

RUDOLF BULTMANN'S
DEMYTHOLOGIZING
OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

A theological debate of major importance was begun in 1941 by Rudolf Bultmann's conference "Neues Testament und Mythologie," and for almost twenty years it has been carried on by theologians, exegetes, and philosophers of the most diverse backgrounds and convictions. The five volumes edited by Hans Werner Bartsch under the title *Kerygma und Mythos*,¹ a collection containing the conference of Bultmann, and many of the contributions to the debate from Bultmann himself and others, are evidence of the interest which has been aroused. It is gratifying that Catholic scholars have taken their part; the fifth volume of *Kerygma und Mythos* is made up of some of their discussions of the problem. One finds there the names of Karl Adam, R. Schnackenburg, J. de Fraine, and J. Hâmer, among others. The fullest treatments given thus far by Catholics are Léopold Malevez's *Le Message Chrétien et le Mythe*,² and René Marlé's *Bultmann et l'Interprétation du Nouveau Testament*.³ Among the works in English which should be specially mentioned are Reginald Fuller's *Kerygma and Myth*,⁴ a translation of much of the first volume of *Kerygma und Mythos*, and a small part of the second, together with an essay by the English theologian, Austin Farrer; also, Ian Henderson's *Myth in the New Testament*.⁵ The essay of Amos Wilder, "Mythology and New Testament,"⁶ and that of Kendrick Grobel, "Bultmann's Problem of New Testament 'Mythology'"⁷ are of interest, since both were

¹ Hamburg: Vol. I, 2 ed., 1951; II, 1952; III, 1954; IV, 1955; V, 1955. N.B.: This work will be cited hereafter as *KM*.

² Brussels-Bruges-Paris: 1954. An excellent discussion of this book can be found in V. T. O'Keefe's "A Recent Interpretation of Bultmann," *Theological Studies* 16 (1955), 77-85.

³ Paris: 1956.

⁴ London: 1953.

⁵ Chicago: 1952.

⁶ *Journal of Biblical Literature* 69 (1950), 113-127.

⁷ *Ibid.* 70 (1951), 99-103.

included by Bultmann in a rather limited list of what he considered "important or characteristic" reactions to his position.⁸ Geraint Vaughan Jones' *Christology and Myth in the New Testament*⁹ gives a sympathetic, though critical, appraisal.

The most important contributions of Bultmann himself, in addition to the initial conference, are his study, *Zu J. Schniewinds Thesen, das Problem der Entmythologisierung betreffend*,¹⁰ and the essay which appeared in 1951, *Zum Problem der Entmythologisierung*.¹¹ Except for the first part of the former, both of these are translated in Fuller's *Kerygma and Myth*.¹² Most useful for an understanding of Bultmann's view on the act and the word of God, a central notion in his demythologizing, is his essay "Welchen Sinn hat es, von Gott zu reden?", which was first published in 1925, and appears in the first volume of his collected essays, *Glauben und Verstehen*.¹³

I

The task which Bultmann proposes in "Neues Testament und Mythologie"—one which he has no ambition to complete by himself, for "it calls for the full time and strength of a generation of theologians"¹⁴—is that of demythologizing the New Testament proclamation. It is a task which is motivated not only by considerations of theological science, but also by genuine pastoral concern. For much of what the New Testament has to say is completely foreign to "modern man" who thinks "scientifically," and because that is so, many men will not accept any of it, for they are convinced that it is all of a piece; that it is exclusively mythological. It would be a mistake, of course, to think that Bultmann's motive in demythologizing is "to make the New Testament relevant to the

⁸ *KM* II, 179.

⁹ London: 1956.

¹⁰ *KM* I, 122-138.

¹¹ *KM* II, 180-208.

¹² 102-123; 191-211. N.B.: Hereafter, when a reference to *Kerygma und Mythos* is given, the corresponding reference to *Kerygma and Myth* will be given merely by citing the pagination of the latter in parentheses. Since *Kerygma and Myth* is only a partial translation, the second reference will sometimes be lacking.

¹³ 2 ed. (Tuebingen: 1954), 26-37.

¹⁴ *KM* I, 26 (15).

modern world at all costs."¹⁵ Pastoral concern plays its part, but Bultmann would be quite prepared to reject the New Testament *in toto*, unless he could find that the New Testament mythology is merely a way of expressing the kerygma—the proclamation—and that the kerygma itself is not myth.

It is interesting to see that in the entire essay Bultmann only once defines what he means by "myth," and that in a footnote. He seems to take an almost careless attitude to what would appear to be a central element of his thesis; in fact, in the essay *Zum Problem der Entmythologisierung*, in which he answered certain criticisms of his position, he said that he did not think that questions about the concept of "myth" were among the most important.¹⁶ We shall have occasion later to see the various titles on which he considers a statement mythological, and in connection with that to consider the charge that he has fluctuated in his idea of myth, and that in his explanation of the redemptive event he has accepted as real an act of God which he had previously ruled out as mythological. At the moment, we shall simply recall the definition which he gave in the 1941 essay, and then see what elements of the New Testament he thinks mythological.

As for the definition: "Mythology is the presentation of the otherworldly in terms of this world, and the divine in terms of human life; the presentation of the other side in terms of this side—for example, God's transcendence is expressed as spatial distance."¹⁷

What elements of the New Testament are mythical? Briefly, the following: the world-picture (*Weltbild*) of the New Testament is mythical, and the redemptive event is presented in mythical language. The world of the New Testament is a three-storied structure: heaven, earth, and the underworld. Heaven is the abode of God and the angels; the underworld is hell, the abode of Satan and his demons. The earth is not only the scene of the ordinary life of men, but the place into which the celestial and infernal forces are constantly intruding, both in the events of nature and in the thinking,

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 22 (10).

¹⁶ *KM* II, 180.

¹⁷ *KM* I, 22, n. 2 (10, n. 2).

willing, and acting of men. Man is not master of himself: there is demoniacal possession, and, less spectacularly, Satan may inspire him with evil thoughts. On the other hand, God can guide man's thinking and willing, He can speak to him, and give him the supernatural power of the Spirit.

History is controlled by supernatural forces. This age (aeon) is under the power of Satan, Sin and Death; but this age is hastening to its end. That end will be cosmic catastrophe; the Judge will come from heaven, the dead will rise, men will be judged and enter into salvation or damnation.

