Jesus did was to point one to the Father. He did not point anyone to Himself and in so doing He assured all men of their status as God's children. Jesus was the first to bring the value of every human soul to light. The main thrust of the gospel, then, must be centered around the idea of bringing about a relationship between God and man, and between man and his fellowmen.⁵⁹

Harnack blamed Paul for obscuring the simple religion of Jesus by concocting a speculative idea that Jesus Christ possessed a peculiar nature of a heavenly kind. Harnack believed that Jesus was the personal realization of the gospel. In Him men saw what it really meant to be a "son of God." However, he believed that it was a fallacy to make Jesus a God or even make Him the center of His own gospel.

Harnack condemned the Church for introducing such doctrines as the Trinity, Incarnation, and Pre-existence. With one great stroke Harnack stripped away the whole

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹K. S. Latourette, A History of Christianity (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1953), p. 1130.

structure of traditional doctrines. He reduced the religion of Christians to a handful of simple ethical truths of which Jesus was the first expositor in word and life. The only life worth living was the one that came from Jesus. This came as a result of obedience to His commands and not by trusting doctrines about His nature.

Harnack felt convinced that the Christian religion was the only potent religion in the world. The Christian religion had the power to change lives and bring about reconciliation between man and man. In addition to this, it had a heritage with which every generation has to deal, in respect to the past as well as the future.

Harnack's influence on Bultmann was strong especially in his early career. His influence on the rise of demythologization can be seen from the standpoint that the latter was a kind of corrective of the liberal tendency to eliminate the myths in the Bible.

Johannes Weiss

Johannes Weiss was the son-in-law and former student of Ritschl. He was also a fellow at the University of Gottingen. In 1892 he published a work on the kingdom of God motif in Jesus' preaching. In the preface of the second edition which came out in 1900, he paid the following tribute to his old teacher:

In the school of Albrecht Ritschl I have become convinced of the peculiar significance of the theological concept of the kingdom of God which

formed the organizing center of his theology.⁶⁰

Ritschl had thought that for Jesus the kingdom of God had already come. He taught that it manifested itself in Jesus' ministry in so far as the disciples had come to live the ethical life. He also taught that the kingdom would result in the triumph of righteousness through powers that were already existent in the world.

Weiss believed that Ritschl's view came from imposing the presuppositions of Kant upon the New Testament. He believed that Jesus understood the kingdom of God as impending, it had not yet made its appearance.⁶¹

Weiss believed that the modern Christian should forget about the apostle Paul. He believed that Paul's doctrine of redemption was founded in the context of a mythological world view. He was not convinced that a man who was living in the constant consciousness of divine grace needed any conversion to Christianity. It was necessary for Paul but not for the man of today.

Weiss saw traces of pantheism in Paul's belief in a revelation of God in nature. However, he believed that modern thinking has been pantheistic and therefore would be sympathetic to Paul. Paul's teaching of justification by faith was similar to that of Pharisaic

⁶⁰ Johannes Weiss, Die Predigt Jesu Vom Reiche (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1900), p. 7.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 64.

legalism. Weiss believed that Paul was guilty of idolatry since he worshipped Jesus. Roman Catholics had fallen into the same error when they devised the worship of Mary. For Weiss, Jesus should not be the object of worship for anyone. He was only an ethical eye-opener and guide.⁶²

Wilhelm Wrede

Wilhelm Wrede was a professor of New Testament at the University of Breslau. Whereas Weiss had focussed attention primarily on the apocalyptic framework of the teachings of Jesus, Wrede was concerned with the question of Jesus' Messianic consciousness, particularly with the question of why Mark wanted Jesus to keep His Messianic consciousness a secret until after His resurrection.

Wrede came to the conclusion that Mark's picture of Jesus was unhistorical. The Markan picture of Jesus was not a representation of Jesus as He really was. It was a picture composed from the theological pre-suppositions of the early Church.⁶³

Wrede was even more radical than Weiss. He argued that Paul was a second founder of Christianity. In his reasoning, there was nothing in common between Paul and Jesus. In fact Paul knew nothing, and definitely

⁶²Smart, op. cit., p. 38.

⁶³Wilhelm Wrede, Das Messiasgeheimnis in den Evangelien (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1963), p. 131.

wanted to know nothing, about Jesus. He simply transferred his concept of the Messiah to Jesus. He transformed the simple ethical teachings of Jesus into a religion of supernatural redemption.⁶⁴

Wrede believed that Paul's Christology was a gnostic mythology. He condemned Paul for teaching that salvation was made possible by an objective achievement accomplished by Jesus. For Wrede, this was entirely alien to modern thought. Salvation, he believed, was only a reality when it was considered as an inner experience of man.⁶⁵

The conclusions of Johannes Weiss and Wilhelm Wrede had their base in historical investigation. The conclusions of Bultmann and his concept of demythologization were no different. Wrede and Weiss did influence the rise of demythologization. In any case this was the shape of New Testament scholarship in which the concept was born. The spirit of the age was intensely curious and historically conscious. Men wanted to know the facts and were prepared to investigate the knowledge of the past.

⁶⁴Wilhelm Wrede, Paulus (Tubingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1907), p. 10.

⁶⁵Ibid.

THE HISTORICAL AUDACITY

A cursory glance at the conditions in both secular and ecclesiastical history has revealed areas and trends that have contributed to the rise of demythologization. Without a knowledge of the historical background, demythologizing must remain an insolvable enigma.

The ravages of the French revolution had created a storm of confusion throughout Europe. The enlightenment period had given to man confidence in his ability to understand his environment and to achieve the highest possible sense of fulfillment. As Kant said, "it represents man's emergence from a self-inflicted state of minority," with courage as its watchword.⁶⁶

The closing decades of the nineteenth century witnessed the revival of the critical idealism of Kant. It was also a time when men became very curious and historically conscious. Men were not satisfied to take anything for granted. Religious history, as well as biblical history, belonged to the context of general history, and all were made subject to the same forces and the same laws of development.

⁶⁶Immanuel Kant, Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der blossen Vernunft, (1794), p. 197.

The History of Religions School

In 1880 a circle of young scholars, in their attempt to react against Ritschlian theology, formed what was called the Religionsgeschichtliche Schule (History of Religions School). Their basic concern was to free themselves from all bias. They were determined to develop a "purely historical conception of the Bible, free from all dogmatic considerations."⁶⁷

It was the proponents of the History of Religions School that popularized the idea that the New Testament was permeated with mythology. Rudolph Bultmann, a member of this school, became the chief advocate. This generation of historical critics no longer saw Jesus from the perspective of late Jewish apocalypticism as did Weiss and others. Instead they began to interpret Him in the light of late Hellenistic beliefs and practices. Heinz Zahrnt observed and cited these words of Heitmüller:

Early Christianity lived in the atmosphere which was saturated by Mystery-bacilli and grew up in a soil which had been fertilized and broken up by the decay and syncretism of the most varied religions, a soil which was thus especially fitted to provide new life for old seeds and shoots.⁶⁸

The theoretician of the Religionsgeschichtliche Schule was the brilliant historian and philosopher Ernst

⁶⁷ Smart, op. cit., p. 42.

⁶⁸ Heinz Zahrnt, The Historical Jesus (New York, 1963), p. 57.

Troeltsch. His historical researches convinced him that Christianity could not have survived if it were not possessed of great spiritual power and truth. However, he believed that Christianity was not the ultimate religion. He was wide open to the idea that someday another religion more potent than Christianity might appear on the scene. Bultmann and Troeltsch believed in historical relativism and paid considerable attention to it. It was in Troeltsch's ruthless assertion of the relativity of all that is historical that demythologization found a useful companion.

The Totalitarian Rule

The imperial regime in Germany was swept away by a popular rising towards the end of the first World War. In November of 1918 the German Republic was proclaimed. The Weimar constitution that the country received a year later gave the Republic a security that lasted until the year 1930. R. H. Nichols wrote,

It survived financial chaos in the early 1920's, then ran into more prosperous times after 1924. Economic decline beginning in 1929 made opportunity for the National Socialist or Nazi party under Adolph Hitler. In 1933 this party by propaganda and violence gained control of the government and Hitler became practically dictator.⁶⁹

⁶⁹R. H. Nichols, The Growth of the Christian Church (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1941), p. 312.

Hitler ruled Germany with a heavy hand. The Nazi doctrine of totalitarianism brought all under subjection. Under its rule democracy and liberty sunk into oblivion. Germany became greedy for power and prestige.

During the second World War, the Germans who had become slaves to the Nazi doctrine of totalitarianism were confronted with disappointment when some of them became prisoners of war. They were brought up to believe fanatically in the doctrines of National Socialism but they saw Hitler's empire ruined and their hope shattered. What seemed to them a promising future became a definite uncertainty, and many questions began to fill their minds. It was almost useless to approach those men with a conventional message about Christianity. They were desperate men. They were men with a definite need. They wanted something that was geared to meet that need.⁷⁰

It was evident that the Germans would feel the sting of despair greater than anyone else, but it must not be overlooked or forgotten that the attitude of despair was worldwide. It was not surprising that new theological understandings arose to adjust to the need of those disillusioned people. Indubitably, demythologizing

⁷⁰J. Macquarrie, *op. cit.*, p. 154. Macquarrie's involvement in Germany during this period of crisis lends credence and emphasis to this conclusion.

arose directly out of this situation. John Heaney says,

Indeed it was born of the experience of German Protestant military chaplains during the last war. And in fact, many of the German chaplains taking part in the debate were formerly chaplains, whose experiences had taught them the difficulty of attempting to present Christianity to the modern man after his exposure to Hitlerian propaganda. Bultmann proposed his formulation of a new approach to the evangelization of such men in his essay, 'The New Testament and Mythology.'⁷¹

⁷¹ John Heaney (ed.), Faith, Reason, and the Gospel Maryland: The Newman Press, 1961), p. 171.

Chapter 3

DEMYTHOLOGIZING PREVAILING

The twentieth century has revealed some of the most exciting insights in the history of Christianity. During this period a mad rush of new theological discoveries have come to the fore. Some of these trends have dwindled into obscurity with the same speed in which they appeared. Others, like the concept of demythologization, have left an indelible impression on modern theological thinking.

In the mind of many young scholars, the concept of demythologization has assumed great importance in that it has addressed itself to the crucial issues that will evidently remain at the center of theological investigation for the remaining decades of the twentieth century.

One of the startling developments in the twentieth century was the rise of the movement known as Form Criticism. The movement arose as a response to the History of Religions school and its method of New Testament research. The History of Religions school was considered to be discrepant in the area of the historicity and reliability of the gospel traditions concerning the life of Jesus. Form Criticism addressed itself to this task and began to raise questions about

the authenticity of the Jesus tradition.¹

The method of Form Criticism had a two-fold objective. In the first place it sought to explain the origin of the tradition about Jesus by reconstruction and analysis. In this way it penetrated into the period previous to that in which the Gospels were written. In the second place, it sought to make clear the intention and real interest of the earliest tradition.²

Form Criticism had many good points as well as bad points. In any case, despite its extravagances, it began a new era in which tradition received a considerable amount of attention. It was the method that Rudolph Bultmann used for studying the New Testament and therefore had much in common with demythologization.³

INTRODUCING BULTMANN

Rudolph Bultmann was born on August 20, 1884 in Weifelse, Germany. His father was the son of a Lutheran missionary in Sierra Leone. Bultmann studied at the Universities of Tübingen, Berlin, and Marburg. He was a student at Marburg when that center of learning had

¹Livingston, op. cit., p. 307

²Ibid.

³Rudolph Bultmann, History of the Synoptic Tradition (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), p. 2.

a world-famous reputation both in philosophy and theology.

Bultmann studied under such men as the able Church historian Karl Muller, the Old Testament scholar Hermann Gunkel, the historian of Dogma Adolph Harnack, the systematic theologian Wilhelm Herrmann, and the New Testament scholars Adolph Julicher and Johannes Weiss. Bultmann spent his entire life in biblical studies.⁴

Bultmann's thesis for the licentiate in theology at Marburg was published in 1910 under the title, The Style of the Pauline Preaching and the Diatribe of the Cynics and Stoics. As a student and teacher Bultmann entered a climate of New Testament exegesis and theology which was emerging from the dominance of liberalism.

During his long stay at the University of Marburg, Bultmann became a distinguished scholar in the area of New Testament studies. Few men have written more books with a candid claim to the term "epoch-making" than Bultmann.

During the time of the Nazi domination of Germany, Bultmann took active part in the strong opposition which the Churches developed to the Nazi regime. After World War II he spent much time lecturing in Europe and the United States. In 1921 he returned to Marburg as professor

⁴ Heinrich Fries, Barth, Bultmann and Catholic Theology (Pittsburg, 1968), pp. 283-288.

of New Testament until his retirement in 1951.

The years that Bultmann spent in retirement were not lazy years. In the same year he was invited to give the Scharfetter Lectures in Yale University. Four years later the University of Edinburgh asked him to deliver the Gifford Lectures. In fact, it was not until after his retirement that his program of demythologizing came to the attention of scholars outside Germany.

Bultmann reacted strongly against the old liberal school of thought which desired to see the "real" historical Jesus without any theological entanglements. Although he agreed with Barth on certain issues, it was difficult for him to fit into the main stream of neo-orthodox theology. He said:

It seemed to me that in this new theological movement, as distinguished from the liberal theology out of which I had come, it was rightly recognized that the Christian faith is not a phenomenon of the history of religion, that it does not rest on a 'religious a priori' (Troeltsch), and that therefore theology does not have to look upon it as a phenomenon of religious or cultural history. It seemed to me that...the new theology had correctly seen that Christian faith is the answer to the word of the transcendent God that encounters man and that theology has to deal with this word and the man who is encountered by it. This judgment, however, has never led me to a simple condemnation of 'liberal' theology; on the contrary, I have endeavoured.... to carry further the tradition of historical-critical research as it was practiced by the 'liberal' theology and to make theological knowledge fruitful for it.⁵

⁵Charles W. Kegley (ed.), The Theology of Rudolph Bultmann (New York, 1966), p. 24.

