

## NOTES

### THE SCOPE OF DEMYTHOLOGIZING

John Macquarrie, author of *An Existentialist Theology*, an expository study of Bultmann and Heidegger, has more recently expanded a series of lectures given at Union Theological Seminary in March, 1957, into an assessment and evaluation of demythologizing.<sup>1</sup> Macquarrie presents a unified work beginning with "The Paradox in Bultmann," proceeding through considerations of demythologizing in its relation to exegesis, history, dogma, kerygma, philosophy, and language, and concluding with a summary "Towards Vindicating the Paradox."

In a dialectic fashion Macquarrie scrutinizes the major reflections on Bultmann's demythologizing: that of Jaspers, who "maintains that Bultmann is a most *illiberal* thinker," and that of Fritz Buri, "who thinks it is time that the Church forgot about once-for-allness" (p. 30) of revelation—both attacks from the left; that of Catholics who accuse Bultmann of lacking clarity and overstressing knowledge of man in theology to the exclusion of apprehension of God—a criticism from the right. With varying degrees of emphasis and always with clarity, Macquarrie draws together almost all the significant contributions to the Bultmann dialectic in what at times is indeed a heterogeneous series of alliances.

René Marlé has indicated that "the merit of Macquarrie's book lies in the fact that it has brought out extremely well a certain number of the more important aspects of this work [Bultmann's theology]. Its weakness lies in the fact that he has only thought it worth while to criticize one or two of them."<sup>2</sup> It may, therefore, be profitable to examine some radical problems and solutions that are present and operative, though oftentimes not explicitly considered, in an assessment of Bultmann's theological approach. We may here indicate exactly where some fundamental differences of approach are located and make explicit the beginnings at least of a systematic dialectic from which there is hope of progress in the understanding, if not the resolution, of mutual problems.<sup>3</sup> For evident reasons, therefore, we intend to

<sup>1</sup> John Macquarrie, *The Scope of Demythologizing* (New York: Harper, 1960).

<sup>2</sup> René Marlé, "Demythologizing Assessed," *Heythrop Journal* 2 (1961) 47.

<sup>3</sup> Apropos of the more general problem of transmitting differences of opinion because intellectual reconciliation on controversial questions is felt to be beyond hope, Karl Rahner observes "that even in the field of theology, although it has fortunately not caught up with the others yet, reviewers have adopted the modern practice of a more or less uncommitted 'notice' of new publications, and have given up any concern to come to terms with a writer by a close and reasoned examination of his thought" (*Theological Investigations* 1 [tr. Cornelius Ernst; Baltimore, 1961] 13).

consider only a few of the general principles—for the most part, principles with clear epistemological overtones and implications—that govern and permeate all of Bultmann's works. These reflections may be divided into observations on (1) the exclusive nature of Christian revelation, (2) the historical facts, (3) the preached Word, (4) dogma, and (5) the modes of cognition. Unifying what may at first seem to be a diffuse selection is Bultmann's stress on encounter and descriptive scriptural categories interpreted existentially, as opposed to a more objective and reflective series of categories susceptible of existential interpretation in the light of an explicit theory of rational discourse at variance both from that proposed by Bultmann and by Macquarrie.

#### THE EXCLUSIVE NATURE OF CHRISTIAN REVELATION

Jaspers has a good point in affirming that Bultmann overemphasizes the exclusive nature of the strictly Christian revelation, though Macquarrie appears to allow Bultmann a natural revelation. Yet, in projecting the possibility of natural revelation, Bultmann himself approaches the question by asking if there are any other revelations besides that in Christ. He then analyzes the concepts of omnipotence, demand, and transcendence (concepts common to the idea people think they have of God), compares them with the same concepts as found in Christian revelation, and concludes that what a man knows in what he felt was natural revelation is himself rather than God. Nor do nature and history provide any knowledge of God other than the fact that man is a sinner, and history is a history of this sin. In the light of these statements, it is somewhat difficult to see that Bultmann concedes in principle a natural revelation even for the most metaphysically privileged.<sup>4</sup>