Corresponding to this mythical world-picture, there is the presentation of the redemptive event in mythical language. A pre-existent Divine Being, the Son of God, appears on earth as a man, and makes atonement for men's sins by His death on the cross. His resurrection from the dead is the beginning of the cosmic catastrophe, through which death is overcome, and the demonic forces lose their power. The risen Christ is exalted to heaven, from which He will soon come again as judge, at which time all will rise from the dead. In the meantime, those who are joined to the risen Lord by baptism and the Eucharist receive the Spirit, which works within them, and is the pledge of their own resurrection from the dead.¹⁸

Modern man simply cannot believe in this mythology, which is nothing but a mixture of an outmoded cosmology and themes derived partly from Jewish apocalyptic, partly from the Gnostic redemption myth. He knows that there is no three-storied world; there is no longer any heaven or hell in the traditional meaning of those words. Natural science has shown him that the universe is a closed one; there are many things in it which are not understood, but no one seeks an explanation for them in the supposed activity on earth of heavenly or hellish powers. Biology and psychology have given man an understanding of himself as a unified being (*ein einheitliches Wesen*), solely responsible for his own thinking and acting—he is quite as closed as is the physical universe to the interference of outside powers. Therefore, he cannot accept what the New Testament has to say about nature miracles, or about the pneuma which possesses man, and changes him, and becomes the

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 15 f. (1 f.).

principle of his thinking and acting, or about the sacraments in which pneuma, a spiritual force, is communicated by material means.¹⁹

Man understands, moreover, that death is a perfectly natural thing. It cannot, then, be the punishment for sin—man is subject to death even before he commits sin. And if the escape for that difficulty is to be looked for in the doctrine of original sin, modern man recognizes that to attribute human mortality to the fall of Adam is senseless, for guilt implies personal responsibility, and the idea of original sin which regards it as if it were an inherited illness is sub-ethical, and impossible.²⁰

So, too, the notion that one man's guilt can be expiated by the death of another is unthinkable; therefore the New Testament doctrine of atonement by the death of Christ cannot be accepted. The entrance of the pre-existing Son of God into the world, rescuing men by drawing them with Himself into the heavenly world of light out of which He has come, cannot be accepted—it is irrational, and utterly meaningless. The resurrection of Jesus cannot be accepted, for it involves an impossible nature-miracle.²¹

Is there any truth in the New Testament, a truth independent of this mythology, which can be accepted even though these mythical elements evidently cannot be believed? The very nature of myth suggests that there may be. For the purpose of myth is not to present an objectively true world-picture but to express man's understanding of himself in the world in which he finds himself. Myth is an expression of man's conviction that the origin and purpose of the world are not to be sought in it, but beyond the realm of known and tangible reality; that he is not master of his own being; that he can be delivered from the forces within the visible world which now dominate him.²² Therefore, since myth expresses a certain understanding of human existence, it is to be interpreted existentially. The task of the theologian is not to eliminate the myths—that was the error of the liberal school—but to interpret them, and

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 17-19 (4-6).

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 20 (7).

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*, 22 f. (10 f.).

to interpret them existentially, for only that kind of interpretation is suitable, considering the nature and intention of myth. The New Testament myths are an expression of a certain understanding of existence, and if this understanding is a possible one, then faith can accept it as true, even though the mythical imagery is obsolete and incredible.

It is impossible, of course, to prove the truth of the New Testament understanding of existence—it can only be accepted in faith. But to accept it in faith involves no *sacrificium intellectus* if it can be shown that the New Testament understanding of human existence corresponds to the real possibilities of human existence—if it corresponds to the self-understanding which all men have in an unreflective and unscientific way, and which was given systematized form in Heidegger's existentialist analysis of *Dasein*, "human existence." This is, undeniably, to approach the New Testament with a philosophy, and to use that philosophy as a norm of interpretation. It is a matter of serious difference between Bultmann and Karl Barth; for Barth, man cannot come to the Bible with any preconceived idea of what in it is to be accepted, and what rejected—to do so is to attack the sovereignty of God. It is the Bible which will tell him whether his ideas are right, not the other way around. Here we must concede that Bultmann comes closer to the position of Catholic theology than Barth does.²³ Certainly, a philosophy cannot be the adequate norm for judging the content of Scripture; if the Scripture is the word of God it will speak of things which no human system of thought can ever know by itself. At the same time, when Catholic theologians attempt to show that a doctrine of faith is not against reason, they are certainly judging it by norms of human knowledge, even though allowing that it speaks of matters which surpass human reason—and which can be accepted only by faith. And that is what Bultmann claims that he is doing. Judged by the categories of *Dasein* (human existence) established

²³ Cf. R. Marlé, *op. cit.*, 91: "Il y a même dans cette attention portée à la philosophie, dans ce souci de trouver celle qui puisse le plus adéquatement servir la réflexion de l'exégète et du théologien, quelque chose de tout à fait traditionnel." See also the remarks of L. Malevez in his study, "Exégèse biblique et Philosophie," *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 78 (1956), 897-914; 1027-1042, pp. 1038-1041.

by Heidegger's analysis, the New Testament myths give an understanding of human existence which corresponds, at least partially, with man's own understanding of himself; the possibilities of realizing true existence which they offer are seen to be real possibilities. But only faith can tell me that the possibility offered by the New Testament—the decision to be crucified with Christ—is the only way in which I can achieve authentic existence. The analysis of *Dasein* shows that the possibility offered by the New Testament is a true possibility—only through faith can I accept it as the only one. If Catholic theologians disagree with Bultmann on this matter, it is not because he approaches the New Testament with intellectual postulates, but because they cannot accept those postulates.

Why does Heidegger's philosophy play this important part in Bultmann's thought?²⁴ Because he considers that Heidegger's analysis of human existence (*Dasein*) is merely the "clear and methodical development of the understanding of existence which is present in existence itself"²⁵—it is the scientific analysis of a pre-scientific, vital, unreflective understanding of what existence means. Now if the intention of the New Testament is to give an understanding of existence, it is essential to see whether or not the understanding which they offer is a possible one. Only by faith can one decide that it is the true one, and choose it; but such a decision is inconceivable if one does not see, previously, that it is at least a possible understanding. And the service which Bultmann asks of Heidegger's analysis is an answer to the question whether the New Testament understanding of existence is a possible one.

When Heidegger speaks of existence, *Dasein*, he does not mean the mere fact of *being*; *Dasein* is the existence proper to *man*; as distinguished from *Vorhandensein*—the brute reality proper to other beings. *Dasein* is characterized by the possibility of inquiring about being in general, of understanding oneself, of freely disposing of oneself by decision, by *choosing* what one is to be. "Human being,

²⁴ As Malevez points out in the article cited (p. 1042), Bultmann seems to have arrived at his position before coming under the influence of Heidegger, but the latter's existentialist anthropology furnished concepts which allowed Bultmann to give a more elaborated and considered expression to the demythologized Christianity which he had already accepted.

²⁵ *KM* II, 189.

as distinct from all other being, means existing—a form of being which assumes complete responsibility for itself.”²⁶ The analysis of *Dasein* (“the clear and methodical development of the understanding of existence which is present in existence itself”) is a purely “formal” analysis, i.e., it does not tell man *how* he should exist, what existential decisions he *should* make, but simply that he must exist, or, if that be saying too much, “it tells him what ‘to exist’ means.”²⁷ “Of course, such an analysis does in effect become a ‘norm’ in so far as it attempts to make the phenomena of existence intelligible, as for instance . . . the phenomenon of love. Yet it is a misconception to suppose that this involves a decision ‘as to what each man’s love means for him.’ Rather, the reverse is true. Existentialist (*existential*) analysis can only make clear that each concrete instance of love can only be understood existentially (*existentiell*)—i.e., in its very exercise.”²⁸ The analysis is called “existentialist” because it examines what existence is, and establishes the categories of *Dasein*; but any particular decision, any encounter with another is exclusively personal, it is “existential,” it is the very act of existence.

Heidegger’s analysis of *Dasein*²⁹ reveals that man, reflecting on his being, is aware of anxiety about it, recognizing that he is in the world as one thrown into it, and that his ultimate destiny is death. At the same time he is aware that his being is “power-to-be”; he is not condemned, as other beings are, to one way of existing; he is free, and can decide to exist in this way or that. Yet he sees that *Dasein* as being-in-the-world is preoccupied with entities not itself, and tends to become preoccupied with them to the point of distraction. It “falls away” from the understanding of itself. In this fall, *Dasein* tends to understand itself in terms of other entities, which it is not. Hence, the existentialist analysis reveals man as

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 193 (193).