The impetus in Bultmann's post-liberal theology can be seen in the movement called "dialectical theology." Bultmann, Barth, Tillich, Gogarten, Brunner, and Thurneysen were all exponents of dialectic theology, although at times they all varied extensively. What this group had in common was the idea of making the act of faith free from the props of history or social philosophy. They made theology basically the explanation of a kerygma for the individual person. For all of them, the event of Christ was central.

For all of them, there was a demand for a new theological view with the same bipolar emphasis: the kerygma in Christ and man's belief were to be commitments without metaphysical or historical guarantees, but at the same time this message and event was to be brought to man in terms which would make an impact on his life.⁶

Bultmann was not only involved in New Testament exegesis, but in general theology such as the theology of God, natural theology, and faith. His exegetical skill was supported by essays in classical thought and comparative religion. He examined the central figure of Christianity under the principles of his own exegesis and the problem these historical forms raised in his book, Jesus, which was published in 1926.⁷

In 1927 he wrote an essay on the Gospel of John

⁶F. O'Meara and D. Weisser (eds.), Rudolph Bultmann in Catholic Thought (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), p. 20.

⁷Ibid., p. 21.

which became a starting point for his program of demythologization. In 1948 Bultmann presented the particular theological milieu, viewpoint, and purpose of the synoptic, Johannine, and Pauline traditions in his two volume Theology of the New Testament. His lectures at the University of Edinburgh were published as History and Eschatology in 1957.

In 1964 he was eighty years of age and was still very active in theological discussion. A considerable amount of misunderstanding has arisen from the fact that men failed to interpret his concept of demythologization in the context of his whole thought.

UNDERSTANDING MYTH

The eighteenth century thinker considered myth to be a primitive scientific world-view which was fortunately overcome by the light that reason brought.⁸ According to Marcus Barth, myth was depicted as the effort to convey the knowledge of the unknowable.⁹

Emil Brunner used myth as a term to distinguish the means by which God, in His transcendence, communicated His will to human beings. In this usage myths were responsible to preserve the history of man's existence.

⁸Markus Barth, "Introduction to Demythologizing," Journal of Religion, XXXVII (July, 1957), 147.

⁹Ibid.

If this mythical element were removed from Christianity, it would become nothing more than an abstract religion. Brunner believed that it was a mistake to confuse this type of mythical understanding with the mythical concepts of pagan religion. For Brunner, the mythical was the super-historical, that which was beyond the sensuous, but which was at the same time related to it.¹⁰

Cullmann agreed with Brunner and believed that the Scriptures referred to time and the end of time in mythical language.¹¹

Karl Barth understood the term myth as referring to stories about the gods. He was not willing to accept it in Christian theology. He did not deny that there were myths in the Scriptures but he believed that they had nothing to do with the essentials of the Christian faith. He said that "the creation stories of the Bible are neither myths nor fairy tales. This is not to deny that there are myths and perhaps, fairy tales in the materials of which they are constructed."¹²

According to John Heaney, Bultmann defined myth as

¹⁰Emil Brunner, The Mediator (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1947), pp. 277-396.

¹¹Oscar Cullmann, Christ and Time (Philadelphia, 1942), p. 94.

¹²Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, Vol. 3 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936), p. 84.

"the use of imagery to express the other-worldly in terms of this world and the divine in terms of human life."¹³

Bernard Ramm believed that Bultmann defined as myth, anything that ran contrary to scientific understanding of the universe.¹⁴

In his writings, Bultmann made mention of the fact that the New Testament was engrossed in a mythological world-picture. He defined myth thus:

Myth is spoken of here in the sense in which it is understood in the history of religions. Mythology is that which is a manner of representation in which the unworldly and divine (das Unweltliche, Gottliche) appears as the worldly and human--or, in short, in which the transcendent appears as the imminent (das Jenseitige als Diesseitiges). Thus in the mythological manner of representation, God's transcendence is thought of as spacial distance. Myth is not spoken of here, therefore, in that modern sense in accordance with which it means nothing more than ideology.¹⁵

In the second volume of Kerygma und Mythos, Bultmann made his point clearer using almost similar terms when he said,

I understand by 'myth' a very specific historical phenomenon and by 'mythology' a specific manner of thinking. It is this phenomenon and this manner of thinking that are at stake in the discussion. I use the concept 'myth' in the sense customary in the science of history and in the scientific study of religion. In this sense, myth is the report of an

¹³Heaney, op. cit., p. 173.

¹⁴Bernard Ramm, A Handbook of Contemporary Theology (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1966), p. 86.

¹⁵H. W. Bartsch, Kerygma und Mythos, Vol. 1 (Hamburg: Herbert Reich-Evangelischer Verlag, 1951), p. 22.

occurrence or an event in which supernatural or superhuman powers or persons are at work; hence the fact that it is often defined simply as history of the gods. Mythical thinking refers specific phenomena and events to supernatural or divine powers that may be represented dynamistically or animistically or even as personal spirits or gods. Thus it excludes certain phenomena and events and also certain realms from the known and familiar and controllable course of worldly occurrences. Myth objectifies the transcendent and makes it immanent. In so doing, it also makes it disposable, as becomes evident from the fact that cult more and more becomes a procedure for influencing the deity, for avoiding its wrath and for obtaining its favor.¹⁶

From the two passages above, quite a few things were learned, as far as Bultmann's understanding of myth was concerned. He understood myth as that which made a reality simpler. Myths could make a reality so simple that it would appear as something which could be touched.

When the biblical literature spoke of God, it spoke in terms of myth, as far as Bultmann was concerned, for only in such cases could the primitive Christian comprehend divine realities. Myths objectified the transcendent and transformed reality into that which was merely qualitative. It was this type of objectifying that caused the Scriptures to picture the transcendent God as dwelling in a spacial heaven distant from the world. In another book, Bultmann said, rather convincingly, that "the idea of the transcendence of God is

¹⁶ Hans Werner Bartsch (ed.), Kerygma und Mythos, Vol. 2 (Hamburg: Herbert Reich-Evangelischer Verlag, 1952), p. 180.

imagined by means of the category of time."¹⁷

Bultmann defined myth in terms of "development." In primitive times, man's scientific understanding was not well developed. Hence, things which looked to the Jews in that day as miracles were not really miracles in the light of modern day understanding. The early Christians, therefore, had no alternative. They had to express themselves in the way they did, and that way was mythological.

Bultmann also believed that myths manifested themselves in the form of a narrative or a report of things that were non-natural or supernatural. In this respect, Bultmann believed that myth was a history of the gods. In this sense he used the German word (Gottergeschichte). Bultmann felt confident that anyone who had a mythological perception knew that there was always a "second" history concurrent with the history of ordinary events. He called this "second" history "holy" history. It was history which was different from the ordinary historical events though similar to it by reason of its narrative form.¹⁸

Bultmann concluded that the New Testament was full of myths. Its world-picture was entirely mythical.

¹⁷Rudolph Bultmann, Jesus Christ and Mythology (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), p. 22.

¹⁸Schubert Ogden, Christ Without Myth (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1961), p. 27.

He encouraged modern men not to accept these myths at face value. He felt strongly that the New Testament had something to say to the modern man behind these myths. The modern man should engage in a program of interpreting them rather than eliminating them. The New Testament myths contained a very important kerygma which no one could afford to bypass. Bultmann said,

Does not the New Testament embody a truth which is independent of its mythical setting? If it does, theology must undertake the task of stripping the kerygma from its mythical framework.¹⁹

Since the New Testament had something to say to every man, Bultmann felt that the purpose of detecting the myths was

to express man's convictions that: (1) the origin and purpose of the world are to be found not in the world but beyond it, (2) man is not 'lord of his own being' since he is dependent not only on the visible world but also on the invisible and mysterious powers, (3) man can be delivered from these powers.²⁰

The overall purpose of myths in the New Testament, therefore, was to present an objective picture of the world as well as to express man's understanding of himself in the world in which he existed. He was not his own master. He was limited by certain experiences which he did not create and which he had no power to control.

¹⁹Bartsch, op. cit., p. 3.

²⁰Morris Ashcraft, Rudolph Bultmann (Waco, Texas: Word Books Publisher, 1972), p. 50.

DEMYTHOLOGIZING IN TRANSIT

Demythology was a rather poor term that Bultmann used to describe his intentions. Many have remarked that Bultmann's attempt was a radical effort to do away with sacred literature, and certainly it was. However, in the light of recent theological discoveries when men have openly rejected the relevance of the Scriptures and have publicly announced the death of God, Bultmann's concept of demythologization must be considered conservative.

Demythologizing in Retrospect

Bultmann believed that, in the past, men have tried to grapple with the problem of the interpretation of Scripture. As a result they were forced to engage in demythologizing of some nature. He cited, first of all, the allegorical method of interpretation which occupied Christian thought for centuries. The allegorical interpretation believed that beneath the letter (rhete) or the obvious (phanera) was the real meaning (hyponoia) of the passage.²¹

Bultmann believed that the allegorical method had many weak points. He believed that it was a method which spiritualized the mythical events so that they became

²¹Bernard Ramm, Protestant Biblical Interpretation (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1970), p. 24.

symbols of processes going on in the soul.²²

In a radio address delivered in 1953, Bultmann pointed out that the New Testament has always been demythologized throughout the centuries in different ways. He explained that it has been: (1) sacramentalized in such teachings which said that the exalted Christ was present in the sacraments; (2) secularized, as seen in the theory of Karl Marx's classless society; (3) spiritualized as in Luther's concept of the coming kingdom, demonstrated in the short catechism; (4) ethicized as in the case of Pietism, which developed the idea that works of love and missionary activity helped to build the kingdom of God upon the earth; (5) aestheticized by Michael Angelo's Last Judgment; and (6) liturgized as was demonstrated in the eschatological texts used during Advent Sundays.²³ Bultmann considered that some of these ways were perversions but he was also aware of the fact that others were time-conditioned.

Bultmann also felt that previous attempts at demythologization were seen in classical liberalism. However, the liberals went too far when they eliminated the biblical myths instead of interpreting them. Bultmann

²²Bartsch, op. cit., p. 13.

²³Kendrick Grobel, "The Practice of Demythologizing," Journal of Bible and Religion, XXVII, 1 (January, 1959), 31.

in his essay on demythologizing, wrote:

It was characteristic of the older liberal theologians that they regarded mythology as relative and temporary. Hence they thought they could safely eliminate it altogether, and retain only the broad, basic principles of religion and ethics. They distinguished between what they took to be the essence of religion and the temporary garb which it assumed.²⁴

Bultmann also saw the history of religions school as indulging in the demythologization issue. They discovered that the importance of the New Testament was not in its teaching about religion and ethics but in its actual religion and piety.²⁵

Bultmann felt that the history of religions school missed one point which was very important. Christian faith was not the same as religious idealism. The Christian life did not consist in the development of the individual personality or in making the world a better place. The Christian life meant a turning away from the world--a total detachment from it.

Bultmann believed that all of the previous attempts served their time and proved themselves to be discrepant. He was convinced that demythologization was the most valid and most logical attempt ever made to interpret the Scriptures. It was also more systematic and provided more more satisfaction to the serious biblical exegete.

²⁴Bartsch, op. cit., p. 13.

²⁵Ibid., p. 14.

Demythologizing as a project

Demythologizing was definitely a necessity as far as Bultmann was concerned. He was concerned about the modern man in his distress. It was probably agonizing for him to see a man who was accustomed to using modern scientific conveniences holding on to primitive ideas such as heaven and hell. If the modern man was ever guilty of believing in heaven or hell that was evidence of a split personality. His religion and his life would be at odds. The modern scientific developments demanded men to accept and teach that which fell under the category of the logical and scientific.

Bultmann believed that the cosmology of the New Testament was entirely mythical. It presupposed a three tier concept of the world, a concept which understood heaven as above and a place called hell beneath and the earth in the center. For Bultmann, this was scientifically incorrect and absurd.

Bultmann was also concerned about the idea of communication. It was around this idea that demythologizing revolved. Bultmann was convinced that if the Bible was preached as it was that preachers would be guilty of preaching mythology. This could be a stumbling-block to men. Even though the early Christians were able to convey the gospel message in a consoling manner, the modern man desired to have something different. Whatever

is preached to him must be purged of its mythical elements. The crucial task at this point has to do with discovering the elements which constituted the mythological in Bultmann's thinking.

Ian Henderson pointed out that the list of elements which constituted Bultmann's project of demythologization were: the way in which the person of Christ was described as the pre-existent Son of God; the idea of atonement for the sins of the world; the New Testament account of the miracles of Jesus; and the concept of grace.²⁶

Other elements grouped under the rubric 'myth' were: the way in which God's transcendence was considered in terms of His dwelling place being a spacial heaven above the earth; the resurrection, ascension, and other concepts such as demons and the doctrine of original sin. Bultmann believed that these robbed man of his individual freedom.²⁷

In Bultmann's essay on demythologizing, the main topics which he discussed as mythological were: the cross, the Christ event, the redemption event, and the resurrection. For Bultmann, the real message which God has made available to man was hid beneath these elements. They must be uncovered in order to receive God's message.

²⁶Ian Henderson, Myth in the New Testament (London: SCM Press, 1952), p. 46.

²⁷Ibid.

ORGANIZING DEMYTHOLOGIZATION

Bultmann believed that the New Testament has provided the groundwork for a program of demythologizing. However he believed that the myths contained in the New Testament were full of rugged edges. They were not only rough but even contradicted themselves. Christ was sometimes referred to as a sacrifice and at other times as a cosmic event. Sometimes the gospel writers saw in Jesus the fulfillment of the Jewish Messianic prophecies while Paul envisioned Him as the second Adam.