Bultmann does not criticize the non-Christian inquiry about God but only the answer which non-Christian inquiry sets forth. When Bultmann testifies that man apart from Christianity could not arrive at an answer about God, the assertion could mean that a strictly supernatural revelation exceeds unaided reason. But to Bultmann the affirmation is more comprehensive. When Bultmann asserts "dass der ausserchristliche Mensch gar nicht zu

<sup>4</sup> One striking possibility of a natural revelation, despite Bultmann's explicit denial of all natural revelation, is Bultmann's well-known *Vorverständnis*: the question about God at the heart of human existence. Here one senses very definite echoes of Thomas' natural desire as well as Augustine's knowledge of divine Truth in the existential judgment. Much of the data for maintaining an apprehension of God outside of the encounter is present in Bultmann's works, despite his *ex professo* general denials. Hence, it is understandable that Macquarrie feels ambiguity in Bultmann's position. There is the ambivalence of positive denial in the face of affirmed data pointing in another direction.

einer Antwort kommen könnte,"<sup>6</sup> he is using *Antwort* in the sense of all the contents of Christian revelation, that which will free man from himself, that which will save man, that which alone is knowledge of God. Nearly all confessions would agree that natural reason could never arrive at many of the specific illuminations peculiar to Christian revelation. And most theologians could join Bultmann when he claims that all answers apart from the answer of Christian revelation are illusions if they attempt to supplant or displace the Christian revelation. There is no salvific gnos̄is. But the term *Antwort* is so used that knowledge of God achieved through natural reason and the saving religious experience of Christian revelation, the religious encounter, are, terminologically at least, proposed as if they operated on the same plane, the level of actual justification. The implication is that knowledge of God must be saving knowledge: acknowledgment and response to God's demands as made known in the Christian revelation. A speculative knowledge of God, therefore, is not Christian revelation. Hence, the answer of natural reason is really not knowledge of God at all. By forcing natural reason beyond its realm, Bultmann must necessarily conclude to an abnormal shrinking of natural reason even in its proper domain. The intellectual has been replaced by the psychological, the objective by the subjective; there are evidences of a flight from the abstract. One might wish that Bultmann had proceeded to inquire into what man is capable of discovering and affirming about God as a transcendent object of thought, rather than to presume a final answer in the very terms of the question.<sup>6</sup>

For Bultmann, however, revelation has its existence only in the revelational encounter. This is the knowledge of God demanded by Hosea, Jeremiah, and Isaiah. With Bultmann the emphasis is so strong and persistent that the ultimate molecule of divine truth has its being only in the "existential" event.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, any revelation, in the wide sense of the term,

<sup>6</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *Glauben und Verstehen 2* (Tübingen, 1952) 86.

<sup>6</sup> The premise of corrupt human nature and the dichotomy between faith and understanding is strongly present here.

<sup>7</sup> *Existentiell*, which has been literally transposed in the present work to read "existential," may have reference to the individual situations which are part and parcel of the human existence in which man understands his own existence. The "existential" may be studied according to the existential philosophical principles. Existential, then, is the term applied to abstract, reflective consideration of existence. "Existential" is applied to the concrete, fundamental grasp of existence given in and with the act of existence. Therefore, an existential knowledge is that achieved by the existential analysis proper to philosophy. An "existential" knowledge is that achieved in the concrete act of existence. While the existential analysis discloses the possibilities of existence and the formal structure of existence, the "existential" application comes not through existential operations but rather through "existential" activity. Bultmann's interpretation of the New Testament would be