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 194 (195).

²⁹ Cf. Werner Brock, “An Account of ‘Being and Time,’” in Heidegger’s *Existence and Being* (Chicago: 1949), 25-131; H. Rahner, “Introduction au Concept de Philosophie Existentielle chez Heidegger,” *Recherches de Science Religieuse* 30 (1940), 152-171; F. Copleston, *Contemporary Philosophy* (Westminster: 1956), 176-184; L. Malevez, *Le Message Chrétien et le Mythe*, 25-28.

Being characterized by anxiety, thrown into the world, fallen, and destined to death, and yet able to choose the way in which he is to exist, as other beings cannot; open to various possibilities of existence. Either of two decisions is open to him: he can *decide* to immerse himself in the world of things—to ratify his fallenness by personal decision—and seek security in crowd consciousness, at the expense of personal responsibility and self-direction: this is the choice for “unauthentic existence.” Or he may assume responsibility for his destiny, committing himself to the fulfillment of the possibilities that are open to him, such as love, trust, friendship, and above all freely acquiescing in—choosing—his destiny to death. Renouncing the false security which comes when one preoccupies himself with visible, tangible reality, he may open himself to the future—this is the choice for authentic existence. This authentic existence is, of course, not something which, once achieved, is an inalienable possession: it is achieved only by decision which must be made anew in each concrete situation.

These, then, are the possibilities which are open to man: decision to immerse himself in the world of things—the world of *Vorhandensein*—and lead “unauthentic existence”; decision to accept his destiny to death, and to accept all the possibilities of realizing himself which each concrete situation in which he finds himself discloses to him.

For Bultmann there is a striking similarity between this existentialist analysis of *Dasein* and the picture which the New Testament—especially the Pauline epistles—gives of life without faith, and life in faith.³⁰ Man without faith finds himself in the world, handed over to its powers. But if the world is hostile to man it is so only because of man's sin: not matter as such (as in the Gnostic mythology) but sin, is the reason why the world is a world of corruption and death. And since sin is there because of the free decision of man, man is responsible for the present state of the world. Sin and death come from the flesh (Rom. 8:13; Gal. 6:18), and the

³⁰ *KM* I, 33 (25): “If at times some have objected that I am interpreting the New Testament with the categories of Heidegger's philosophy of existence, I fear that they are blinding themselves to the real problem. What I mean is, that they should rather be startled that philosophy is saying, independently, the same thing that the New Testament is saying.”

flesh is "the sphere of the visible, the tangible, the measurable, that which is in man's control (*Verfuegbar*)."³¹ To live according to the flesh, *kata sarka*, is to put one's trust in these realities, to seek security in them, and *this* is sin. This leads to anxiety, to the relentless search for these realities in an effort to achieve security. But because the visible and tangible is transitory, it can give no real security, and the sense that that is so only increases anxiety: "man loses his 'life,' his authentic existence (*seine eigentliche Existenz*), and becomes the slave of that very sphere which he had hoped to master, and which he hoped would give him security."³² This is life without faith—and its correspondence with the fallenness, anxiety, unauthentic existence of the existentialist analysis of *Dasein* shows that it is a concept which man can understand and accept, for it describes a real situation.

To this "life without faith" the New Testament contrasts "life in faith," or, life "according to the spirit," *kata pneuma*. It is a life which is based on invisible, intangible realities; a life in which man renounces all contrived security, and opens himself to the future. Such a life is possible for man only if he believes in the "grace" of God;³³ i.e., if he believes that God has freed him from his past; freed him from clinging to tangible reality, and from the false security which he sought in that. Since such clinging is sin, to be freed from it means forgiveness of sin. Faith means opening oneself to the future,³⁴ trusting completely in God, committing oneself to Him, in the expectation that all will come from Him, and nothing from oneself. It means complete detachment from the world, and so, complete freedom. The Spirit is the possibility of a new life, which must be appropriated by deliberate resolve.³⁵ When this resolve is made, then man is a "new creature." Consequently the existence lived by the man of faith is eschatological existence;³⁶ the old things are passed away, his relation to the world is com-

³¹ *Ibid.*, 28 (18): ". . . die Sphaere des Sichtbaren, des Vorhandenen, Verfuegbaren, Messbaren. . ."

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*, 29 (19).

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 31 (22).

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 30 (20).

pletely changed. Christian existence, so understood, is unmythological; it is a real possibility for man.

But how does the New Testament interpretation of existence differ from that of the existentialist analysis? *In the first place*, the New Testament declares that the "fallenness" (*Verfallenheit*) of man is *aversio a Deo*. No philosopher can say that; ". . . only through faith can fallenness be seen as *aversio a Deo*, because it is only by faith that God is encountered as a Person."³⁷

In the second place, the most important point of difference. Philosophy thinks that the decision of man to rise from his fallenness and lead authentic existence is a decision which man can make by himself. He needs only to be shown what his present condition is, in order to be able to get out of it. For the New Testament, on the contrary, it is only by an act of God that he can do so. And the New Testament says that God has acted, that He has acted in Christ, forgiving man's sin, freeing him from his past, enabling him to make the decision to rise from his fallenness, from his preoccupation with visible and tangible realities (which is what sin is), and to lead authentic existence—existence in which he opens himself to the future, overcomes his dread of suffering, renounces his lusts, lives, in a word, in a way which the New Testament calls being "crucified with Christ."

Now just as man cannot recognize that his fallenness is *aversio a Deo*, except by faith, so it is only by faith that he can know that he cannot get out of his fallenness except by an act of God. And only by faith can he accept the New Testament claim that God has acted, on his behalf, in Christ. "The question is not whether the nature of man can be discovered apart from the New Testament . . . the question is whether the 'nature' of man is realizable, i.e., whether man can achieve his authentic 'nature' merely by reflecting on it, once he has been shown what it is. . . . Philosophy is convinced that all we need is to be told about the 'nature' of man, in order to realize it."³⁸ The New Testament on the contrary, says "that man cannot free himself from his fallenness, but that he is freed by an act of God . . . its (the New Testament's) proclamation is the

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 124 (104 f.).

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 34 f. (26 f.).

proclamation of this saving act of God, the redemptive act (*Heilsgeschehen*) wrought in Christ." 39

Why is the New Testament claim that man cannot free himself from his fallenness except by an act of God understandable? Simply because "only those who are loved are capable of loving; only those who have received confidence as a gift can show confidence; only those who know what self-commitment (*Hingabe*) is by experience can adopt that attitude themselves." 40 Man is self-assertive, he is totally fallen, "in fallenness (*Verfallenheit*) every movement of man is the movement of fallen men." 41 The very fact that he thinks he can escape from his fallenness by himself is an expression of his self-assertiveness (*eigenmachtigkeit*). Only if he has an experience of love, confidence, self-commitment on the part of God can he achieve authentic existence, and himself love, show confidence, practice self-commitment. And the New Testament proclamation is that God has acted, that he has revealed his love in Christ, and so has freed man from his past, and made possible for him authentic existence. The New Testament cannot prove its claim that God has acted in Christ any more than it can prove that man's fallenness is *aversio a Deo*. But at least the claim is not mythological, and therefore man can understand it, and can accept it without any *sacrificium intellectus*. Whether or not he will accept it is, of course, a different question. In his reply to the theses of J. Schniewind, Bultmann said: "You tell us that even when Christianity has been emancipated from myth, modern man continues to reject it because it speaks of an act of God, and of sin. . . . But that is another matter altogether. Christianity is then rejected not because it is myth, but because it is "*skandalon*." 42

If Bultmann were quite clear on what he means by the "act of God in Christ," we would be in a position now to judge whether or not he has, on his own terms, demythologized it. On that point, however, those who have commented on his thought have taken two different interpretations of it, the majority following what

39 *Ibid.*, 35 (27).