Some New Testament writers underscored the virgin birth of Christ but in the same manner many saw Him as the pre-existent Son of God. For Bultmann, this was a contradiction.

The virgin birth is inconsistent with the assertion of His pre-existence. The doctrine of the Creation is incompatible with the conception of the rulers of this world (1Cor. 2:6.), the 'god of this world' (2Cor. 4:4) and the 'elements of this world' (Gal. 4:3). It is impossible to square away the belief that the law was given by God with the theory that it comes from the angels (Gal. 3:19).²⁸

Apart from these contradictions, there was another "curious contradiction" running throughout the New Testament. This was the idea of human existence.²⁹

²⁸Bartsch, op. cit., p. 11.

²⁹Ibid.

Bultmann noticed that sometimes the New Testament brought out the idea that human existence was determined by cosmic forces while at other times it was challenged to make certain decisions. He said,

Side by side with the Pauline indicative stands the Pauline imperative. In short, man is sometimes regarded as a cosmic being, sometimes as an independent 'I' for whom decision is a matter of life or death.²⁹

Demythologizing the Christ

Bultmann believed that the New Testament presented Christ in mythical terms. He was presented as the pre-existent divine being as well as the Son of God. Apart from this, Christ was also presented as a historical person. He was Jesus of Nazareth. Hence His life became, for Bultmann, more than a mythical event. It was a human life which ended in tragedy at the crucifixion. In the life of Jesus, then, there was a combination of myth and history. This proclamation disturbed Bultmann. He said,

The New Testament claims that this Jesus of Nazareth, whose father and mother were well known to His contemporaries is at the same time the pre-existent Son of God, and side by side with the historical event of the crucifixion it sets the definitely non-historical event of the resurrection.³⁰

Bultmann was convinced that the Christian faith

²⁹Ibid., p. 34.

³⁰Ibid.

was grounded in the event of Jesus Christ. This Christ event must be regarded as a real and objective act in history. It was not pictorial or symbolic. The event happened but the bare event did not disclose the act of God. Ashcraft says,

Bultmann asserts that when I speak of an act of God I am always speaking of my own existence, in general, but in a specific individual, here-and-now-commitment. He insists that God acted in Christ. 'At the point where man can do nothing, God steps in and acts...on man's behalf.' But it is impossible to say that this event is known, as other historical acts are known. It cannot be described in terms of what and how. The act of God in Christ is known existentially, just as man can only talk of God in terms of human existence. God's saving act in the historical Jesus is a historic event. Man in faith came to know God. When they proclaimed that event, others come to know God. So, proclamation of the event is a continuation of the event and, consequently, a part of the event.³¹

According to Bultmann, what God has done in Jesus Christ was not a historical fact that could be proven historically. It was precisely the mythological description of Jesus Christ in the New Testament which made it clear that the figure and work of Jesus should be understood in a manner which was beyond the categories by which the objective historian understood world history.³² If this were not done the figure and work of Jesus Christ would never be understood as the divine work of redemption.

³¹Ashcraft, op. cit., p. 70.

³²Ibid.

Demythologizing the Cross

Bultmann asserted that the New Testament described the cross of Jesus in a mythical way. It stated that the pre-existent, sinless Son of God was crucified and that His blood was the atoning sacrifice. Orthodox Christianity had no problem confirming the vicarious death of Jesus for the sins of the whole world but Bultmann believed that this was a mythological interpretation attached to the death of Christ. He was convinced that this was a hodge-podge of sacrificial and juridicial analogies which have ceased to be tenable for mankind today.

....in any case they fail to do justice to what the New Testament is trying to say. For the most they can convey is that the cross effects the forgiveness of all past and future sins of men, in the sense that the punishment they deserved has been remitted. But the New Testament means more than this. The cross releases men not only from guilt, but also from the power of sin (Col. 2:13-15).³³

For Bultmann, the death of Christ on the cross meant triumph over demonic and infernal powers which have held men in bondage. In order to demythologize the New Testament's conception of the cross, one must present it, not as an event external to human beings but, as that which took place within man's existence.³⁴

³³Ibid., p. 35.

³⁴Ibid., p. 10.

For Bultmann, the cross meant that man was crucified with Christ. Christ's death upon the cross meant the death of man's values. Whenever the crucified Lord was proclaimed as Lord, this meant that God had judged the world and its "desires and strivings and standards of values."³⁵ Bultmann was convinced that,

The historical event of the cross acquires cosmic dimensions and so its full significance is brought into sharper relief. For if we see the cross, the judgment of the world, and the defeat of the rulers of this world (1Cor. 2:6), the cross becomes the judgment of ourselves as fallen creatures enslaved to the powers of this world.³⁶

Bultmann was convinced that the cross was not an isolated event that happened to some mysterious deity. It was an event that had meaning for the whole world. The death of Jesus must be viewed as that which represented His own death to the world, to His past, to His pride, and therefore to His old self-understanding. When man developed enough fortitude to denounce his pride or anything related to his selfishness, he has actively confronted the death of his very self.³⁷

Bultmann believed that the cross event proclaimed or demonstrated the end of earthly human existence. He said,

Indeed the kingdom of God and the death imply the end of earthly human existence as we know it with its possibilities and interests. Moreover it

³⁶Ibid., p. 36.

³⁷Ibid., p. 37.

may be said that death, like the kingdom, is not to be considered by man as an accidental event which sometimes will bring to an end the everyday course of life, but as the true future which confronts man and limits him in the present and puts him under the necessity of decision.³⁸

Bultmann believed, then, that the cross was that which forced men to make decisions whenever they came into confrontation with each other. Man must decide whether or not he wanted to accept judgment on his own self-understanding and make himself available to God. This meant that he would have to forget about depending upon himself and learn to place his trust in God. This was what Bultmann called faith.

Bultmann believed that, through faith, man was freed from the false understanding he had about himself which did nothing else but to bind him to the past. It was through this faith that man became open to the future. Achtemeier put it this way,

He is now, in the light of Christ's death on the cross, free from death but from a death seen, not as a natural power, all men must die physically, but its meaning as something that cuts off all future.³⁹

Bultmann was aware of the fact that the cross event could be demythologized to a certain point and no further. Every aspect of the cross did not fit his mythological interpretation. He said,

³⁸Rudolph Bultmann, Jesus and the Word (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), p. 54.

³⁹Achtemeier, op. cit., p. 37.

In its redemptive aspect the cross of Christ is no mere mythical event, but a permanent historical fact originating in the past historical event which is the crucifixion of Jesus. The abiding significance of the cross is that it is the judgement of the world, the judgment and the deliverance of man. In this sense Christ is crucified 'for us', a phrase which does not necessarily imply any theory of sacrifice or satisfaction. This interpretation of the cross as a permanent fact rather than a mythological event does far more justice to the redemptive significance of the event of the past than any of the traditional interpretations...The real meaning of the cross is that it has created a new and permanent situation in history.⁴⁰

Bultmann believed that Jesus was willing to give up His selfhood to the point of sacrifice on the cross. He was convinced that man should live in the same kind of self abandonment shown in the cross of Jesus. Without this attitude man would never experience the joy of living.

Demythologizing Christ's Resurrection

Bultmann believed that the cross, as it stood in history, had no power of renewal as far as men's lives were concerned. He believed that the cross could never stand alone. It must always be linked with the resurrection of Jesus for they were one and the same event.

Bultmann was convinced that the New Testament presented the resurrection in a mythical manner. He was confident that the cross and the resurrection were not

⁴⁰Bartsch, op. cit., p. 37.

to be separated. The resurrection was simply a proof of the atoning significance of the cross. Bultmann wrote,

But what of the resurrection? Is it not a mythical event pure and simple? Obviously it is not an event of past history with a self-evident meaning. Can the resurrection narratives and every other mention of the resurrection in the New Testament be understood simply as an attempt to convey the meaning of the cross?....Does it not express this truth in the affirmation that the Crucified was not holden of death, but rose from the dead?.....

Yes indeed: the cross and the resurrection form a single indivisible cosmic event which brings judgment to the world and opens up for men the possibility of authentic life.⁴¹

The resurrection, then, was only a mythical way of proclaiming the saving significance of Jesus' cross. The only thing historical about it, for Bultmann, was the Easter faith of the disciples. There was a certain point in time that they became aware of the eschatological event of the cross and that was the time that it appeared to them as though a resurrection took place. The resurrection was only an awareness. Bultmann said,

The resurrection itself is not an event of past history. All that historical criticism can establish is the fact that the first disciples came to believe in the resurrection. The historical event of the cross and the rise of Easter faith means for us what it meant for the first disciples, namely, the self manifestation of the risen Lord, the act of God in which the redemptive event of the cross is completed.⁴²

⁴¹Ibid., p. 38.

⁴²Ibid.

Bultmann believed that the only time that the resurrection ceased to be a myth was when it was preached and received in faith. Resurrection preaching and the response of faith were part of the eschatological and the Christ event was incomplete without them. Christ's death represented both the judgment and salvation of the world and inaugurated the word of reconciliation. Through this word of preaching the cross and resurrection became a present reality.⁴³

Bultmann denied a bodily resurrection because he felt that the resuscitation of a corpse was scientifically impossible. He said,

The resurrection of Jesus cannot be a miraculous proof by which the sceptic might be compelled to believe in Christ. The difficulty is not simply the incredibility of a mythical event like the resuscitation of a corpse--for that is what the resurrection means, as is shown by the fact that the risen Lord is apprehended by the physical senses. Nor is it merely the difficulty of establishing the objective historicity of the resurrection no matter how many witnesses are cited, as though once it was established it might be believed beyond all question and faith might have its impeccable guarantee. No, the real difficulty is that the resurrection is itself an article of faith, and you cannot establish an article of faith by invoking another. You cannot prove the redemptive efficacy of the cross by invoking the resurrection.⁴⁴

Bultmann found a lot of comfort in the writings of the apostle John. He was equally attached to the

⁴³Daniel Fuller, Easter Faith and History (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1965), p. 10

⁴⁴Bartsch, op. cit., p. 39.

writings of the apostle Paul. However, when it came to their insistence on the bodily resurrection of Christ he felt that it was necessary to part with them.

For the resurrection of course, simply cannot be a visible fact in the realm of human history. When Paul is pushed to do so by gnosticizing objections to belief in any resurrection, he does.... guarantee the resurrection of Christ as an objective fact by listing the witnesses who had seen him risen (1Cor. 15:5-8). But is such a proof convincing?⁴⁵

The crucial point at this juncture was centered around an adequate explanation of the empty tomb. Bultmann believed that it was impossible to find security in the objective world of things. The man who went about proving the resurrection from a historical event was missing the whole point. There was no difference between the Easter faith of the disciples two thousand years ago and that of the modern believer. Hordern explained that Bultmann would agree that Jesus was alive today, but the life which Jesus has today was not preceded by any historical event.

The man who wants a more objective proof that Jesus rose from the dead is one who is afraid to take the risk to which Christian faith always calls a man.⁴⁶

⁴⁵Rudolph Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament, Vol. 1 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), p. 3.

⁴⁶William E. Hordern, A Layman's Guide to Protestant Theology (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1955), p. 207.

DEMYTHOLOGIZING AS A CORRECTIVE

Bultmann was concerned about the original message which the disciples enjoyed in the first stage of Christianity. He believed that the apostles possessed the real kerygma but that they expressed it in mythical forms. In his zeal to establish the view point of the apostles and early Christians, Bultmann considered all previous forms of biblical interpretation to be unsatisfactory. He believed that his program of demythologizing was a timely corrective and was able to recover the real kerygma.

Bultmann believed that myths expressed something about human existence. However, the science of human existence belonged to the area of existential philosophy. Therefore when Martin Heidegger, the leading exponent of existential philosophy, joined the faculty at Marburg, Bultmann felt that this was the perfect answer to the problem of biblical interpretation. Existential philosophy became a definite adjunct to his theology.

Heidegger and Bultmann--a fusion of Theology and Philosophy

Bultmann was very much interested in hermeneutics. He believed that the content of theology should be wholly biblical. He believed that Heidegger's concept was founded on biblical grounds although Heidegger denied it.

For Bultmann, when a man began to speak about

anything he was unable to verify in his own existence, that man was approaching difficulty. Walter Schmithals said that "existentialist analysis is simply the systematization of the self-understanding of existence involved in existence itself."⁴⁷ It was on this basis that Bultmann and Heidegger related. Bultmann justified his use of Heidegger's existential philosophy by saying, in reference to Heidegger, that he

never made any secret that he had been especially influenced by the New Testament (Paul in particular) and by Augustine and in a special way by Luther... If any one wants to understand Heidegger's influence on my theology, then he must keep this in view.⁴⁸

John Macquarrie believed that Heidegger's influence on Bultmann was not hard to detect especially when Bultmann began to interpret Pauline anthropology in the light of existential insight.⁴⁹ Bultmann had no misgivings about his use of existential philosophy to restate the basic insights into human existence contained in the Christian faith. He was convinced that every exegete and theologian was unable to avoid the use of philosophical concepts. Therefore it was important for him to choose his philosophical presuppositions with utmost

⁴⁷Walter Schmithals, An Introduction to the Theology of Rudolph Bultmann (London: SCM Press, 1968), p. 296.

⁴⁸H. W. Bartsch (ed.), Kerygma and Myth, Vol. 2, (London: S. P. C. K., 1962), p. 92.

⁴⁹John Macquarrie, An Existential Theology (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956), p. 86.

care.

However, although Heidegger has greatly influenced Bultmann, the latter has pointed out that Heidegger's philosophy was limited. It was limited in the sense that it only examined the basic structure of existence, namely, inauthentic and authentic existence.