derived from natural reason is necessarily excluded from consideration.<sup>8</sup> As Malevez has pointed out, what Luther's doctrine on justification did to works, demythologizing attempts to do to objectivizing knowledge. Just how radical is Bultmann's concept of revelation may be understood from the terms of his comparison: Christian revelation and any other "revelation," be it what is termed natural or what is attributed to the direct action of God on the non-Christian; knowledge of God with and in Christian revelation as opposed to knowledge of God without specifically Christian revelation; objectivizing knowledge of God as opposed to the religious encounter. Though Macquarrie may feel, therefore, that Bultmann is equivocal when it comes to the question of a natural revelation and when he must consider the plight of the non-Christian, the individual apparently denied the one and only revelation, I would think that Bultmann's epistemological presuppositions and overemphasis on the exclusive nature of Christian revelation have necessarily left him with two problems with which his theology as such is simply unequipped to cope: the relation of reason to religious knowledge, and the problem of the possible justification of the great numbers who do not experience the specifically Christian knowledge. As a matter of fact, even the Old Testament, despite Bultmann's citation and use of texts in his sermons, hardly seems to survive Bultmann's rigorous emphasis on the exclusivity of God's revelation in Christ reproduced in encounter with the Word.<sup>9</sup>

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existential. The actualizing and achieving of the understanding of existence in the light of the existential interpretation is achieved on the "existentiel" level.—In all the writings of Bultmann it is never clear to me how encounter is preserved from the possibility of illusion. There is, of course, no rational justification of encounter presented. The subjective encounter, the subjective experience, is essentially incommunicable, therefore could easily be a personality projection. Man is a psychosomatic unity, and the categories of religious experience must—if they are to touch the man—be capable of objective as well as intersubjective presentation. This is not to exclude one or the other, but to assert that both elements must be present. As I hope to point out at a later date, stress on the intersubjective to the detriment of the scientific, objective, critical, and reflective mode of understanding is a *facilis descensus Averno*.

<sup>8</sup> Bultmann holds that nature reveals and conceals God's presence. But because God cannot be the proper object of objectivizing thought, Bultmann is clear in denying this type of natural revelation. Bultmann at times seems to affirm that shadow is total darkness, obscurity is blindness.

<sup>9</sup> Bultmann postulates the necessity of the pluralistic approach to God within Christianity. Undertones in Macquarrie's statements seem to overindulge a mood of broad-mindedness in indicating that the religious commitment of a person is of no significance if the man follows his lights and the laws of propriety and decency.

## THE HISTORICAL FACTS

Bultmann's theory of cognition, his theory of the relation between faith and understanding, become clearer when one considers Bultmann's reflections on what we may term the historical facts of salvation-history. The most recent critical climate is clearly in agreement with Macquarrie in stating that Bultmann does not do justice to the historical element in Christianity.<sup>10</sup> But, on the other hand, many observers would be disinclined to settle for Macquarrie's compromise of the "minimum of historical factuality," since it seems to be both arbitrary and hardly an improvement over Bultmann's position. The question is not how many facts are needed a priori to insure Christianity's survival as a historical religion, but rather how the historian and the theologian are to understand God's action as described and interpreted in Sacred Scripture and refracted in and through concrete historical events. Though it is clear that a study of history and of the historical facts in which revelation took place cannot strictly prove or disprove faith, nor can faith be deduced from any other intellectual antecedents, critical history may raise the question or furnish the opportunity or possibility, though not the ground, of faith.<sup>11</sup> There is a vast difference between the two. While the "inside," to employ Collingwood's expression,<sup>12</sup> of a strictly supernatural event, and much more the total accumulation of Christian events, may transcend the directly historical investigation, the validity and necessity of the strictly historical method for a reconstruction of certain past outer events which the believer apprehends with a new magnitude and dimension as revelation cannot be minimized or distinguished out of existence.<sup>13</sup> If theology is thinking about the faith, and if the possibility of faith is offered

<sup>10</sup> Cf. William F. Albright, "Bultmann's History and Eschatology," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 77 (1958) 244-48; also *Christian Century*, May 3, 1961, pp. 552-53.

<sup>11</sup> In an effort to reconcile extremes, Macquarrie seems to assert that historical evidence tends to give probabilities rather than conclusive evidence. To oppose probability to conclusive evidence seems to ignore the analogous nature of both evidence and certitude. Historical proof does not coerce; this, however, does not mean to say that it must be either inconclusive or simply probable.