40 *Ibid.*, 39 (32 f.).

41 *Ibid.*, 37 (29).

42 *Ibid.*, 123 f. (104).

Malevez calls the "subjectivistic" interpretation; a minority, in which are Malevez himself, and Friedrich Gogarten,⁴³ holding the "objectivistic" interpretation. Before we can inquire whether he has succeeded in demythologizing the kerygma, we must see these two interpretations of his thought on the central point of the kerygma, the saving act of God in Christ. In doing so, we shall see how he understands Redemption and eschatology, and how even on the "objectivistic" interpretation we would have to agree substantially with Oscar Cullmann that in eliminating what he calls "myth," he has actually eliminated redemptive history (*Heilsgeschichte*).⁴⁴

II

The New Testament declares that the saving act of God on our behalf is to be found in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Bultmann accepts that—"In the end, all is concentrated on the central question: the Cross and the Resurrection."⁴⁵ Evidently, neither cross nor resurrection mean for him what they do for the Catholic theologian—or, for that matter, for many Protestants—; for him, the way in which the New Testament portrays the cross is a mixture of ideas on sacrifice and a legalistic satisfaction theory which are no longer tenable.⁴⁶ And the bodily resurrection of Jesus never happened; it is simply a myth.⁴⁷

What, then, is his understanding of the New Testament proclamation of the death and resurrection? What relation do cross and resurrection have with the saving act of God?

All, I think, will agree that for Bultmann the saving act of God is *at least* this: God's word is addressed to me here and now, in the preaching of the Church. That word reveals that God has judged and pardoned me; it challenges me to decision—the decision to give up false security based on tangible reality, to open myself freely to the future, putting my trust in God who calls me. This preaching, through which God speaks to me, summons me to die and rise with

⁴³ Cf. *Demythologizing and History* (New York: 1955).

⁴⁴ "Rudolf Bultmann's Concept of Myth and the New Testament," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 27 (1956), 13-24, p. 13.

⁴⁵ *KM* I, 41 (35).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 42 (35).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 45 (39); *KM* III, 51.

Christ. There is, then, in Bultmann's thought some relation between the saving act of God which affects me here and now, and the historical cross of Jesus. Those who follow the subjectivistic interpretation give this explanation of the relation: The death of Jesus, as an historical fact, has no significance, *in itself*, for man's salvation. There was no divine act in the death of Jesus. The death of Jesus is *historisch*—an event of past history, and nothing more. How does the Cross become a *geschichtlich* event—one which, although it took place in the historical past, has a vital existential reference to the man of today? By its proclamation as salvific in the kerygma of the Church. This proclamation of the Cross as salvific takes the form of preaching that Jesus not only died, but rose from the dead. The resurrection of the dead body of Jesus is purely mythical, of course; it never took place because it is incredible that a corpse should be brought back to life. But the meaning of the proclamation of the resurrection is that Christ triumphed over death, and that his death is salvific for those who, on hearing the preaching, will accept crucifixion with him: "Faith in the resurrection is really the same thing as faith in the saving efficacy of the Cross."⁴⁸ The purpose of the kerygma is to announce to man God's judgement, his revelation to man that he is a sinful creature who cannot overcome sin by his own power. But this judgment liberates man for it shows him that he can be freed from his sinfulness if he will be crucified with Christ, if he will renounce his affections and lusts, overcome his natural dread of suffering, and live in detachment from the world. The decision on man's part to do this will make him pass from a life of sin, a life in which he puts his trust in visible, tangible reality; by this decision he will experience God's pardon, and be enabled to live a life based on unseen, intangible realities—a "life in faith." When this happens, the saving act of God has taken place in man; and *that*—not a Parousia accompanied by cosmic catastrophe—is the eschatological event. The judgment has already taken place for those who have accepted the preaching of the Cross. This saving act is something purely interior to the believer—something objective has happened, of course, for God has *really* addressed him. But the historical death of Jesus is nothing more than an

⁴⁸ *KM* I, 46 (41).

example, an inspiration helping man to make his own decision in response to the word of God, addressed to him in the kerygma. "The crucifixion represents the authentic existence of man, and asks me if I will make this existence my own. Faith in the Crucified, therefore, is understood as in the medieval expression 'the imitation of Christ'."⁴⁹

Those who hold the objectivistic interpretation think that the subjectivistic does not do justice to Bultmann's thought on the relation between the saving act of God and the historical cross of Jesus. In their opinion, Bultmann maintains that there was a real act of God *in Christ*; the death of Jesus was part of the redemptive event, quite apart from man's decision to accept the kerygma and be crucified with Christ. The historical cross was the beginning of God's notification that he has judged and pardoned man. The judgment of God, itself timeless, was manifested in time by the death of Jesus, even before the Cross was proclaimed salvific in the apostolic preaching, even before men believed in its saving efficacy.⁵⁰

It seems that the objectivistic interpretation is justified by certain texts of Bultmann in which he speaks of the relation between the historical cross and the redemptive event as it takes place in the believer. One of the most trenchant criticisms of Bultmann's position is to be found in the theses which J. Schniewind formulated against it. In one of these we find an objection which presupposes the subjectivistic interpretation: "Bultmann emphasizes what he calls the 'historic significance' (*geschichtliche Bedeutsamkeit*) of the Cross. By that he does not mean the historical uniqueness of the revelation of God, but historicity as the pattern of human life. He abstracts from any relation to the historical cross of Jesus as an event of the past. . . . What Bultmann says about the significance of the Cross is confined to our human existence . . . he never speaks

⁴⁹ R. Prenter, "Mythos und Evangelium," *KM* II, 69-84, p. 78. Cf. also J. Hâmer, "Le Christ est Ressuscité," *L'Église et les Églises*, Vol. II (Editions de Chevetogne: 1955), 437-468, p. 458: "Partant de la nature kérygmatische du Nouveau Testament, le professeur de Marbourg aboutit à une réduction de l'événement du salut à la prédication qui l'annonce. Si le Nouveau Testament est prédication, le salut lui-même n'est en aucune façon antérieur à la parole prêchée."