Heidegger believed that there was a transition from inauthentic to authentic existence which could be found only in decision. Heidegger was unable to indicate the content of that decision. Hence, Bultmann felt that the philosopher dealt only with the structure of human existence but the theologian dealt with the way in which human existence was carried on. Under Heidegger's philosophy there was no freedom from the past for the individual, and truly there was none apart from faith in Christ.⁵⁰

Bultmann and Heidegger shared several fundamental ideas of which the most important were the basic concepts and terminology used in dealing with the subject matter, and the importance of the way in which questions were put. The way in which a question was put determined what the answer would be. Men could study the question concerning the meaning of death abstractly, but when faced with death the question must be dealt with existentially. There

⁵⁰ Rudolph Bultmann, History and Eschatology (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1962), p. 44.

would be a considerable amount of difference between the two answers.

Heidegger used the term dasien to distinguish between human existence and the existence of objects. He defined human existence as both subject and object, for a subject could look upon himself as an object. Bultmann used the terms possibility and potentiality to describe the same understanding.

Heidegger's thoughts in an encompassing way could be understood as hermeneutical. Bultmann referred to his system of existential interpretation as a method of hermeneutics. It was precisely in the hermeneutical act that philosophy and theology met.

Existence--an expression of Slavery and Eschatology

Bultmann equated Heidegger's concept of authentic and inauthentic existence with the biblical terms faith and sin. God, for Bultmann, was the ultimate standard and around Him revolved two polarities--authentic existence which consisted in belief in God and inauthentic existence which was the lack of faith in God.

Inauthentic existence as a life of unfaith

Bultmann argued that inauthentic life was the life of sin. It was life that was bound, a life which could not realize its potentials. It was a life entirely closed to the future. It preceded the life of faith and was especially marked by unbelief, worldliness, bondage,

and death.

Bultmann believed that sin could not be understood apart from its relationship to faith. The real meaning of sin was unbelief. Man knew that he was a sinner only when he came into confrontation with the grace of God.⁵¹ At this point Bultmann quoted the words of Jesus, "If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sinned; but now they have no excuse for their sin." (John 15:22). For Bultmann, God's revelation in Christ had a two-fold significance. It brought an opportunity for faith as well as an awareness of sin.

In his exposition of Romans, Bultmann described human existence in terms of the body. He said,

The most comprehensive term which Paul uses to characterize man's existence is soma, the body. That soma belongs inseparably and constitutively to human existence is most clearly evident from the fact that Paul cannot conceive even of a future human existence after death 'when that which is perfect is come' as an existence without soma.⁵²

For Bultmann, soma was not something that clung to man's real self, it belonged to his very essence. Man was soma as far as Bultmann was concerned. It was Paul who said, "Christ shall be magnified in my body (soma = me) whether by life or by death" (Philippians 1:20). Again

⁵¹Rudolph Bultmann, Existence and Faith (New York: Meridian Press, 1960), p. 154.

⁵²Rudolph Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament, Vol. 1 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), p. 192.

this thought was brought out in Romans 12:1, "Present your bodies (somata = yourselves) as a living sacrifice."⁵³

While soma was man himself, sarx represented a power that claimed and determined him. Paul spoke of a life kata sarka which meant according to the flesh. Life according to the flesh in Paul's writings was a life of unbelief as opposed to life in the spirit which was the life of faith.

Bultmann spoke of the life of selfishness as a characteristic element in the life of unbelief. He felt that orthodox Christianity misunderstood this self-centeredness and called it original sin. Bultmann believed that this idea of self-centeredness has permeated the life of man to the point that man has continually tried to live his life apart from God and his fellowmen.⁵⁴

Bultmann believed that sin occurred only when man misunderstood himself and forgot that he was a creature of God. Man's original sin, then, was his attitude of dependence upon himself without reference to God. It was the attitude which put confidence in the flesh rather than in God.⁵⁵

⁵³Ibid., p. 194.

⁵⁴Existence and Faith, op. cit., p. 217.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 81.

Bultmann understood, from his study of the New Testament, that whenever a man rejected God, the world became his forte. As he saw it, the world could be described as the creation of God or the sphere of demonic activity. Whenever man tried to live in unbelief or without God, he has no alternative but to become involved with the demonic. In other words, he has exposed his life to the dominion of Satan.

The man who lived a worldly life was perverting the creation of the Creator and has given himself over to worldly pleasures, lust, and greed. He was attempting to secure a future by means of worldly resources. Thus Bultmann said,

Natural human 'care', except as it may mean worrying dread of the future, is pro-vision, foresight, which self-reliantly strives to forestall the future. The intention of such 'care' is to insure one's self for the future, or also, to keep what now is for the future. This attitude is care 'about worldly affairs' (1 Corinthians 7:32), which rests upon the illusion that a man can insure his life by that which is worldly and controllable. As antithesis to this sort of 'care' stands 'care about the Lord's affairs'--and to have the latter, is to be care-free or to be careful for nothing. (Phil. 4:6). In both these cases, 'care' has the qualified sense of worldly care.⁵⁶

For Bultmann, sin was also slavery and death. The main issue as far as authentic existence was concerned, was that of freedom. Sin, defined as slavery, was the

⁵⁶Theology of the New Testament, Vol. 1, op. cit., p. 242.

worst enemy of existence. It was disastrous. If man persisted in his worldliness, his freedom would dwindle. He was a slave to his master who made him do things he never intended to do. The dreadfulness of this condition could be seen only in contrast to that which Christ offered. Christ set men free and whoever the Son of Man made free, was free completely.⁵⁷

Bultmann had very little to say about the concept of death--a topic which occupied prominence in existential philosophy. For him, sin meant death.

Death is the punishment for the sin a man has committed; sinners are 'worthy of death' (Romans 1:32), they have 'earned' death. So Paul can say that sin pays her slave his 'wage' with death (Romans 6:16,23), or that the sinner by his death pays his debt, atones for his sin (Romans 6:7). In such statements, death, we must recognize, is first thought of as the death which is natural dying, as Romans 5:12 shows, according to which death as the punishment for sin was brought into the world by Adam's sin.⁵⁸

Bultmann believed that all men had to die physically but he also believed in a living death and this to him was a gruesome contradiction which could not be harmonized with each other. He said,

Fundamentally....death is already a present reality, for man 'sold under sin (Romans 7:14) has lost himself, is no longer at one with himself. This is clearly expressed in the formulation of vv. 9-11,....'but when the commandment came, sin

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 244.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 246.

revived and I died ... for sin deceived me and ..
.. killed me.

The juristic conception of death as the punishment for sin and the conception of death as a fruit organically growing out of sin are not harmonized with each other. Nor does either conception agree with the view set forth in 1 Corinthians 15:45-49, that Adamitic man was created 'earthly' and being earthly is flesh and blood (v. 50) and therefore 'perishable' (v. 53).⁵⁹

Inauthentic existence as a life of unfaith was related to slavery. It was the kind of existence which was under the guidance of the Devil. It resulted in darkness and falsehood as was seen in the case of the Jews who opposed Jesus in the Gospel according to John and the eighth chapter.⁶⁰

Authentic Existence as a Life of Faith

In inauthentic existence, man was seen as a proud being full of his own ways and totally misunderstanding the meaning of his existence. In authentic existence the pendulum has swung in a different direction. Man, in this condition, understands himself and makes himself available to God.

It is faith in God that gives man the opportunity to experience authentic existence. Without faith man lives in slavery but in faith he has the opportunity to live in freedom. The idea of faith is primal in Bultmann's

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 249.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 315.

thought. He saw it as the only corrective for the sinful man who lived without meaning and direction.

Bultmann believed that faith was terribly misunderstood by the average man. There were those who viewed faith as an abstract term which could be defined even apart from Christ. Others saw faith as a product of man's accomplishments. Bultmann argued to the contrary. For if this were so, man would become boastful in his achievements. It was impossible to define faith except as a specific faith in Christ. He said,

As true obedience, 'faith' is freed from suspicion of being an act of accomplishment, a work. As an accomplishment it would not be obedience, since in an accomplishment the will does not surrender but asserts itself.⁶¹

Bultmann did not believe that faith was a set of doctrines which one believed. The experience of faith, for him, was never in the past tense or a state of the soul. It was the commitment of the individual to God.⁶² Bultmann understood faith as obedience, confession, hope, fear, and confidence. It was obedience in that it accepted Jesus as Lord. It was confession in that it was not anything abstract (Romans 10:9). It was hope because it had an eschatological element, it pointed to the future. It was fear, in that it saw God as the answer to understanding human existence and not the world. It was

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²Ibid., p. 314-320.

confidence, because it believed that God was able to accomplish its desires.⁶³

The basis for faith, for Bultmann, was God. He was almost uncommunicative when it came to the idea of speaking about God objectively. However he found it necessary to do so despite its dangers since the subject matter of theology was God. Bultmann felt that the revelation of God in the Christ event was not an event which produced knowledge about God. It was only an occurrence which called one to God and to authentic existence. It was a revelation that placed one into a new situation as a self.⁶⁴

Despite his understanding of the Christ event, Bultmann still considered it as the only basis for Christian living and Christian faith. Bultmann cared little for the historical Jesus. He concentrated his thoughts on the redemptive act in the person of Christ. This, he believed, was the central idea of the New Testament. Faith was nothing except it was faith in Christ.

Faith as Deliverance

Deliverance meant freedom and faith could never be divorced from freedom, the one anticipated the other. The idea of freedom or deliverance permeated the writings

⁶³Ibid., p. 322.
op. cit., p. 59.

⁶⁴Existence and Faith,

of Rudolph Bultmann. Freedom was what life was all about as far as Bultmann was concerned. Bultmann was convinced that it had an important part to play in the theology of Paul. For Paul, the new life was freedom from sin, freedom from the law, freedom from the world, and freedom from death.⁶⁵

The individual who lived his life under the dominion of sin in the past could only make himself available for authentic existence when he relinquished the world and its pleasures. Authentic existence expressed itself in a life which was willing to place all efforts at security into the hands of God.

Faith was deliverance from sin and from the self. Man could not know authentic existence until he knew what was deliverance from himself. The only possible way to accomplish this was by faith in Christ. Faith was also deliverance from the law which kept men under bondage. Christ became the "end of the law" since He brought freedom from its tyranny (Galatians 2:4). This did not mean that man was free to do what he wanted. It meant that he was at liberty to love. Bultmann said,

Such fulfilling of the law, however, is no 'work' in the sense of meritorious accomplishment, but is a deed done in freedom. To perform this deed of love, believers are God-thought (1 Thessalonians 4:9). Love, then, is an eschatological phenomenon; in it the

⁶⁵Rudolph Bultmann, Essays: Philosophical and Theological (New York: Macmillan Company, 1955), p. 168.

faith which transplants men into eschatological existence is at work (Galatians 5:6). Love, as sheer existence for one's neighbor, is possible only to him who is free from himself, i.e. to him who has died with Christ to live no longer for himself but for him who for his sake died and was raised.⁶⁶

The life of faith experienced deliverance from the world--the world dominated by diabolic power, the world of false security and the world of selfishness. A man who experienced authentic life could say that he was a citizen of a heavenly commonwealth (Phil. 3:20). The world lost its influence on him since he now understood himself. He has a difference in purpose--a purpose of love which has made him susceptible to the leading of God.

Bultmann also considered the life of faith as freedom from death. This freedom from death meant two things. It could mean a future expectation of resurrection from the dead or it could mean a present victory over death. Bultmann believed that John and Paul were divided over the meaning of death's freedom. John saw it only as the present victory of life over death. Paul saw it as both.⁶⁷ Bultmann was convinced that when a man accepted the judgment of death, he was in essence admitting his nothingness. It was only when this nothing-

⁶⁶Theology of the New Testament, Vol. 1, op. cit., p. 344.

⁶⁷Existence and Faith, op. cit., p. 181.

ness was confessed sincerely that God could take over and make this nothingness into something--authentic life.⁶⁸

Faith has Eschatological significance

When Bultmann used the term 'eschatological', he never meant it in the traditional sense, such as, the end of history, death, the judgment, or even the resurrection. Salvation, for him, was an eschatological event. The proclamation of this event called men into authentic existence and this itself was an eschatological occurrence.

The encounter with Him (Christ) turns the 'now' into eschatological time. If the passing moment were to become permanent, it would no longer be eschatological, but worldly time. It is precisely this fact which gives the 'now' which man meets the burden of responsibility; it turns it into the moment of decision over life and death.⁶⁹

Bultmann was cognizant of the fact that the idea of eschatology as futuristic when God would call a halt to history, permeated New Testament thought. However, his view of history did not allow for this interpretation. In fact, Bultmann felt that, after a while, the futuristic concept of eschatology gradually changed. History, for Bultmann, was made up of human decisions in freedom. It was personal rather than future. Eschatology, for Bultmann, was only realized eschatology. Hence authentic

⁶⁸Ibid.

⁶⁹Rudolph Bultmann, Das Evangelium des Johannes (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1941), p. 270.

existence was eschatological existence.

From what has been stated above, apparently Bultmann was not too keen about the future. He seemed to have the understanding that man should live in a moment by moment relationship with God. However, in this moment by moment relationship, Bultmann spoke about the individual making provision for the future. For him, the individual was perfectly open to the future. So that in one sense, one could narrowly conclude that Bultmann's eschatology was partly futuristic but caution should be taken at the same time. Man's openness to the future made him eager for the 'not yet' of history and eschatology, as Bultmann saw it.

Bultmann saw this eschatological existence as a sort of 'deseccularization.' He used the term 'deseccularization' in the sense that there has taken place in man's experience a "smashing of all human standards and evaluations."⁷⁰ The term was comparable in meaning to conversion or repentance. In this sense, Bultmann affirmed that the believer was no longer of the world, since the world was no longer his determining origin. He no longer approached the world for his satisfaction.