<sup>12</sup> Collingwood, of course, holds that the "inside" of an event may be reconstructed through historical investigation. It is not immediately to the point to open here the involved question of the exact and precise function as well as the limitations of historical method in the face of faith events.

<sup>13</sup> This seems to be more and more emphasized in Germany. Note the renewed stress on the theory that in the historical event of Jesus all world history gets its real essence and meaning: "Jesus Christus und die Historie," *Christ und Welt*, March 24, 1961, p. 8. The article follows an elaboration of the Erlangen discussion among Paul Althaus, Walter Künneth, Wilfried Joest, and Ethelbert Stauffer.

because God intervened in history, then accurate historical investigation must always be a part of theology; and no amount of subjective a priori speculation or postulation can substitute for or replace critical investigation of the divine events as well as enlightened examination of the later understanding of the divine events manifested in the theological sources.<sup>14</sup>

In addition, as Althaus has noticed, compressing the boundaries and scope of the historical facts (even though one can easily enough find frequent statements in Bultmann denying that this is his intention) has virtually made Bultmann reincarnate Ritschl's position, where value judgments tend to supplant historical facts: that is, the only Christ is the Christ for us. Faith, therefore, is centered on a religious value judgment. Though the religious experience may be valid enough, it is not immediately clear that the "outside" of the religious experience, the person of the Jesus of history, for example, is anything more than a secular and profane, though sanguine, accident, with no intrinsic and permanent relation to the experiential grasp of the divine revelation. This is a difficulty observed by Henderson nine years ago when he wrote that "there must have been something about the actual Jesus at the time at which He was on earth, to make the New Testament witnesses summon men to decide for or against Him."<sup>15</sup> It is not simple to reconcile Bultmann's position with all the modern interpretations of the Old Testament nor with the concrete evaluation of the primitive Christian community and its understanding of the relation of the Jesus of history to the saving events.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Rahner, *op. cit.*, p. 56: "Spiritual processes continue to function with complete adequacy even though a satisfactory theory of their subjective and objective propositions has not yet been offered." Hence, in the Church, where the "spiritual process" is possessed and certified, there need be no anxiety about theories of faith and history, which at times are groping, tentative, and hypothetical. It is only through hypotheses, speculations, provisions, and conjectures of a human and responsible character that a clearer understanding of the faith-history problem may emerge. Collingwood's theory has all the advantages of the positivistic school and fewer of their limitations. From the evolving notion of what history is comes an ever deeper and fuller understanding of salvation-history. The "What really happened?" of the Tübingen school need not drive the New Testament scholar to the (neo-)Calvinistic denial of the legitimacy of historical method as applied to the New Testament documents. Cf. T. A. Roberts, *History and Christian Apologetic* (London, 1960), especially the last chapter. Though Roberts does not explicitly rephrase Burkitt and Dodd's question, "Is the Gospel true?", he does indicate by his approach that the problem is better expressed when we ask first whether the Gospels are intelligible.

<sup>15</sup> Ian Henderson, *Myth in the New Testament* (London, 1952) p. 49. Bultmann's distinctions of the *geschichtlich* and the *historisch* do not conceal the impression that he is minimizing material of a quite rebellious nature. The quest for explanation is persistent.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Rahner, *op. cit.*, pp. 64-68, for an analysis of the experience and subsequent articulation of revelation.

## THE PREACHED WORD

While Bultmann is quite arbitrary and overly subjective in minimizing the historical element of revelation, he introduces the revelation of God in Christ through Christ's presence in the preached Word, a presence that cannot be legitimated by history and a presence that is transcendent and eschatological. Clarification of one aspect of the relation of historical investigation to faith and insight into Bultmann's methodology may be reached through a study of the mode of Christ's presence in the preached Word.