⁵⁰ Cf. L. Malevez, *op. cit.*, 102.

of the historical uniqueness of the revelation of God in the Crucified One." ⁵¹

In his answer to these theses, Bultmann said of those comments: "If I had abstracted from the relation of faith to the historical cross of Jesus as an event of the past, I would certainly have surrendered the belief and kerygma of the New Testament. But that is not my intention. I am concerned with the historic (*geschichtlich*) significance of the unique historical (*historisch*) event, in virtue of which, although it is a unique historical (*historisch*) event, it is nevertheless the eschatological event. . . . I do not contest the uniqueness (*Einmaligkeit*) of Jesus; on the contrary, I think that I have given it its true value in emphasizing that 'the word was made flesh,' in which the preaching has its origin (*Ursprung*) and legitimation." ⁵²

What is Bultmann's understanding of "the word was made flesh"? Certainly not that the Second Person of the Trinity became man, but that the Word of God—his Revelation—is communicated through a man. And there, precisely, is the *skandalon*: the Word, which belongs to the sphere of pneuma, is announced through one who is of the sphere of the flesh.⁵³ Moreover, this "the word was made flesh" is not something that happened only once. "When a man like myself speaks the Word of God to me, the Word of God becomes incarnate in him. For the Incarnation, regarded as an eschatological event, is not an event of the past which can be dated; it is an event which is continually being re-enacted in the event of preaching." ⁵⁴

It might seem that these considerations about the meaning of "the word was made flesh," far from giving "true value" to the uniqueness of Jesus, detracts from it—Jesus is only one of many in whom the Word has become flesh. And in a sense that is so. At the same time, it seems that a comparison of these statements with those of the reply to Schniewind shows that the preaching has an

⁵¹ *KM* I, 93 (66).

⁵² *Ibid.*, 128 f. (110 f.).

⁵³ Cf. *Das Evangelium des Johannes* 14 ed. (Goettingen: 1956), 40: "In dieser Sphaere (that of the flesh) erscheint der Logos, d.h. der Offenbarer ist nichts als ein Mensch. . . . Das Aergernis ist also durch das ho logos sarx egeneto aufs staerkste betont."

⁵⁴ *KM* II, 206, n. 1 (209, n. 1).

intrinsic connection with the historical Jesus, and that this connection, in which Jesus' uniqueness consists, is that in the historical Jesus (which, as the context shows, means the historical fact of his cross) the preaching has "its *origin* and legitimation." If the historical Jesus is unique, it is because in him the preaching of the Cross has its origin.

Another text which seems to support the objectivistic interpretation. In discussing the question raised by Schniewind, and others, whether he has not "denied that God has acted once for all in Christ, on behalf of the whole world," thus "eliminating the *ephapax* of Rom. 6:10,"⁵⁵ Bultmann interprets that "once for all" in such a way as to show, quite conclusively, it seems, that he regarded the saving act of God as one which took place in Jesus himself: "(The *ephapax*) teaches us, in a high degree of paradox, to believe that just such an event of the past (Jesus' death) is the once-and-for-all eschatological event, which is continually re-enacted in the word of preaching."⁵⁶ And in the *Zu J. Schniewinds Thesen* Bultmann expresses himself in the same way: "The 'Now' of the kerygma (2 Cor. 6:2—Now is the day of salvation) is not accidental; it is the same as that of the advent of Jesus, or of his Passion."⁵⁷ "Faith in the sense of openness for the future is at the same time the acceptance of the judgment of God which happened on the Cross, and still happens (des im Kreuze geschehenen und geschhenden Gerichtes Gottes)."⁵⁸

These texts are all later than the 1941 essay, and are Bultmann's answers to doubts raised by that essay about the relation between the saving act of God in us to the historical cross of Jesus. But in the essay itself, there are texts which throw light on this question, and seem to support the objectivistic interpretation. "By giving up Jesus to be crucified, God has set up the cross for us."⁵⁹ "In its redemptive aspect, the cross of Christ is no mythical event (i.e., no expiatory sacrifice), but an historic (*geschichtlich*) fact,

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 204 (206).

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 206 (209).

⁵⁷ *KM I*, 132 (115).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 131 (114).

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 42 (36).

originating in the past historical (*historisch*) event which is the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth. In its historic significance (*in seiner geschichtlichen Bedeutsamkeit*) this is the judgment on the world, the judgment which liberates men. And so far as it is that, so far is it true that Christ was crucified 'for us.' . . . The mythological language basically has no other purpose than to express the significance of the historical event."⁶⁰

In the light of these texts, it seems just to say that for Bultmann the relation between the saving act of God in us, and the historical cross of Jesus, is that of part to whole, of first act to an entire drama which continues each time that a person, hearing the kerygma, makes the decision to be crucified with Christ. That seems to be the meaning of his statement that the Cross as a permanent historic fact has its origin in the past historical event which is the crucifixion of Jesus.

Here we might ask those who hold the subjectivistic interpretation why Bultmann insists—as they admit he does—that the event of redemption in the individual means God's word to him, in response to which he makes the decision to be crucified *with Christ*? If Jesus and no other is the "example, and inspiration" for one's own decision, why is that so? They answer that Bultmann can give no reason why it should be so, except that the kerygma says that it is. For instance, Ian Henderson says: "Why should one decide about this particular historical being (Jesus) and not about any of the millions of other such beings? The answer is, on Bultmann's view, because the New Testament witnesses summon us to decide for or against this particular historical being."⁶¹ It appears to be a matter of reproach against Bultmann that he holds this view. But we must remember that for Bultmann the primitive kerygma was not the product of man, but of God's speaking to man. And its continuation in the preaching here and now is again God's speaking to man. He denied with the greatest emphasis that this speaking of God is merely a metaphor for, or an interpretation of, a purely subjective state—especially against Helmut Thielicke, who claimed that that was his meaning. This "speaking" is entirely real; its reality is that of

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 42 (37).

⁶¹ *Op. cit.*, 49.

existential encounter,⁶² and consequently, the best possible reason for deciding for Jesus is that the kerygma summons me to such a decision, for that is the word of God to me.

Now, if God, speaking to me, tells me that I must die *with Christ*, if that word of God to me sets up Jesus as the example and inspiration of my own decision, is not that because there was something in the death of Jesus which is lacking in the death (or life) of any of the possible heroic models whom one could think of? If the kerygma exhorts me to be crucified with Christ rather than slain with Judas Maccabeus, is it not because there was something in the death of Christ which is not to be found in that of Judas?

If the "historic significance" of the historical cross consists in its being the judgment of God which liberates man,⁶³ then the uniqueness of the historical cross of Jesus, which Bultmann is at pains to defend, would seem to be that it was the first expression, in time, of that timeless judgment of God. If it were not that, it is hard to see how Bultmann would insist, as he does, on the continuity between the historical cross and the kerygma in which the cross is proclaimed as salvific. ". . . in the New Testament, faith is always faith in Christ . . . (the New Testament) claims that faith only became possible at a definite point in history, in consequence of an event, viz., the event of Christ. Faith in the sense of obedient self-commitment and inward detachment from the world is only possible when it is faith in Christ."⁶⁴ All these texts of Bultmann are best explained, I think, on the objectivistic interpretation: namely, that the reality which the kerygma has (the announcement of the saving judgment of God) is the same reality which was present in the historical cross, and therefore that the saving act of God was present for the first time in the death of Jesus.

But if there was an act of God *in Christ*, outside of and apart from the kerygma of the Church, what was it? (For it certainly was not the expiatory sacrifice of his life offered by the God-Man; that for Bultmann is pure mythology.)

Bultmann's answer to that question would be quite clear, if we

⁶² *KM* II, 196 (196 f.).

⁶³ *KM* I, 43 (37).