It must be understood, however, that Bultmann

⁷⁰Theology of the New Testament, Vol. 2, op. cit., p. 76.

did not want to portray faith as a dualistic world view. For although the believer was no longer of the world, faith was not a flight from the world. Bultmann said that "their being 'not of the world' must not be confused with a retreat out of the world" (John 17:15,18).⁷¹

Bultmann saw 'desecularization' as a transition into eschatological existence. He said,

In the midst of the world the believer is lifted out of secular existence....He has already gone through the Judgment and gone over into life (John 3:18; 5:24). He already has Death behind him (8:51), he already has life (3:36; 6:47; 1 John 5:12). To him 'the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining' (1 John 2:8). As Jesus was a foreigner in the world because of his foreign glory, so believers who belong to him are also foreigners, and he can say as he departs, 'I have glorified myself in them' (17:10) and 'the glory which thou hast given me I have given to them' (17:22).

In what does the 'glory' consist which has become the property of believers? The first answer must be: in the knowledge which in faith is given to the believer. The statement that Jesus gives his glory to his own is synonymous with the other, that he gives them 'eternal life' (17:22)--and what is it? 'this is eternal life: to know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent' (17:3).⁷²

Bultmann believed that the two characteristics of eschatological existence were peace and joy. He believed that peace had the connotation of "well-being", something Jesus left as a farewell gift to His people as it was recorded in the words, "Peace I leave with

⁷¹Ibid., p. 78.

⁷²Ibid., p. 83.

you." However Bultmann felt that when Jesus added the words, "My peace I give unto you; not as the world gives, do I give to you," He was indicating that this second 'peace' was eschatological "lying beyond all possibilities that are of this world."⁷³

Peace, for Bultmann, was not realized as a state of mind.

On the contrary, since it can be seized as a reality by faith alone, it can no more become a state or condition than can 'freedom.' In the world believers have not peace, but trouble; it is only 'in him' that they have peace (John 16:33).⁷⁴

Bultmann said that joy in its truest meaning could only be described as Christ's joy. As such, it should be distinguished from the transient joy that the world offered.

But this joy, although a gift of the believer, is never a definitively realized state, but always lies ahead of the believer as something to be realized. The paradox is expressed by the juxtaposition in John 15:11: 'that my joy may be in you and your joy be brought to pass.' Joy, being eschatological can never become a static condition, kinetic reality, so to speak.⁷⁵

For Bultmann, joy became the above reality by faith. Faith was that which overcame the sorrows which the believer endured in the world (John 16:20-22). Joy was always "our" joy (1 John 1:4). The Greek word used

⁷³Ibid.

⁷⁴Ibid.

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 83-84.

in this verse was the unexpected "hemon" instead of the expected "humon", which explained the fact that a brother could be a source of joy and encouragement to another brother. Joy took place in the encourager as well as in the encouraged. Bultmann said,

Against the assault of the world with its cares and troubles, eschatological joy must be struggled for, but it thereby becomes invincible...(Jn. 16:22). Though it has no describable object in which it rejoices, it nevertheless has an existential significance...(16:23). In faith the believer has found the understanding of his own existence, because he no longer understands it from the world's standpoint but from God's--and thereby it has lost its enigmatic quality.⁷⁶

Bultmann believed that believers were united with the Revealer--God. He believed that this was the way John expressed the believer's eschatological existence. Believers were bound to the Revealer by virtue of this union. This relationship with the Revealer was only made possible by an act of faith. However, it must be noticed that it was not a matter of faith in any direct relationship to Jesus or to God but rather faith in the incarnate One.

The relation between the believer and the Revealer was always expressed through prayer, as far as Bultmann was concerned. He wrote:

Both the certainty of the believer that he is united with God and also the separating interval between God and the believer find expression in it.

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 84.

Prayer, too, shows that the believer is still in the world, but is nevertheless an expression of his eschatological existence which is no more 'of the world.' For he who prays can be certain that he will be heard (John 15:7; 16:23). In all their variations these statements mean just one thing: such prayer is possible only to him for whom a relationship to God has been opened up by Jesus and through him ever remains open.⁷⁷

According to Bultmann, John developed another criterion of eschatological existence--the possession of the Spirit (1 John 3:34). The Spirit's work in this world was to convict and convince it of inauthentic existence. So that the eschatological occurrence which took place in the life of Jesus was to continue in the Spirit's activity.

As this occurrence takes place in the Spirit's 'convincing' it likewise takes place in the brotherly love which also manifests itself in the fellowship of believers (John 13:35). For brotherly love too, is an eschatological phenomenon.⁷⁸

When all was said and done, it must be recognized that the central thought at this particular point was that Bultmann saw the life of faith as a life of eschatological existence.⁷⁹ Eschatological existence was not only a life of faith, it was something presently realized in the life of the believer. It was not something to look forward to. It could be realized in this present life.⁷⁹

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 90.

⁷⁸R. Bultmann, Jesus Christ and Mythology (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), p. 81.

⁷⁹R. Bultmann, The Presence of Eternity (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957), p. 48.

Demythologizing, taken as a corrective, has brought into focus many areas for serious criticism. There are certain passages in the Bible that must be understood symbolically. There are also stories that were cast into a pre-Copernician framework. In these cases, the evangelical has granted the possibility of a limited kind of existential interpretation on the condition that no harm is done to the religious substance.

Chapter 4

DEMYTHOLOGIZING DELIBERATING

When Bultmann delivered his address on April 21, 1941 before his pastoral colleagues in Frankfurt, Germany, he was prompted by a real and a pertinent issue--the issue of making the Gospel's content more meaningful to modern man. The theological tribunal before whom he propounded his concept, not long after, began to dismantle and disparage his scholarship in such a way that even Bultmann himself thought that they had lost contact with the intellectual world. This was probably the first stroke of a death knell that confronted the efforts of Rudolph Bultmann.

Bultmann made matters worse when he published his address a year later under the title The New Testament and Mythology. This address triggered such a hot debate among theologians and philosophers that one wondered whether theology would take up arms in Germany as it did during the middle ages under Roman Catholic domination. Reginald Fuller had this to say,

The years 1941-1953 were marked by the most heated phases of the Bultmann controversy. It started in Germany where...the essay was first circulated in mimeographed form during the second World War. When printing became possible again with the cessation of hostilities, the controversy spread to other countries. Switzerland, Scandinavia, England, America,

France, Belgium and Italy, and even Japan have taken part.¹

At first the essay was read only to Lutherans, but as time sped on, Scottish Presbyterians, Reformed, Anglicans, Free Church, and even Roman Catholics became interested in it.² Concerning the storm which arose over Bultmann's theology, Karl Barth wrote, rather ironically, "I know of no contemporary theologian who has had so much to say about understanding, or one who has so much cause to complain of being misunderstood."³

THE EMPHASIS WHICH PROMPTED THE ARGUMENT

Bultmann's whole theology was based upon approximately eight theses and every one of them was exposed to severe criticism. He was definitely a radical and a controversial figure. Nevertheless, he was one who was greatly respected.

Bultmann emphasized the following: (1) that the New Testament originated in an ancient mythological framework; (2) that the mythology of the New Testament was unbelievable to the modern man who possessed a

¹Reginald Fuller, The New Testament in Current Study (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1962), p. 12.

²Ibid.

³Bartsch, II, 83.

⁴William Hordern, New Directions in Theology Today, Vol. 1, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1966), p. 25.

different world view; (3) that the New Testament myths expressed man's self-understanding in terms of authentic existence as well as inauthentic existence; (4) that the New Testament was in demand of demythologization since its mythical statements often contradict themselves; (5) that the New Testament mythology must not be eliminated but rather interpreted; (6) that man must abandon all forms of tangible security and live in detachment from the world if he was to experience authentic existence; (7) that whenever the Word was preached faith arose in the hearts of individuals; and (8) that existential philosophy interpreted human existence in the same way that the New Testament did.⁵

Although these eight views have been subject to criticisms, the demythologizing argument has revolved around three main issues. These entail: (1) the question of what was meant by the term myth; (2) the question about Heidegger's philosophy of existentialism as an adequate framework for New Testament exegesis; and (3) the question of the relationship of history to the Christian faith. Reaction to these issues have been numerous. Some have been in Bultmann's favour while others have been in direct opposition to him.

⁵Ibid.

THE GENESIS OF THE ESTRANGEMENT

About eleven years after Bultmann delivered his address before the pastors of the Confessing Church, the bishops of the United Lutheran Church in Germany met and issued a pastoral letter condemning the efforts of Bultmann's program of demythologization as a heresy. The center of their concern was Bultmann's denial of the "objective factualness" of the redemptive events such as, the incarnation, atonement, resurrection, ascension, and the second coming of Jesus. To a lesser degree they blamed Bultmann for betraying other Reformation ideas. To substantiate their point, they appealed to the writings of Luther and Melanchthon.⁶

Bultmann countered by explaining that his program of demythologization was just an extension, and not a contradiction, of the Reformation principles of sola fide in the sphere of epistemology.⁷ In fact Bultmann was not too happy over the charge that the Lutherans had made. He and his disciples reacted harshly to the idea of "objective..." They condemned their opponents on the grounds that they were introducing into theology an alien

⁶Reginald Fuller, op. cit., p. 18.

⁷Bartsch, I, op. cit., p. 210.

philosophical thought, namely, the subject-object pattern. Demythologization was against this pattern. Demythologization, as Gogarten explained, was a radical attempt to free history and theology from the pattern of subject-object thinking.⁸

Bultmann believed that Luther knew nothing about the subject-object pattern, since it was not in existence at that time. The subject-object pattern of thought was originated after Luther, and since then it had become obsolete.

Bultmann and his disciples maintained that the only objective facts were, the birth of Jesus some time during the reign of Caesar Augustus; Christ's execution on a Friday at the passover during the pro-curatorship of Pontius Pilate in Judea; and the resurrection of Jesus which the disciples experienced on the second or third day after His death. The incarnation, atonement, and resurrection were affirmations of faith which could not be objectively proved as having redemptive significance.

Bultmann denied the Lutheran charge on the grounds that they had a very poor usage of the word "objective." Bultmann was no stranger, as far as Luther and his ideas were concerned. He had followed Luther's teachings all

⁸F. Gogarten, Demythologizing and History. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), p. 150.

his life.

Since Bultmann and his followers have claimed to be simply followers of Luther, it may clarify the issues to look at Luther. We cannot expect that, in his time and place, Luther would have discussed the problem of the objective reality of the New Testament narratives. But Luther did face the Anabaptist, who argued that man can be saved by faith alone without dependence on such 'objective' things as baptism. In his Large Catechism, Luther answered them by affirming that while nothing in us brings salvation except faith, faith must have something to believe--something to which it may cling and upon which it may stand.⁹

There were other criticisms at this point but they were of lesser importance. It was helpful to note here that the German preacher, Helmut Thielicke raised the same argument in his criticism of Bultmann as did the Lutheran divines. He believed that, for Bultmann, everything seemed to happen in human consciousness.¹⁰

AN ANALYSIS OF THE PREDICAMENT

Although Bultmann's theology has drawn widespread attention for a number of years, there were not many who have fully committed themselves to his ideas. His most avid supporters were, Friedrich Gogarten, one of his long-time friend; Hans Conzellmann, and Werner Bartsch, the editor of a five-volume series entitled Kerygma and Myth. Others committed to Bultmann have found discrepancies in

⁹Hordern, op. cit., p. 35.

¹⁰Bartsch, I, op. cit., p. 148.

his thinking. These men have been called Bultmannians, but for the sake of accuracy they should be called either "Left Wing" or "Right Wing" Bultmannians. Schubert Ogden, Ian Henderson, Wolfhart Pannenberg, Gerhard Ebeling, Ernst Fuchs, to name just a few, have all been associated with either of the parties described above.

Criticisms of Bultmann's concept of demythologization have been numerous. The objections of Karl Jaspers, Fritz Buri, Karl Barth, Amos Wilder, Harvey Cox, and Helmut Gollwitzer could be taken as exemplary.

Buri, Jaspers, and Wilder

Fritz Buri was a liberal theologian. He was very radical in his views on demythologization. He felt that Bultmann's concept of demythologization was limited and therefore discrepant. He believed that when Bultmann retained "the act of God" that he left a remnant of mythology. His desire was, not only to demythologize but also, to dekerygmataze Christianity and thus remove the proclamation of the "act of God" in Christ altogether.

Commenting on Buri and his disciples, Fuller writes,

This proclamation, for them, is merely an outworn symbol of the transition from inauthentic to authentic existence, achieved simply by human decision (which in Buri, at any rate can be understood in faith, paradoxically, as an act of God).¹¹

¹¹Reginald Fuller, op. cit., p. 20.

According to Buri, Bultmann was inconsistent for, on the one hand, he maintained that the content of the kerygma was an actual redemptive occurrence which took place in history. On the other hand Bultmann affirmed that the kerygma was not interested in historical research and that it would be an error to justify faith in God's word by historical investigation. Hence Buri felt that the reason why Bultmann talked about a theory of proclamation was simply because he wanted to maintain the kerygma. However, this theory of proclamation was not compatible with historical research.¹²

For Buri, Bultmann's concept of the kerygma was simply a mythical hangover. To be consistent Bultmann should do away with this kerygma and thus demythologize the whole New Testament.

Karl Jaspers, the German existentialist philosopher of the early twentieth century, wrote a book reacting against Bultmann and his program of demythologization. Jaspers was not a Christian, neither was he an atheist. His contribution, as far as criticizing Bultmann was concerned, depicted the far-reaching influence of demythologization.

Jaspers believed that Bultmann had two weak premises in his approach to the New Testament.

¹²Fritz Buri, "Theologie und Philosophie," Theologische Zeitschrift (March-April, 1952), p. 128.