The affirmation of a continuing and "existential" presence in the preached Word is not without charm. Some development of Christ as a speech event has been undertaken. It is said that God's Word is simply given (*edothē*) to men other than Christ; in Christ, God's Word occurs (*egeneto*).<sup>17</sup> Yet, one can see that such a presentation remains on the level of description and provides no beginning explanation of the phenomena in question. Descriptive nomenclature simply tolerates the problem. It is perhaps because a description is not an explanation that, in the same discussion cited, Albert C. Outler edges to Chalcedon for an explanation.<sup>18</sup>

From Bultmann's usage of the term "presence," it does not appear that Christ is present in the preached Word as Bultmann claims God is present in the Word. Nor does it seem that Christ is present in the Word as the Word is present to man, nor as man is present to himself, nor as objects of nature are present to man, each of which is a type of presence discussed by Bultmann. For the presence of Christ in the Word, Bultmann admits a type of sacramental presence, confessing that the presence of Christ in the preached Word is a mystery. Conceding the mysterious and indefinable, one notices much more of a definite, traceable, historical continuity between the Word in the Old Testament, the Word of the Jesus of history, and the Word of the disciples, the Word as understood in the primitive Christian community, and the Word as understood by the Christians of the first few centuries, and the preached Word as Bultmann understands it. It is by no means so clear as Bultmann would maintain that Word here has the univocal meaning he attaches to it.

What is here observed as criticism of Bultmann should be taken in the total context of Bultmann's clear vision of a vital need of interpretation in theology. In this realization and execution we feel that Bultmann's efforts may be of more speculative value than the work of many other exegetes. Cullmann, for example, with commendable clarity and insight, restores the

<sup>17</sup> Carl Michalson, in *Christian Century*, May 3, 1961, p. 553.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 555. He interprets natures to mean functions or energy systems.

biblical teaching and categories. But he must affirm that subsequent speculation, categories of the absolute and explanatory—for example, the doctrine on the two natures of Christ—are useless and improper.<sup>19</sup> If his concept of functional theology were correct, the only hope for Christian thinking and living would be in a personal restoration of the biblical categories. Bultmann, on the other hand, has the merit of attempting to make revelation relevant for the modern man through a speculative theology and a pertinent interpretation of modern significance. Bultmann proposes an existentialist speculative theology. In the light of this speculative theology, he has proceeded to the other problem of preserving the biblical categories while interpreting them in existentialist terms and thought patterns of pertinence to the modern man. While we cannot agree with the mode of the twofold interpretation, Bultmann has, in his own way, attempted to bridge the gap between the rich, modern interpretations of Scripture, a speculative theology, and the concrete “existential” man. Criticisms of his total system should not obscure his grasp of the problem; and his projected solution with its twofold interpretation could be carefully studied by all theologians who must be concerned with the problem of theological relevance, the aim of which would be first to understand and interpret the modern biblical flowering in terms of speculative theology and then to interpret this theology in terms of contemporaneous man.<sup>20</sup> Bultmann’s concept of the eschatological Word is an effort in the direction of theological relevance. That his conception does not come up to what we feel is his intention should not obscure the clarity with which he has grasped the double problem of interpretation.

#### DOGMA

Cut loose from the anchor of history and the historical development of a Church growing in self-understanding, dogma in its final and absolute form becomes contrary to the subjective approach, the value judgments of religion, the subjective encounter with the preached Word. But dogma is a technical and objective formulation, the term of a transit from the descriptive to the explanatory, and usually the term of strong historical currents

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament* (Philadelphia, 1959) p. 266.

<sup>20</sup> “The biblical, liturgical and patristic renewals have not been accompanied by any comparable renewal on the speculative side of theology” (Charles Davis, “The Danger of Irrelevance,” *Downside Review* 79 [1961] 100). Davis observes that “the revival of a past age” (p. 101), be this patristic or scriptural, though absolutely necessary for the scholar, is not sufficient to interpret and adapt revelation to a modern climate; nor is it sufficient simply to display the staggering data of positive or biblical theology. Davis, in common with others, sees hope for speculative theology in Bernard Lonergan’s now well-known works. Cf. also Rahner, *op. cit.*, “The Prospects for Dogmatic Theology,” pp. 2-37.



tending to oversimplify and thus to distort a truth. Therefore, dogma insures the validity of the subjective religious experience, preserves the sacred mysteries of divine revelation, and consequently permits revelation to be communicated from generation unto generation, ever old and ever new. Thus, God's mysteries and not man's projections remain the proper object of a faith always based on the revelation and demands of a transcendent God.