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 31 (22).

could say that his answer was the one which, according to Malevez's reading of Friedrich Gogarten, Gogarten thinks that he gave. Jesus, the Word of God, through whom God spoke, revealed in his own preaching God's judgment and pardon of man. Through Jesus, the notification of God's saving judgment was given. Jesus interpreted his own death in advance. The act of God in Christ is not to be found in the Cross as such, but in the interpretation of the Cross given in the kerygma of Jesus himself. That kerygma is, so to speak, the formal element of God's notification; the Cross, thus interpreted, is the material element.⁶⁵

Salva reverentia, I think that that explanation is neither the thought of Bultmann (Malevez admits that it is not exactly so), nor Gogarten's interpretation of his thought. Gogarten never speaks of the interpretation of the cross by the kerygma of Jesus, and if Malevez would reply that that is his meaning, regardless of his not expressly saying so, one could only say that such a view is so foreign to what Bultmann holds on Jesus' kerygma, that it would be rash to think that Gogarten meant it, unless he did say so expressly.⁶⁶ For when Bultmann speaks about Jesus' preaching, he speaks in a way which makes the view which Malevez thinks that Gogarten proposes quite untenable as an explanation of Bultmann's thought.

In the introduction to his "Jesus," Bultmann speaks of the various strata (*eine Reihe von Schichten*) in the tradition about the words of Jesus found in the synoptic gospels.⁶⁷ Some of the tradition originated in Hellenistic Christianity; the words attributed to him in this tradition are certainly not his. The traditions of the Aramaic speaking Palestinian community are not all of equal historical value; those which relate to the specific interests of the community are the community's creation. And even when one gets to the earliest stratum of these Palestinian traditions, one has no

⁶⁵ *Op. cit.*, 105-108.

⁶⁶ Admittedly, Gogarten emphasizes Jesus' kerygma, and sees it as a part of the redemptive event (*op. cit.*, pp. 68 ff.). But I cannot find that he says anywhere in his book that the kerygma of Jesus interpreted the Cross in advance, thus making the connection between that kerygma and the Cross which Malevez attributes to him.

⁶⁷ *Jesus*, 2 ed. (Berlin: 1929) 15.

certainty that the words of Jesus found there were really spoken by him.⁶⁸ It is completely clear (*vollig deutlich*) that Jesus was the originator (*Urheber*) of the spiritual movement of which the oldest Palestinian community is the first verifiable stage, but how far that community preserved His teaching in an unaltered state is another question. However, it is preponderantly probable (*nach ueberwiegender Wahrscheinlichkeit*) that the words which this earliest stratum of the tradition ascribes to Jesus were really His.⁶⁹

Now when discussing the kerygma of Jesus in his *Theology of the New Testament* Bultmann discounts the idea that Jesus predicted His own death on the Cross: "To be sure, the predictions of the passion foretell His execution as divinely foreordained. But can there be any doubt that they are all *vaticinia ex eventu*?"⁷⁰ "The latter (i.e., the predictions of the passion and resurrection) are probably later products of the Hellenistic Church . . . while the predictions of the parousia are old, and are probably the original words of Jesus."⁷¹ The application to Jesus of the prophecy of the suffering Servant of Isaiah 53 was not made by Jesus Himself: ". . . the traditions of Jesus' sayings reveal no trace of consciousness on His part of being the Servant of God of Isaiah 53."⁷² Finally, in the essay "Die Christologie des Neuen Testaments": "His (Jesus') teaching is not new because of its thought content; for in its content it is nothing else than pure Judaism, pure prophetism."⁷³

Moreover, when Bultmann speaks of the source of the preaching that the Cross is salvific, he says that the first preachers of the Gospel perceived the real meaning of the Cross from their direct contact with it: "The cross for them was the cross of him with whom they had lived in personal intercourse. The Cross was an experience of their own lives. It presented them with a question,

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 16: "Natuerlich hat man erst recht keine Sicherheit, dass die Woerte dieser aeltesten Schicht wirklich von Jesus gesprochen sind."

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁷⁰ Vol. I (tr. K. Grobel, London: 1952), 29.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 31.

⁷³ *Glauben und Verstehen*, Vol. I, 2 ed. (Tuebingen: 1954), 245-267, p. 265.

and it disclosed to them its meaning." ⁷⁴ But if Bultmann thought that Jesus in His kerygma had already explained the meaning of the cross, the question of how the first preachers came to perceive its meaning would be that Jesus had explained its meaning beforehand, not that the cross "disclosed to them its meaning."

This shows quite clearly, one would think, that however Bultmann conceived the saving act of God in Christ, it was not as God's speaking through Jesus' preaching about the meaning of the Cross.

Yet if Bultmann's view is, as it seems, that the saving act did take place in Jesus, before and apart from the preaching of the Cross in the kerygma of the Church, where in the history of Jesus is that act to be placed? All that Bultmann has said about the origin of the kerygma in the historical cross would suggest that the saving act is to be placed in the crucifixion itself.

But how is that act to be understood? For Bultmann, an act of God is always a word of God addressed to man: "Our being addressed by God in the here and now, our being questioned, judged, blessed by Him is what we mean when we speak of an act of God." ⁷⁵ To speak in this way of an act of God is not to give a symbolical description of a subjective experience. This speaking of God to man, in which the act of God consists, has all the reality of existential encounter; it is analogous to the encounter of man with man. "Such language is neither pictorial or symbolical, although it is certainly analogical, for it assumes an analogy between the activity of God and that of man, and an analogy between the fellowship of God and man, and that of man and man." ⁷⁶

This speaking of God may take place in many ways: He speaks to me through the word of preaching, through the Bible mediated to me by the Church as the Word of God addressed to me, through the word of a fellow Christian.⁷⁷ God can also speak to me without human intermediary: "In faith I can understand a thought or a resolve of mine as something which is the work of God, without

⁷⁴ *KM* I, 43 (38).

⁷⁵ *KM* II, 196 (196 f.).

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, cf. also "Welchen Sinn hat es, von Gott zu reden?", *Glauben und Verstehen* I, 26-37, p. 35 f.

⁷⁷ *KM* II, 204 (207).

necessarily removing it from its place in the natural chain of cause and effect."⁷⁸ He may speak to me through things which happen in the world (*das weltliche Geschehen*). Not that these happenings are "miraculous"—quite the contrary, they are events which are entirely within the framework of natural cause and effect. But "from time to time the believer sees the concrete happening (*das konkrete Geschehen*) under the light of a word of grace addressed to him, and then faith can and ought to see this concrete happening as an act of God."⁷⁹

Now when Bultmann says that "the cross (an event of history, a concrete happening, intelligible in its context in world history, and, as such, understandable in terms of natural cause and effect) disclosed its meaning" to the first preachers of the Gospel, it would seem that he understands that "disclosure of meaning" as an instance of the speaking of God, revealing the meaning of an event which is, so far as historical research can determine, merely the tragic end of a noble figure, brought about by the hatred of his enemies. Can we believe that Bultmann thought that the meaning of Jesus' death, disclosed to the first preachers, and, through them, to the world, was unknown to Jesus himself? Certainly, Bultmann does not think that Jesus' preaching gives any indication that he was aware of its meaning before the Cross had become a present reality for him. But if the Cross "disclosed its meaning" to the disciples, can it be thought that it did not do so to Jesus himself? And if it did, what does that mean except that Jesus, on the cross, was the first to receive the notification of the saving judgment of God, and that this judgment was first manifested to Jesus himself? On this view, the historical cross of Jesus is the place where God's saving act first took place; where the notification of His liberating judgment was first given. The designation of Jesus as "the first receiver of the notification" is P. Nöber's;⁸⁰ he uses it in his description of Malevez's "objectivistic interpretation" of Bultmann; it seems strikingly apt, and completely faithful to Bultmann's thought.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 197 (197).