First is his conception of modern science and the modern view of the world, which leads him to negate many articles of the Christian faith. The second is his conception of philosophy which enables him to give an existentialist interpretation to certain contents of faith, that, in his opinion derives from scientific philosophy. These premises are the main pillars upon which his argument is built. These pillars seem to me not strong enough to bear its weight.¹³

For Jaspers, religion without myth was something impossible. He accused Bultmann of what he called "orthodoxy" and "illiberality."¹⁴ Bultmann's reply to Jaspers took the form of an insistence on the evangelical purpose behind the concept of demythologization. Bultmann and his disciples maintained that demythologization did not arise out of a purely rationalistic, intellectual criticism of the kerygma. Its intention was to liberate the New Testament message of God's act in Christ in all its naked clarity and make it heard in the modern world.

Amos Wilder has directed a considerable amount of concern to the place of myth in religious language and was more than competent to react to Bultmann's proposal. Wilder asserted that myth has been an indispensable vehicle of religious truth. He believed that no religion, Christian or otherwise, could rid itself of it, otherwise that religion would be condemned to silence.

¹³Karl Jaspers, Myth and Christianity. An Inquiry into the Possibility of Religion without Myth (New York: Noonday Press, 1962), p. 4.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 37, 38.

Wilder maintained that mythical language was symbolic and suggestive of truth which could not be conveyed by the use of ordinary descriptive language. In fact these truths could not have been communicated by any other language. Myth was therefore to convey and express Christian truth.¹⁵

The crucial issue at this juncture for most critics of Bultmann was whether or not Bultmann has provided an acceptable understanding of myth. Has his use of the term myth been acceptable? John Macquarrie argued that Bultmann's use of the term "myth" was confusing.¹⁶ He believed that his use of the term was so narrow that it should definitely be scrapped.¹⁷

H. P. Owen believed that Bultmann's use of the term "myth" was nothing more than a label which was used for designating a collection of various items. He argued specifically that "there is a prima facie difference between miracles and a spacial notion of divine transcendence. The one is a fact, the other is the symbolization of a fact."¹⁸

¹⁵Amos Wilder, New Testament Faith for Today (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), pp. 38-71.

¹⁶John Macquarrie, The Scope of Demythologizing (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1960), p. 199

¹⁷Ibid., p. 200.

¹⁸H. P. Owen, Revelation and Existence: A Study in the Theology of Rudolph Bultmann (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1957), p. 5.

On the other hand Schubert Ogden argued that Bultmann had a good control of his use of the term "myth." He felt that Macquarrie and Owen have been unfair in their treatment of Bultmann at this particular point.¹⁹ However, the consensus have acknowledged that Bultmann encountered some difficulty in his use of the term "myth." It was not that he was inconsistent but that he used it in a poor sense.

Barth, Cox, and Gollwitzer

Karl Barth was such a prolific writer in every respect that it was difficult to summarize his thoughts adequately in a page or two. Barth did a considerable amount of studying in Bultmann's concept of demythologization. He studied this concept from the standpoint that one should not criticize the thoughts of another until they have ascertained a good understanding of the man's point of view.

After studying Bultmann's program of demythologizing, Barth concluded that there was an underlying inconsistency in it. He felt that Bultmann's interpretation and his main emphasis were in conflict. Demythologization, for Barth, was a principle incapable of doing justice to the explanation of the event of Jesus Christ.

¹⁹Schubert Ogden, Christ without Myth (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1961), p. 175.

For Barth the most disturbing thing in Bultmann's program was that it seemed bent on reversing the last fifty years of theological development by leading theology back into the "Egyptian captivity" of an alien philosophy. He viewed Bultmann's concern to translate the kerygma to modern man as a throwback to the liberal era of Ritschl, Harnack, and Troeltsch.²⁰

As far as the idea of myth was concerned, Barth argued that there was none in the New Testament. He preferred to use the term "saga." However, Barth believed that there was a possibility for mythological thinking to enter the Bible but the accounts were certainly not myths.

Harvey Cox believed that when theology began to employ existentialism as a means to help modern man that the outcome was a definite failure. He said,

Existentialism appeared just as the Western metaphysical tradition, whose social base was dismantled by revolution and technology, reached its end phase. It is the last child of a cultural epoch, born in its mother's senility. This is why existentialist writers seem so arcadian and antiurban Consequently their thinking tends to be anti-technological, individualistic, romantic, and deeply suspicious of cities and of science.²¹

Cox argued that in order to appeal to man's heart, existentialists have been put into an embarrassing

²⁰Karl Barth, Rudolph Bultmann: Ein Versuch, ihn zu Verstehen (Zollikon-Zurich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1953), p. 53.

²¹Harvey Cox, The Secular City (New York: Macmillan Company, 1969), p. 220.

situation since they have had to entice people into existential frivolousness as a kind of preparation for preaching. Commenting on Bultmann's efforts, Cox wrote,

Because the world has already moved beyond the pathos and narcissism of existentialism, such theological efforts to update the biblical message as that of Rudolph Bultmann fall short of the mark. They fail, not because they are too radical but because they are not nearly radical enough. They deliver a nineteenth century answer to a twentieth century bourgeois Bildungsschicht. He fails to reach the man of today because he translates the Bible from mythical language into yesterday's metaphysics rather than into today's post-metaphysical lexicon.²²

For Cox existentialism was an outdated philosophy. If demythologizing was ever going to make a successful attempt at presenting the New Testament in modern day understanding, Heidegger's existentialism was more a barrier than a help. It would naturally undo whatever was done, if it were used as a means to bring about such an understanding. In explaining the matter further Cox wrote,

There is something immature about existentialism. Like classical theism, it longs for some ultimate explanation of reality. In this case it is closer to traditional theism than to the starting-point of urban-secular man, who does not feel this compulsion to find inclusive and overarching meaning.²³

Helmut Gollwitzer, in his criticism of Bultmann's use of Heidegger, explained that Bultmann began by assuming that man was anxious to know about authentic life.

²²Ibid.

²³Ibid., p. 221.

Gollwitzer believed that the New Testament has a message for man. Unfortunately, man has not approached the New Testament with the idea of listening to that message. Instead, man has approached the New Testament pragmatically. Therefore God "can now only become perceptible in his function of serving man's interest in authenticity."²⁴

It must be noticed that Gollwitzer was not only speaking to Bultmann's situation but to the gamut of existential thinking. He understood Bultmann as saying that the New Testament writers did not write from the standpoint of describing the universe. They wrote to illustrate their own self-understanding, as far as Bultmann was concerned. Gollwitzer argued that this approach distorted the whole meaning of the New Testament literature.²⁵

For Gollwitzer, when man has confronted God in Christ, man acquired a new understanding of himself. From then onwards, he realizes his relation to his neighbor in a new light, and God is also understood by him in an entirely different way. However, to approach the New Testament with an existential philosophy, one cannot avoid being destructive.²⁶

For Gollwitzer, the image that the New Testament

²⁴H. Gollwitzer, The Existence of God as Confessed by Faith (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1965), p. 33.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid.

writers had concerning the new birth was primary for them. This was not necessarily so for the existentialists. It was through the new birth that the New Testament writers found a new understanding of themselves and a new vision of God. It was the most important thing for them.

The existentialist tried to change the message of the New Testament into what would be said if the twentieth century philosophers had written it. However, the fact of the matter was that the message was to first century Christians. Therefore the existential approach has missed the real point that the New Testament writers were making.

THE PREMISS FOR A NEW MOVEMENT

The demythologization enigma precipitated another area of theological thought known as "The New Quest for the Historical Jesus." The advocates of this movement had their training from Bultmann. Before the close of the debate on demythologization, the conviction began to emerge that the basic history of Christianity must play a more crucial role for faith.

In Bultmann's own view, the life of Jesus was not central to theological concern. He never denied that Jesus existed but he did believe that a quest for the historical Jesus would be fruitless and meaningless. The central concern of theology, for him, was the cross and the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The Breakdown of the Bultmannian era

Bultmann's concepts were blunted by the wave of discontent which arose from his so-called disciples. Carl Henry put it this way,

Self-professed 'followers' of Bultmann now range from those who regard interpersonal relations alone as significant for encountering God, to those who emphasize a necessary connection between the historical Jesus and the content of the Christian faith.²⁷

Henry has held a considerable number of personal interviews with the theological family in Europe and as they have reflected on the status of Bultmann's theology, the situation has appeared to be one of despair. The consensus was that Bultmann's influence, especially in the area of demythologization, was becoming more and more shaky.

Ernst Fuchs, a professor at Marburg and one who has become prominent in modern theological debate, believed that the main interest was not centered around Bultmann anymore. He maintained that whereas Bultmann provided the a prioris, his disciples have possessed the vitality.

When Henry wrote his book in 1964 he felt convinced that the situation was irreconcilable. He said,

In the eyes of Bultmann's successor in New

²⁷Carl F. Henry, Frontiers in Modern Theology (New York: Channel Press, 1964), p. 13.

Testament at Marburg (since 1952) the Bultmannian school has been 'broken to pieces' during the past ten years. Long a foe of Bultmannianism in its German seat of origin, Werner George Kummel has served as president of Europe's Society of New Testament studies. As he sees the situation, Bultmannianism is now irreconcilably split, and New Testament scholarship is divided into at least four competing camps.²⁸

The four camps which Kummel mentioned were, the Conservatives, the Heilsgeschichte scholars, the Pannenberg scholars, and the post-Bultmannian scholars. For Kummel the critical point of Bultmann's theology came when Ernst Kasemann wrote his revolutionary paper on the historical Jesus in 1954.²⁹

Since that time the death knell of demythologization became evident. Interest in the 'happenedness' in the life of Jesus and not only His mere existence became dominant in exegetical theology. Bultmann's disciples began to insist that some knowledge of the historical Jesus was indispensable.

✓ One of the most fatal causes for Bultmann's decline was his insistence on the existential interpretation of the New Testament. In doing this Bultmann became largely anthropocentric in his theology. In contrast to this the New Testament's concern was theology and not anthropology.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Ibid., p. 15.

Demythologization has lost its sting. Day after day its influence has become weaker and weaker. Henry said,

Attacks on Bultmann's position from outside his camp have become sharper and sharper and have exploited the interior divisions. Heinrich Schier, a former Bultmann student and disciple, became a Roman Catholic and is now teaching at Bonn. 'Bultmann is a rationalist and neo-Ritschlian,' says Emil Brunner....Peter Brunner, the Heidelberg theologian points a finger at Bultmann's weakest point. 'In Glauben und Verstehen he nowhere tells us what a minister must say in order to articulate the Gospel... But if one raises the question of proclamation it becomes clear that Bultmann has not resolved the problem of content.' Says Otto Weber, the Gottingen theologian, 'In a word, the reason for the breakdown of Bultmann's theology is his existentialism.' And from Basel Karl Barth's verdict has echoed throughout Europe: 'Thank God, Bultmann doesn't draw the consistent consequences and demythologize God!'³⁰

Criticisms of Bultmann have been incessant. Fundamentalists, Conservatives, Neo-Orthodox, and Liberal scholars have contributed their share. Demythologization has been put in the balances and found wanting.

Attempts to improve the Bultmannian enigma

To understand the intentions of the "New Quest," one must clearly understand Rudolph Bultmann for he has been the central figure. The "New Quest" was only an attempt to improve the thoughts of Bultmann.

Axiomatic for Bultmann was the conviction that neither God nor anything pertaining to Him should be referred to objectively. In other words, the object of

³⁰Ibid., p. 26-27.

faith could not be derived from any historical examination. "For faith does not at all rise from the acceptance of historical facts."³¹ In the light of this Bultmann's disinterest in the historical Jesus was understandable. However, Ebeling and others did not agree with him at this juncture.

Gerhard Ebeling advanced a different alternative to that of Bultmann--an alternative which recognized the validity of the Jesus of history. Ebeling did not disagree that faith was the central factor in Christianity, but he did raise the question of history when Jesus was contrasted with the proper object of faith. He insisted that the Christian was faith in Jesus Himself. Ebeling was not afraid to go behind the kerygma if necessity demanded it.

Of course Ebeling wanted to avoid the problems which stemmed from the subject-object split. Therefore he saw the question of faith as the "question of man's participation...the thing in which faith participates belongs inseparably to faith itself."³²

Ebeling felt that the historical Jesus was so important to Christian that,

If Jesus had never lived, or if faith in Him

³¹R. Bultmann, "The Primitive Christian Kerygma and the Historical Jesus," The Historical Jesus and the Kerygmatic Christ (New York: Abingdon Press, 1964), p. 25.

³²G. Ebeling, Word and Faith (Fortress Press), p. 42.

were shown to be misunderstanding of the significance of the historical Jesus, then clearly the ground would be taken from under Christian faith.³³

Ebeling was not the only advocate of the new quest of the historical Jesus. He was aided by such men as Ernst Fuchs of Marburg, Ernst Kasemann of Tübingen, and Gunther Bornkamm of Heidelberg. These men detected a type of docetism in Bultmann's Christology and wanted to avoid this fatal mistake. They were determined to show by historical criticism that there was no break, or contradiction that divided the Christ of faith from Jesus as He lived in history.

Ebeling and his colleagues did not want to fall into the same error as those who were involved in the nineteenth century quest of the historical Jesus.

The New quest frankly aims to validate the Church's faith in Christ as the Lord and Saviour, whereas the old quest very frequently was motivated with a desire to discredit the faith of the Church.³⁴

Like Ebeling, Fuchs insisted that, in the New Testament, faith was concerned to interpret the historical Jesus.³⁵ For Fuchs, the so-called Christ of faith was in no way different from the historical Jesus. He insisted that faith did not necessarily believe in facts. Faith has always been grounded in a person, especially in the

³³G. Ebeling, The Nature of Faith (The Mullenberg Press, 1961), p. 46.

³⁴New Directions in Theology Today, I, p. 60.

³⁵E. Fuchs, Zur Frage (Tübingen, 1960), p. 143-167.

word with which that person pledged himself.