Bultmann's effort is to bring the primitive Christian revelation to man through the eschatological encounter. But man's psychological structure always tends to make God in man's image. This is especially true when the importance of the historical foundation of concrete revelational events transpiring over a period of time is minimized, and when the rational process involved in understanding, appropriating, and objectively formulating progressive revelation is ignored.<sup>21</sup> Faith must be a going out of self, a confrontation with the "wholly other," a reaction to the reality of a transcendent God. Dogma insures the objectivity of the encounter, both for the individual and for subsequent generations. Religious conviction is not simply a matter of feeling, in which rational formulation and discourse is irrelevant.<sup>22</sup> That these observations are neither idle nor simply the convictions of one or other religious group is indicated by the interest of Diem and other Barthians in removing the rust from the relation of history and dogma—a search that once again manifests the ineradicable desire of the human intellect to seek for explanatory and objective answers.

Basic to the question of the historical facts, the preached Word, and dogma is the epistemological and historical question of the transit from scriptural categories to scientific, reflective terminology; from the categories of direct experience to the categories of critical reflection, the transit from the descriptive to the explanatory; from God as He is in relation to us, to God as He is in Himself. Bultmann would confine himself to the God-for-us.<sup>23</sup> But,

<sup>21</sup> Another dimension to Bultmann's rejection of objectifying thought is that the human understanding and grasp of revelation is simply not adequate. The epistemological presupposition is to equate the terms adequate and complete. Because the understanding is not complete, it is, so the argument runs, false.

<sup>22</sup> Jaspers seems to us correct in his observation that, if the kerygma be understood only in modern thought categories, the Gospel message may ultimately evanesce into man's own understanding of self.

<sup>23</sup> "The Greek Fathers tell us that the God of Christian thought is not God as He conceives Himself and appears to Himself, *theos pros heauton*, but God as He is with respect to us, *theos pros hemas*. The God in whom we believe, or more accurately according to the Creed, the God in whom I believe, is the one who has created me. God does not have need of me. He could exist without my existing, of course. But the God who is, is inseparable from the God who has created me" (Romano Guardini, *The Life of Faith* [tr. John Chapin; Westminster, Md., 1961] pp. 50-51).

as a matter of historical fact, there is and was a transit made by the Church which defined the contents of the faith, a passage from the God-for-us to the God-in-Himself.<sup>24</sup> As to the legitimacy of the transit, one may choose several positions. First, one may affirm that the categories of Scripture are heterogeneous and alien to the scientific and objective Church definitions. The ultimate reason for the transit from the descriptive to the explanatory is usually held to be an objectivizing Hellenistic ontology. Operating from systematic premises, namely, the Kantian separation of faith and knowledge and the Lutheran dichotomy between correlative works of the intellect and an absolute faith, one dismisses the conciliar formulations and reverts to scriptural categories as the only legitimate understanding of revelation. This, with the Heideggerian refinements, is Bultmann's position. Secondly, one may reject the problem altogether, relying on a direct communication with God, one that is experienced according to the motion of the Spirit and accepted or rejected in the light of the good or bad will of man. This position is not altogether unknown, and it considers all theological reflection as relative, shifting, and ultimately irrelevant to the religious life. Thirdly, one may realize that the transit from the descriptive to the explanatory is a matter of historical fact and then set out first to understand, then to explain, the basis for the transit.<sup>25</sup> And this is the theological problem. The