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, (198).

⁸⁰ Review of *Le Message Chrétien et le Mythe*, *Biblica* 37 (1956), 115-117, p. 116.

III

Has Bultmann succeeded in his demythologizing? Has he given an explanation of the act of God in Christ which, because it is un-mythological, can be accepted by those who do not think "mythologically"? It is clear that Bultmann asserts the reality of God's speaking to man, whichever interpretation of his thought one follows. Does this assertion mean that Bultmann has fallen into mythological thinking, in spite of his principles? In the beginning of "Neues Testament und Mythologie" he gave as one of the reasons why modern man cannot accept the New Testament as it stands, the fact that science has shown him that he is a "unified being" (*ein einheitliches Wesen*), closed to "the interference of forces outside himself, whether divine or demonic."⁸¹ In that context he gave as an example of mythological thinking the notion that God speaks to man, and guides his thinking and willing.⁸² Yet does not Bultmann's explanation of the encounter of God and man make that encounter a "speaking of God to man," a divine "guiding of man's thinking," an intrusion of the divine into the life of man? Malevez calls this "myth in the broad sense"⁸³, and feels that in that sense Bultmann has not eliminated myth from his explanation of the kerygma.⁸⁴ Friedrich Schumann expressed himself similarly: "If 'mythological' means whatever cannot be reconciled with the modern scientific view of the world, with its closed system of cause and effect, then the eschatological act of God is either no act at all, or

⁸¹ *KM* I, 19 (6).

⁸² *Ibid.*, 15 (1). It is possible that in this text Bultmann means an actual "hearing" of the "voice" of God: ("Gott . . . kann . . . ihn sein befehlendes oder troestendes Wort *hoeren* lassen"). In that case, the text does not give any ground for the charge of inconsistency, for Bultmann certainly does not later assert that in the encounter of God and man, man actually "hears" God's "voice." But the meaning of the text is a matter of relative unimportance, for the problem rises not from that particular text, but from the fact that in "Neues Testament und Mythologie" Bultmann insists that man's inner life cannot be interfered with by an otherworldly power, and the objection is that the encounter is such an interference.

⁸³ *Op. cit.*, 64.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 111.

else it is mythical in the above sense of that word."⁸⁵ And since Bultmann insisted—against Schumann—that he had not fluctuated in his use of the concept of myth,⁸⁶ it is understandable that such a conclusion should be reached.

But if one takes into account statements subsequent to those of the 1941 essay, which clarify their meaning, one can understand better what Bultmann meant when he gave the notion that God speaks to man and guides his thinking as an example of mythological thought.

In the essay *Zum Problem der Entmythologisierung* Bultmann discusses quite fully what he means by myth.⁸⁷ There he reaffirms what he had said in 1941: that for scientific thought man and nature are closed to the interference (*Eingriff*) of other-worldly powers, whereas for mythological thought they are open to it.⁸⁸ But he explains more fully what he means about the way in which mythological thought conceives the interference of the other-worldly powers. It thinks of these powers as if they were like forces of this world; it conceives of an act of God as an event which interferes with the course of nature, of history, or of the life of the soul, by tearing it apart (*ein Handeln, das in den Zusammenhang des natuerlichen, geschichtlichen oder seelischen Lebens eingreift und ihn zerreist*).⁸⁹ The act of God is thought of in the same way in which one would think of the action of a worldly force; it is projected

⁸⁵ *KM* I, 195 (181).

⁸⁶ *KM* II, 183, n. 1.

⁸⁷ In this essay, he accepts the fourfold division of the mythological made by Christian Hartlich and Walter Sachs: "The 'mythological' is that which cannot really happen, (1) because it cannot be established by the common rules of science. Miracles are impossible! (2) because it conflicts with that of unified quality which is a condition of man's personal life. The only medium of God is the Spirit, in the sense of 'the Understandable.' (3) because it contradicts axioms of morality. If we conceive of God as a being of inferior morality, we make him a demon! (4) because it lacks salvific meaning in a sense which is relevant to man's personal life. Existentially irrelevant events are not salvific (*sind heil-los*)! (*KM* II, 182, n. 2.) It is on the second of these points that the charge of inconsistency has been made against Bultmann. He denies the possibility of the interference of otherworldly powers with the closed unity which a human being is, yet he asserts the reality of God's encounter with man.

⁸⁸ *KM* II, 181.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 196 (197).

onto the level of worldly events: "the myth objectivizes the other-worldly as the this-worldly."⁹⁰ Bultmann does not deny that there is an analogy between the acting of God and that of man—as has been seen, he affirms it. For him, to present the other-worldly in terms of this world is mythological not in so far as one draws an analogy between the acting of God and of man, but in so far as one conceives the other-worldly as if it were a worldly force, and conceives its action in this world as something which breaks into the chain of natural cause and effect. Mythological thinking objectivizes God and makes Him like an object of this world; it objectivizes His acting, and projects it onto the level of acting of worldly forces.⁹¹

To think of the transcendent as an object, like the objects of this world, is to think mythologically. Any concept of divine activity which regards what is produced by that activity as something which can be explained only outside of the series of natural cause and effect is mythological. If a thought comes to me which I regard as clearly caused by God's speaking to me—so clearly, that no other explanation of that thought is possible—then I have conceived God's speaking in a mythological way, for I have regarded it as an interference with the series of natural cause and effect. But if the thought is something which can be explained naturally, and yet in faith I accept it as God's word to me, I have conceived God's speaking in an unmythological way: "In faith I can understand a thought or resolve of mine as something which is the work of God, without necessarily removing it from its place in the chain of natural cause and effect."⁹² Only faith can see it as an act of God, and "faith, which speaks of its encounter with the acts of God, cannot defend itself against the charge of illusion. . . . Certainly, it is impossible to prove that faith is related to its object, but faith's strength lies precisely in the fact that it cannot be proved."⁹³

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 184.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 196 (197).

⁹² *Ibid.*, 197 (197): "Einen Gedanken oder einen Entschluss kann ich im Glauben als von Gott gewirkt verstehen, ohne ihn damit seinem innerweltlichen Motivationszusammenhang zu entreissen."

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 199 (200 f.).

Now when it is a matter of decision in face of encounter, *the concept of a "closed" world is no longer valid* ("... fuer mein existentielles Leben, das sich in den Entscheidungen gegenueber den Begegnungen vollzieht, die Welt ihren Character als geschlossenen Zusammenhang verloren hat."⁹⁴ It is the paradox of faith that it understands as an act of God an event which cannot be proved to be such, since it is explicable, without faith, in terms of natural cause and effect. "God's act is hidden for every other eye except that of faith. What can be seen and verified is only the 'natural' event. But in that 'natural' event, there takes place the hidden act of God."⁹⁵

It seems that these further explanations show that the acting of God which Bultmann rejects as mythical, is not all such acting, but only that which is claimed to be demonstrable (as in the case of miracles), or which, although secret, is conceived in such a way that the act of God is put on the level of "worldly" action (as when the Spirit is conceived as a force which, although hidden, influences man in the manner of a natural force.) But the word of God which addresses man and challenges him to decision, and man's response to that word, have the reality of existential encounter. And in the case of such encounter, the closed system of natural cause and effect is transcended.⁹⁶

Whether this "demythologized" acting of God will be accepted as unmythological by Bultmann's modern man is another question entirely. But the explanation found in the 1951 essay seems to justify the opinion that Bultmann has not contradicted himself by maintaining the reality of an act of God, a speaking of God to man, which on his own terms he should have rejected as mythological. For it is not that kind of speaking of God which interferes with the series of natural cause and effect, and which in the 1941 essay he had declared mythological.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 198 (198).