Ebeling and Fuchs have extended the discussion beyond the impasse of Bultmann. Both of them have been aware of the fact that the centrality of the historical Jesus for faith involved a rethinking of the nature of faith.

Ernst Kasemann was generally considered as the one who first raised the question concerning the historical Jesus in the Bultmannian camp. However this has been questioned. Kasemann believed that Bultmann's insistence on the fact that Christian faith should be seen in terms of Easter faith was definitely one-sided. If this were so, it would imply "a Christian faith that is understood as faith in the exalted Lord, for whom the historical Jesus, as such, had no constitutive significance."³⁶

Kasemann's support for the new quest was seen from his argument that the early Christians saw the necessity to include this Gospel history in their kerygma in order to make their faith in Christ consistent with Jesus as a person of history. He was convinced that the Christian message would lose a vital aspect if it were to ever exclude the historical Jesus. He believed that the concept of absolute authority, connected with Jesus in certain texts of the Gospels, could never be adequately explained

³⁶E. Kasemann, "The Problem of the Historical Jesus," Essays on New Testament Themes (London: SCM Press, 1964), pp. 15-16.

by any parallels found in the faith or practice of the early Church. He was of the opinion that the concept could not be even found in Judaism or even Hellenism. Historical reasoning pointed back to Jesus Himself as a source of this concept of absolute authority.³⁷

When the historical method was applied, there emerged a Jesus who claimed an absolute authority. Both before and after Easter He revealed Himself to His disciples as their Lord in that He placed them before the immediate presence of God where they enjoyed the freedom and responsibility of faith.³⁸ Kasemann believed, then, that a history derived from the historical method was relevant for faith. However, faith played the decisive role for providing knowledge.

As far as Kasemann was concerned, faith must first exist before the historical Jesus could have any significance. He said,

History (Historie) becomes historically (geschichtlich) relevant, not through tradition as such, but through interpretation, not simply by establishing what happened, but through understanding events of the past which have become and remain as objective facts.....History (historie) possesses historical (geschichtlich) significance only to the extent that it, through questioning and answering, brings its question and answer into our present situation and thus finds those who are desirous of interpreting it--those who hear and represent its question and answer for our present situation.³⁹

³⁷E. Kasemann, "Das Problem des Historischen Jesus," Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche (1954), p. 152.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Ibid., p. 130.

Gunther Bornkamm has been another proponent of the new quest of the historical Jesus. Like Fuchs, he has not focussed his attention on Jesus' word only, but rather on the events of His life as well.

Like Kasemann, Bornkamm spoke about the absolute authority of Jesus and regarded this as both historically valid and relevant for Christian faith. Kasemann stressed the authority of Jesus as it was manifested in His teachings while Fuchs considered it as it manifested itself in His behavior. However Bornkamm believed that this authority was "equally recognizable in His words as well as in His deeds."⁴⁰

Bornkamm also believed that faith must first exist before the historical Jesus could be of any significance. As far as he was concerned, the disciples' faith had broken down to such an extent after the cross that nothing could have helped except the resurrection. Therefore it was only this resurrection faith (Easter faith) that made the memory of Jesus' past life relevant. This meant that the resurrection which led to Easter faith was something "removed from historical scholarship."

Bornkamm identified himself with Kasemann and Fuchs since he found in history some relevance for a resurrection faith which was already existent.

⁴⁰G. Bornkamm, Jesus from Nazareth (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), p. 61.

Undoubtedly Kasemann, Fuchs, and Bornkamm believed that history itself was impotent to produce this faith.⁴¹

The new quest for the historical Jesus received its impetus from Bultmann's concept of demythologization. It was from among the advocates of demythologization that the proposals of a new quest have come, for, the stripping away of the kerygma has drawn attention to a clear alternative. On the one hand, Bultmann emphasized that the kerygma was the only necessary thing for Christian faith. On the other hand, his disciples argued that the kerygma was an objectification of an historical encounter with God and that the person of Jesus of Nazareth must come into focus. According to James Robinson, Bultmann disciples believed that,

the actual demythologizing which went on within the primitive church was the 'historicizing' process taking place within the kerygma and leading to the writing of the Gospels....It is simply because Germany's leading exegetes have correctly understood the demythologized meaning of the New Testament kerygma, that they have looked through the kerygma not directly to a principle inherent in human nature, but rather to Jesus as the event in which transcendence becomes possible.⁴²

The far reaching influence of demythologization has been witnessed through the new quest. The coming generations will never be able to evade this issue, for man's desire to find meaningful existence will demand it.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 180.

⁴²James Robinson, The New Quest of the Historical Jesus (London: SCM Press, 1961), p. 84.

William Hordern put it well when he wrote,

The relationship of faith and history will no doubt continue to plague Christian thought. Because it is rooted in historical events, Christianity must make the attempt to weigh the validity of its historical sources. Because the sources present the picture of one who demanded and still demands a decision, any man's historical conclusions will be deeply coloured by the interpretations with which he begins. The Layman in his field is not at the mercy of the experts for the simple reason that both must make their decision about how they will interpret Jesus. Faced by the disagreement of the experts, the layman cannot escape the need to make his own decisions.⁴³

PROMISE AND RISK--AN ACKNOWLEDGMENT

In pursuing any theological venture it is of utmost importance to recognize the benefits and dangers involved. Demythologization must not be considered as a worthless enterprise in every respect. It has its bad points as well its good points.

The Legitimacy of Demythologization

Demythologization has accumulated an overwhelming sense of prominence over the years. Despite the efforts made to vanquish its conspicuousness, its influence continue to bear upon theological thought today.

Demythologization is at least a biblio-centered theology from the standpoint that it is based on consideration of a Bible hermeneutic. What constituted the hermeneutic of Bultmann's Bible is definitely

⁴³New Directions in Theology Today, I, op. cit., p. 73.

unacceptable, but the Bible was still his text. Too many theologians over the years have indulged in the nauseating habit of putting the Bible in the background in their search for truth. Demythologization is a concept whose warp and woof, from the hermeneutic standpoint, is centered upon Holy Writ. Credit should therefore be lavished on any concept which has made the word of God prominent, especially in modern theology.

The lethargy into which Christians fall at times is appalling. Some do not see the need for a vibrant Christian life while others seem to think that the experiences of the past are sufficient for present living. Demythologization vies for the fact that Christ can update the believers experience and do something for him now. Christian experience should not be limited to a once-for-all affair. It should be a moment by moment affair. The emphasis should not be on what Christ has done in the past (although it is valid and essential to reminisce) but rather on what He can do to refreshen Christian experience here and now.

To the believer as well as the sinner, the concept of demythologization is a reminder that God has broken through man's isolation and has spoken to the profoundest parts of his being. God has done this by speaking a living Word to mankind in the person of Jesus.

Probably the most significant contribution that demythologization has made is in the area of its concern

for modern man. Demythologization desires to confront the contemporary man with a message that he can readily understand. This type of concern will always be a necessity as long as time lingers. Evangelical scholars, as well as others, should let this attitude of concern be foremost as they seek to do God's will.

It is of utmost importance to contemplate the seriousness of presenting the gospel in terms that cannot be understood. Man today is searching for truth and the Bible contains that truth. However the Bible may need explanation in the light of the vast developments that have confronted man today. Preachers, as well as teachers, cannot refuse to grapple with the problems of an age that is so scientifically conscious. They can be confident of one thing, namely, that despite the discoveries of modern science, the Bible still possesses a relevancy which is beyond human comprehension.

Demythologization sets forth valid information in the area of Christian living. The existential understanding of faith demands a renunciation of the world with all its cares and embellishments. This renunciation is a pre-requisite for authentic living in the context of demythologization. At the same time it must be understood that renunciation of the world does not give license to asceticism. It is a freedom of which the world knows nothing apart from faith in Christ. It inaugurates a life in which man's peculiarity and freedom

find expression.

In answer to the above contribution evangelical Christianity affirms and agrees that the man who knows Christ and has had a personal experience of salvation is a free man. This freedom distinguishes him as a peculiar person and one who is saddled with the responsibility to show to others how God called him out of the darkness into His wonderful light. This peculiarity does not mean or imply asceticism, neither does it mean that there should be no difference between sinner and saint. It does imply that a Christian can be in the world, ministering to the needs of sinful men in a perverse society, and yet maintain a holy distinction by virtue of the fact that God has made a change in his life.

The Christian should not conform to the maxims of any age which seems to be tempered by a spirit of luxury and idolatry. Instead, the demands of the gospel should be his sole concern. His whole outlook on life should be different from that of the sinner. The grace of God is that which makes him different.

Demythologization can be seen as an attempt to maintain a somewhat even balance between philosophy and theology. It has been successful in diminishing the tensions between these two disciplines. It performed this task with such a clear perspective that theology maintained its dignity without capitulating to the evils of philosophy.

The thoughtful mind cannot bypass the contribution which demythologization has made towards the understanding of such theological concepts such as demons, angels, heaven, earth, and hell. Demythologization has aroused much curiosity to the extent that one is tempted to concede that the traditional understanding of these terms brings into focus a number of problems, especially in the light of modern developments.

Above all Bultmann's honesty must be admired. He was not afraid to admit that he approached the Bible with certain presuppositions and assumptions. Too many theologians are hindered by their refusal to admit that they have approached the Bible with their own presuppositions and biases. The theology that comes closest to true biblical theology is one that is free of all bias. In order to remain in the stream of sound biblical interpretation, theologians and exegetes must remember that the Bible belongs to the Holy Spirit. The Holy spirit is the one that guides and directs into all truth. God does not need the help of man in this respect.

The Inadequacy of Demythologization

Despite the significant contributions that demythologization has made towards the understanding of the New Testament, it remains pregnant with a multiplicity of errors and material for criticism. Demythologization is not an infallible concept. Bultmann remained convinced

that his method of interpretation was the correct one. However, his arguments cannot verify this affirmation.

The most heinous mistake that Bultmann made was that of approaching the Bible with his own preconceived ideas. In trying to remain loyal to the Formgeschichte school, Bultmann was forced to deny the Gospels the central place in his hermeneutical interprise. He was at variance with the chronology of the Gospels and he posited his dissatisfaction with their biographical and geographical structure. Paul's theology mutatis mutandis, for Bultmann, seemed to be more reliable since they addressed themselves more adequately to the situation of the modern man. Hence, Paul's writings became his text and the Gospels were put in the margin.

Demythologization was incorrect when it advanced the idea that God only existed as an inner event in the soul. One can detect shades of Schleiermacher and Feuerbach presenting themselves at this point. Karl Barth had to wrestle with the understanding of faith that was common in German theological thinking prior to the first World War. Theologians, at that time, saw faith in terms of psychological or subjective experience. This understanding is permeated with error. Faith has no real meaning if God cannot be understood as existing outside the believer.

Bultmann does not want to speak of God in an objective manner yet in his concept of demythologization

he spoke of the "act" of God. Although Bultmann defended himself by explaining that the term "act of God" is used anologically instead of mythologically, there seems to be some inconsistency here, taking into consideration his definition of myth as "the use of imagery to express..... the divine in terms of human life." The "act" of God implies an objective portrayal of God.

Granted that the "act of God" is anological language one must still face the fact that demythologization has confused the issue. If after demythologization one is left with an analogy that requires another sort of understanding, then the gospels should be left as they were. This is why men such as Fritz Buri and his disciples have requested of Bultmann to go a step further and dekerygmataze the "act" of God. This too is unacceptable. Evangelical understanding cannot contain either of these alternatives.

Speech about God and of God is necessary for describing the work of salvation. In fact the Christian faith is concerned with man as a being of history. As such man comes into personal confrontation with God continually for history is the stage on which God acts and operates in relation to His creatures. He disposed of Israel's enemies time and again and displayed His mighty acts in manifold ways so that, "by this you shall know that the living God is in your midst." (Joshua 3:10). This recital of the acts of God in history gives man a definite understanding both of and about God.

God's power is experienced as acting upon and through human life but He must not be restricted to subjective experience alone. Evangelical Christianity rejects the assumption that God never revealed Himself objectively in the past and that faith today is uninterested in the historical actuality of the saving events. Moses did not just sense that he was being called to return to Egypt. He saw the burning bush and heard the voice of God (Exodus 3:11).

Verbs rather than abstract nouns are needed to characterize God. He saves, delivers, helps, and blesses. To limit Him within the realms of subjectivity is to deny Him the privilege of functioning objectively in the complexities and uncertainties of human life. Theology is God-talk--speech about God and about man's response to Him. This has been the situation since Christ descended into this world. He came to reveal God to man. By the very act of Christ's incarnation the objective actuality of God was overwhelmingly displayed. John's testimony was that, "We beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14, NASB).

In demythological language, Jesus Christ has no right to deity. The Chalcedonian creed has little to contribute in demythological surroundings. The birth, baptism, and other aspects of Jesus' life prior to the cross are of little significance and have nothing to do

with the plan of salvation. The most that demythologization has to say about the life of Jesus is that God acted in Him. Jesus did not, in any way, add to man's knowledge about God, but rather summoned men to faith in Him. Jesus was subject to the Father, but it was in this subjection that Jesus' authority found its greatest expression.

Theological scholarship over the years has had to reckon with the question Christ put to His disciples at Caesarea Philippi, "Who do you say that I am?" (Matthew 16:15). Demythologization has, without doubt, provided a feeble response to this all-important inquiry concerning Jesus' identity. The adequacy of any approach to this question must consider in Jesus the ongoing revelation of God. He was God enshrined in human garb. Paul's testimony was that "without controversy great is the mystery of Godliness, God was manifest in the flesh" (1 Tim. 3:16).