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 196 f. (197).

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 198 (198 f.).

Whatever one may think of Bultmann's enterprise, and of his success in carrying it through, one cannot but be struck by the profoundly religious inspiration—indeed, on his own understanding of it, the profoundly Christian inspiration—of his work. For Bultmann defends the reality of the act of God *in Christ*, and keeps the Gospel from being reduced to a system of religious philosophy, a statement of some few timeless religious truths. That he has impoverished the Christian message; that he has eliminated practically all of the redemptive history, should not blind us to his positive contribution. And, as in the case of so many similar enterprises, the Catholic theologian can learn from Bultmann. The work will remind him sharply of what he knows, of course, but sometimes seem to forget, that the Christian message must be presented to our contemporaries in such a way that if they reject it, they will do so only because they refuse to accept that "foolishness" which is intrinsic to the message. Pierre Benoit's study of the Ascension may be taken as an example of how this task of the modern Catholic theologian should be performed.⁹⁷ Specifically, it seems that what Bultmann has to say about the Resurrection as an object of faith, might well inspire our theologians to put greater emphasis on its soteriological value, which is certainly an object of faith; to give at least as much attention to Saint Paul's statement that Jesus was raised up *for our justification* (Rom. 4,25) as they do to the historical evidence that He was raised up.⁹⁸ In the field of eschatology, Bultmann's insistence on the redemptive event as the eschatological event should stimulate us to a more profound study of the New Testament eschatology, which portrays Christian existence as a "new creation,"⁹⁹ and the Church as the eschato-

⁹⁷ "L'Ascension," *Revue Biblique* 56 (1949) 161-203.

⁹⁸ Some good work has already been done in this field; for example, J. Schmitt, *Jésus Ressuscité dans la Prédication Apostolique* (Paris: 1949); F.-X. Durrwell, *La Résurrection de Jésus, Mystère de Salut* (Paris: 1950); D. M. Stanley, "Ad historiam exegeseos Rom. 4:25," *Verbum Domini* 29 (1951) 257-274; F. Holtz, "La valeur soteriologique de la Résurrection du Christ selon S. Thomas," *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 29 (1953) 609-645; B. Vawter, "Resurrection and Redemption," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 15 (1953) 11-23.

⁹⁹ 2 Cor. 5:17.

logical community.¹⁰⁰ If Bultmann's emphasis on these things—however unacceptable his explanation—serves to make us realize what our own task is, that will be a happy result of what has been in some ways an unfortunate incident in theology.

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Digest of the Discussion:

Father Elmer O'Brien, S.J., of Toronto, began the discussion by voicing his concern lest the reaction to Bultmann's errors occasion a total Catholic withdrawal, even from the positive values he represents. Bultmann's insights into the soteriological significance of the resurrection, for example, might be lost; the opportunities for further Catholic development along these lines thwarted. The danger would be the more acute granted the relatively recent evolution of a workable theological method. Father O'Brien asked if Father Bourke thought his fears were justified.

Father Bourke pointed to the many Catholic contributions in this field since 1941 when Bultmann's work first appeared. So all Catholic activity on the problem has not come to a halt. Father Bourke cited as examples the work of Schmitt, who pointed out the consciousness prevalent in the early Church, evidenced in *Acts*, of the actual eschatological situation of the Church, the kingdom of God on earth; Benoit's reflections on the mystery of the Ascension; also, much of the emphasis of the Jerusalem Bible. All of these have appeared since 1941. Father Bourke admitted the danger of overlooking positive values as part of the reaction to Bultmann's errors. But he thought that the studies he was able to cite were indications that Catholic work in this field has gone on—although much more of it is needed.

In response to a question from *Father Edward O'Connor, C.S.C.*, of Notre Dame, Father Bourke further explained Bultmann's concept of faith. For Bultmann, faith is an "openness to the future." It is the belief that we are rescued from our present unauthentic existence by accepting God's judgment upon us. His concept of faith is Lutheran: confidence that God has acted in Christ on our behalf. Because of this act of God we are freed for authentic existence provided that we obey God's word and surrender all self-confidence.

Father Aidan Carr, O.F.M. Conv., asked what the principle of Bultmann's concept of faith would be. Father Bourke replied that it is mainly psychological. Bultmann would maintain that the only reason we can make the decision to rise from a life based on visible, tangible reality,

¹⁰⁰ Cf. J. Schmitt, "L'Église de Jérusalem ou la 'restauration' d'Israël," *Revue des Sciences Religieuses* 27 (1953) 209-218.

is because of an act of God Himself. A person must first be loved before he himself can love; he must first have confidence shown in him before he can show confidence. And in the New Testament God has revealed His love for us in Christ. Father Bourke thought that Bultmann's concept could be illustrated by the modern approach to delinquent children: we have to give them love and show our trust in them before we can expect a corresponding response.

Father Carr asked whether we, too, would not hold that we must first be loved by God before we can love Him in return. Yes, Father Bourke replied, but not in Bultmann's sense. For Bultmann there is no distinction between natural and supernatural; faith and love, for him, are not supernatural qualities at all but merely natural possibilities, which, however, fallen man cannot realize unless God acts on his behalf. That is why, in Bultmann's view, God must first act if we are to respond. But we must keep in mind the completely unsupernatural trend of Bultmann's thought.

Father Gustave Weigel, S.J., of Woodstock, commented on the changing and complex connotations of the word myth. It is not necessary to suppose that everything Bultmann would describe as myth would involve the popular understanding of the word. Very often it might refer only to the necessity of retranslating New Testament concepts so that they can be understood in our own time. He asked whether this retranslation were not the real problem.

Father Bourke agreed that such retranslation is a necessary task. Bultmann's definition of myth could be taken in a thoroughly acceptable sense: a presentation of the other-worldly in terms of this world, the divine in terms of the human. Naturally, any exposition of the divine in terms of the human needs retranslation. Such descriptions can be fundamentally true but they are never entirely accurate, analogous as they are. But what Bultmann eliminates as myth is quite another matter and here we would have to part company with him. Bultmann's view of the influence of the Gnostic redemption myth on St. Paul, for example, is something that we could not accept, even if we had not good reason to believe—as we have—that that myth developed much later. On the other hand, the mere translation of outmoded concepts for our own times is a valid and real problem.

Father John O'Connell, of Chicago, asked for comment on the impact of Bultmann's work on the Sunday to Sunday presentation of Protestant preachers. Father Bourke replied that he could not say exactly how much actual influence Bultmann exerted, but that the reports of Protestant sermons seemed to indicate that it might be fairly extensive. Here the discussion was brought to an end.

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