Only when the consciousness of Christ's deity is settled that other areas of theological formulation become meaningful and dynamic. Theology proper has its basis in Christology because God is "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." The study of man depends upon Christology for its meaning since the fundamental biblical fact about man is that Jesus Christ died for him. The study of salvation or redemption cannot discard an understanding of the nature of Him who

made redemption possible. A look at the structure, role, and destiny of the Church focuses attention on the centrality and Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Of course, modern theologians look at the deity of Christ as a stumblingblock and it is exactly here that demythologization has become slippery. In addition to this, the Christology of demythologization borders definitely on gnosticism, primarily so in its lack of interest in the earthly or historical life of Jesus.

Another cardinal error on the part of demythologization lies in its treatment of the concept of sin. Man is not described as a sinner from the standpoint that he possesses a sinful nature. Neither is man a sinner because he has committed certain acts of transgression. Man is a sinner simply because of his concrete-historicity. Hence he is a sinner from the moment of his birth until he exercises faith in Christ.

The above statements on sin would seem solid if taken at face value, but carried to a logical conclusion they must be rejected. Sin is a transgression of the Law and, according to Romans 5:12-19, there is an actual point in time when man experiences his fallenness. Demythologization places these biblical statements under the category of "myth." Evangelical theology cannot subscribe to this conclusion. Sin is not a creaturely desire of any kind as demythologization desired to put it. Sin is man's active and conscientious participation against

the will of God.

Demythologization can sacrifice the biblical definition of sin because it is not built on the affirmation that the word of God is authoritative and infallible. The Bible is authoritative only in so far as it communicates the claim of God on the individual to radical obedience in faith. It can only lay claim to authority when it confronts man with the question of his previous self-understanding and leads him into an experience of new self-understanding.

Evangelical theology contends that the Bible is not simply authoritative because of what it does. It is authoritative by virtue of the fact that its author is authoritative. It is therefore the only manual for formulating Christian doctrine. Extra biblical principles are not valid tools for passing judgment on Holy Writ. In addition to this, the definition one attaches to sin determines the essence of his understanding of salvation. Demythologization allowed no room for a crisis experience between man and God. The only crisis that takes place is that between man and his own self-understanding.

Demythologization discussed the new self-understanding in terms of faith. Faith is central for it is a contrast to the life of sin. Man without faith knows no freedom whatsoever. He lives his life in slavery and defeat. His unbelief allows him no other alternative but to surrender to the world and its cares. When one is

confronted with the message of Christ and decides to respond, immediately faith "happens." This happenedness becomes the source of a radical transformation on the part of the individual's self-understanding and his understanding of the world.

In light of the preceding paragraph, the way in which demythologization views man's new self-understanding brought about by faith is problematic. In the New Testament, whenever the new birth is effected, a two-fold understanding takes place. Man acquires a new understanding of himself as well as a new understanding of God. Demythologization magnifies the former and dwarfs the latter. This is the mistake and the reason for Bultmann's anthropocentric understanding of the Bible and theology.

Bultmann was again mistaken in thinking that demythologization can strip away the pictorial representations without destroying the concepts of the biblical writers. The main task of demythologization was to reinterpret the language and thought forms of the Bible. However, evangelical theology views the main task as reiterating the biblical message in new terms without changing the fundamental concepts of the biblical writers. On the one hand, demythologizing argued that the modern man should not listen to the gospel until its form is radically changed. On the other hand, evangelicals affirm that the gospel cannot be preached if the biblical form is altered.

It is a fallacy to interpret the cross and the resurrection as one and the same event. Demythologizing argued that they were both one and the same event. It alleged that the resurrection event could not be dated in history as a separate event from the event of the cross since it was not a historical fact.

On the other hand, orthodox Christianity separates the event of the cross from that of the resurrection. It affirms that the resurrection is a historical event. To substantiate this claim, an overwhelming number of New Testament passages could be brought to the fore. The most significant passage is that which says,

For if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ must be still dead. And if He is still dead, then all our preaching is useless and your trust in God empty, worthless, hopeless, and we apostles are all liars because we have said that God raised Him from the grave But the fact is that Christ did actually rise from the dead and has become the first of millions who will come back to life again some day (1 Cor. 15:13-20, Living Bible).

The incident of the empty tomb was indeed a witness to the historicity of the resurrection event. Jesus Christ, at a point of time in history, made appearances to His disciples on the road to Emmaus (Mark 16:12-13); to the five hundred brethren (1 Cor. 15:6); to the disciples on the sea of Galilee (John 21:1-23); and many other places. It is impossible for one to deny the historical factuality of Christ's resurrection and still remain in the stream of sound biblical interpreta-

tion. The proof of the resurrection is as solid as any historical fact that has ever occurred.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is one of the central concerns of the Christian faith. In fact Christianity is founded upon this fact. This statement runs contrary to the conclusions of demythologization but truth needs no apology. The whole eschatological understanding of the Bible is dependent on the historical resurrection of Christ. Man's bodily resurrection also depends upon the fact that Christ did rise and became the fore-runner of millions. Christian faith affirms with burning enthusiasm that "if in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable" (1 Cor. 15:19). Thank God, Christ's resurrection is a historical fact and it is a definite guarantee of man's resurrection.

Demythologizing cared little for factual objective history. It affirmed that whatever history there was should be transformed into myth. Hence it is impossible to get at any understanding of history, for what is important is that which happens here and now. Even the advocates of demythologization have recognized its weakness in this area and have entered on a new search for the historical Jesus.

Closely linked with the problem of history is the understanding of eschatology. Bultmann's treatment of eschatology depended largely upon his concept of myth and his burning urge to demythologize the Christian

message. He maintained that those who have experienced authentic existence have no real history, for authentic existence is a community of the end time--an eschatological phenomenon. The world is finished for such people and the end is imminent.

Bultmann demythologized such categories as the Second return of Jesus, for this, he claimed, was meaningless for the modern understanding. To believe that the life of faith is an eschatological existence is to miss the purpose of biblical and historic Christianity. This affirmation lacks both continuity and stability. The Christian is deprived of all hope of future blessedness. Evangelical theology cannot entertain this error.

Evangelical thought centers around a two-fold eschatological consummation of nature and history. The one is the imminent return of Christ in His glory, the other is the reign of Christ on the earth. For these events the Christian warmly waits. Harold Kuhn says,

The Christian doctrine of the Last Things answers to the believers' deep desire to see a resolution of the problem spawned by the gaping dualism of human moral history. The sensitive Christian responds with delight to the promise that 'in the dispensation of the fulness of time' the Father shall gather together in one all things in Christ. He is deeply aware that the natural world also yearns for this final reconstitution, for this final recapitulation of all creation in Christ. When the centrifugal forces of the Fall shall be reversed, and its tragic consequences neutralized, then, and only then, shall man's spirit

finally be at rest.⁴⁴

Demythologization cannot offer these consoling verities. The only hope that it can provide is that which is experienced here and now. Demythologization is saturated with errors. Biblical reasoning demands the rejection of this proposal as a valid system of hermeneutics. It has done a grave injustice to the Holy Scriptures, especially in the area of eschatology. No true believer is prepared to surrender his belief in that moment of triumph when Christ "shall shew who is the blessed and only Potentate, King of kings, and Lord of lords....to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen" (1 Timothy 6:15-16).

In the contemporary world, there are those who operate as biblical theologians but have never really submitted their minds to divinely revealed truth. They are lucid and fluent in propogating their beliefs, but somehow God seems to have a way of exposing their error.

These are days when men will depart from sound doctrine and expose themselves to the pernicious ideas of men who function under the mask of religion. The evangelical scholar cannot be too vigilant. His task is to sound the depth of modern temper and make men aware of those who wrest the Scriptures to their own hurt.

⁴⁴Harold Kuhn, "The Nature of the Last Things," Christian Faith and Modern Theology (New York: Channel Press, 1964), p. 418.

Chapter 5

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

SUMMARY

The cultural milieu with which the Church has been faced for the past seventy years has challenged its traditional method of biblical interpretation seriously. During this time many theological methods have arisen with a view to address themselves to this basic need. One of these methods is Bultmann's concept of demythologizing which arose to sound the depth of the modern temper and furnish a cogent alternative. As a method of theological inquiry, demythologizing has raised most of the questions polarizing and expanding contemporary theology.

The purpose of this study was to investigate Bultmann's program of demythologization and to determine its value for the evangelical scholar. The methods of procedure for this study included an investigation of the philosophical, theological, and historical situation out of which the concept developed to discover the nature and weight of their contribution. It was necessary to inspect the main tenets of demythologizing using primary sources as much as possible in order to avoid conflict with another man's bias towards demythologizing. Another step of equal importance was to find out what critics had

to say about the concept and to weigh both arguments. In this way the search for a usable future in the area of demythologizing could be accomplished.

The study revealed some startling information. It was discovered that demythologizing was first posed by the Greeks and found expression in ancient Christianity. The question of demythologizing has always been an inevitable consequence of the progress of scientific thought. The Greeks and Christians shared the common problem of defending their religious faith against scientific criticism. In this case, there has always been the temptation of affirming that religious values were presented in mythical forms and should not be taken literally. Demythologization found its highest public expression in the developments of Rudolph Bultmann.

A look at demythologizing as a whole revealed that it was based on certain Bultmannian presuppositions and assumptions which were fatal and unfair to the Holy Scriptures. These assumptions were themselves based upon two kinds of knowledge: knowledge gained by inference from the objective world, and existential knowledge--knowledge of authentic living that is known only in the moment when it is lived. Of these two kinds of knowledge, the latter became the decisive argument for demythologizing. The presuppositions of existentialism comprised the real reason for demythologizing the New Testament.

There was a sort of paradox inherent in demythologizing. For, although God became alive through Christian faith in Jesus' cross, there seemed to be little specifically Christian about the means by which God acts in man. The content of Christianity was limited to a man who died on the cross, and the paradox of faith was expressed in the idea that there was no reason to accept this particular man as the definite saving event. The being of Jesus Christ became God's action for man, but Christ had no significant role on earth other than to inspire men.

It was God that encountered man within his own existence was the affirmation of demythologization. Hence, a theology of God and man without sufficient reference to Christ as a person, teaching, and event for the knowledge and action of God constituted a basic fallacy in demythologization.

Since Bultmann saw a radical opposition between past fact and existential history, his program of demythologizing accorded no value to historical evidences through which revelation was mediated. The very notion of evidence was unthinkable because it presupposed that God's action could be objectified. It is true that the motive of faith is the uncreated witness of God Himself, but this should not hinder one from accepting evidences of credibility which support the reasonable character of his faith. Jesus' miracles, His

sublime moral life, and His humanity do not exhaust the transcendence of revelation as the Word of God but they are evidences which might lead to confessing His deity.

Demythologizing compromised the living dialectic of kerygma and history, which is the very standard of Christian knowledge of Jesus Christ. It is illogical to rob the Christian faith of the mutual interplay of history and mystery. To do this is to undermine the very originality of Christian revelation.

The two central elements in the Christ event are the cross and the resurrection. Demythologization interpreted the cross and the resurrection as one event. It argued that the historicity of the resurrection cannot be established by historical criticism. Demythologization sees the cross, not as an event external to man but, as an event within man's own existence. The cross is not a once-for-all event. It is a constant happening. The cross means that man is being crucified with Christ. Similarly, the resurrection is only the proof of the atoning significance of the cross.

In the concept of demythologization, the cross was pictured as an eschatological event. When man chooses the cross, he chooses the end and ground of his existence. He not only experiences newness; he becomes radically new. He is born again. In this eschatological event man can acquire new "qualities" and enter a new mode of being. Through faith, human existence experiences the reality of

its eschatological aspect as promised, and if he accepts God's justifying grace, man moves into the eschaton, into his final mode of existence. However the believer knows that true eternal life does not fulfil itself in time. Real life is yet to come. True eschatological life does not appear in time but it has begun here and now and will have no end. It is the last moment that is filled with eternity. It is in the last moment that the words of Jesus will be verified in all their depth, "I am the resurrection and the life, he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live; and whosoever lives and believes in me shall never die" (John 11:25).

CONCLUSIONS

The modern man stands in need of an understanding of the Scriptures which is compatible, and not contrary, to his scientific mentality. However, in the process of facing this demand, theological research must not capitulate to any rash system of hermeneutics that will injure the message of the Bible in the long run. In fact, part of the task of biblical interpretation is to recognize that no single system, in itself, will be adequate enough to explicate the full meaning of sacred literature.

The main task of biblical hermeneutics is to encourage those areas of interpretation which vindicate the central message of the sacred Scriptures. Biblical

interpretation must be backed up by Christian experience if it is ever going to be effective. This understanding highlights the error of modern theological developments, for the one who calls himself an exegete is, in all too many cases not a man with an experience of salvation. A genuine experience of salvation is crucial as far as biblical scholarship is concerned. God will not reveal His mysteries to the natural man for he is unable to comprehend and entertain them. Scripture belongs to the Holy Spirit and the things of the Spirit are only revealed to those who are led by the Spirit.

Demythologization has done an injustice to the understanding of a personal God and to the deity of the man Christ Jesus. Any system which does injury to the historicity of the resurrection, ascension, and the second coming of Christ and the eternal bliss of the redeemed cannot qualify as sound biblical interpretation. For, when all is said and done, the mark of solid biblical interpretation rests upon the infallibility of the Sacred Writ and a deep reverence for God and His eternal activity.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

Theology is now in its post-Bultmannian era for some of his students and colleagues have reconsidered several possibilities for resolving the message of the New Testament concerning Jesus in history. At present

this is an open subject and one worthy of detailed study. This historical quest might prove to be an adequate corrective as far as Bultmannian theology is concerned.

Another area of theological enterprise which is the offshoot of the demythologization enigma and which is worthy of further study is the New Hermeneutic. This is a movement which has gone beyond Bultmann in applying the principles of the later Heidegger. It is not only an influential theology of language, but for many it is theology itself. This can be a very fruitful study in relationship to demythologizing. In this movement, existential interpretation is considered as the initial stage towards solving the problem of hermeneutics which has baffled modern theology for a number of years.

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