<sup>24</sup> Another aspect of the transit problem is the current scriptural consideration of the continuity between Jesus, His message, and belief in Jesus. The question seeks explanation. This should be one more indication that the objective reflective question is native and proper to the human mind. Prior conciliar formulations, therefore, are not the products of Hellenism, but rather an ultimate formulation to an ultimate question. Cf. Lonergan's consideration of this problem: *Divinarum personarum conceptio analogica* (Rome, 1957) pp. 6-51, 253-71; *De constitutione Christi* (Rome, 1958) pp. 42-56; *De Deo trino* 1 (Rome, 1961) 69-113; unofficial notes entitled *De intellectu et methodo*; and the primary work of a philosophical nature, *Insight* (New York, 1958). Cf. also Jacques Albert Cuttat, "The Religious Encounter of East and West," *Thought* 33 (1958-59) 485-514. "But from the time of the great ecumenical councils, especially those of Nicaea (325) and Chalcedon (451) which defined the unity without confusion and the distinction without separation of the two natures in one Person of Christ, we witness for the first time in the history of human understanding the dawn of a new form of thinking. It consists in 'keeping together,' that is, in 'maintaining the tension' rather than 'resolving' antithetic terms such as the one and the multiple, being and becoming, the same and the other, soul and body, spirit and nature" (*ibid.*, p. 489). By eliminating a mode of "thought in tension," Bultmann "performs toward Christ an inner movement of an essentially mythical character, transforming into terms which are outwardly Christian a spiritual attitude which is more Hindu and archaic than Christian" (*ibid.*, p. 494).

<sup>25</sup> "The New Testament itself recognizes and propounds the historical fact of the unfolding and development of the apostolic deposit of faith which is so fundamental to the understanding of tradition in its wider sense. In the New Testament Christ's free giving

most fruitful effort to explain the transit from scriptural categories to documentary categories, the transit from the descriptive to the explanatory, has been proposed by Bernard Lonergan.<sup>26</sup> In the light of Fr. Lonergan's considerations, we add some of the difficulties with Bultmann's position, which tends to ignore the transit.

Bultmann eliminates the objective consideration of God and thus preserves the I-thou relationship of Scripture. But such an existential consideration of God fails to grasp the progressive nature of God's revelation. Reverting to New Testament categories interpreted existentially (recalling that the Old Testament scarcely seems to fit Bultmann's concept of revelation), Bultmann has attempted to adduce the New Testament to refute those who would explain revelation in scientific, objective terminology, and thus Bultmann has revived a religious rather than a specifically theological question. For in the New Testament God is the given, not the proven; the experienced, not the reflectively understood; the self-evident reality, not the consciously conceived. Hence, the question for Bultmann, as for the prophets, is: Will men acknowledge God's existence through intersubjective correspondence in the obedience of faith? But to pose an old and ever-present religious question is not to answer the historical and theological question of the development of understanding as manifested both in the New Testament and in later Church history.

Bultmann's omission is common to all theologians who operate exclusively in existentialist categories. Theology, as Karl Rahner has noted, must be theology of essence and of existence. The single saving event of Jesus Christ, so rightly stressed by Bultmann and reproduced in his highly organized system through the preached Word, is an event which discloses itself to us very slowly and with progressive intensity. This revelation is an inexhaustible treasure, whose coin is consistently new and vital intelligible relationships between creature and Creator, between every new generation or culture and the Lord of revelation. Appropriating the relationships, the demands, the exigencies of revelation is "existential." But even to preserve the "existential" relationships, one must attempt through reflective, essentialist theology to understand the objective event in itself. The effort of

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of Himself through the Holy Spirit in the Church is in 'principle' captured and documented; that is to say, we find its origin and beginning there. And it manifests itself in connection with the apostolic heritage, which cannot be contained only in the New Testament writings, more and more in the total tradition of the Church to this day. Otherwise, the development of the 'Jesus tradition' apart from the gospels as well as within them cannot be theologically explicable" (Heinrich Schlier, *We Are Now Catholics* [ed. Karl Hardt; Westminster, Md., 1959] pp. 194-95).

<sup>26</sup> Cf. *supra* n. 24.

history is to recapture the fact that God has spoken to our ancestors in various ways. This speaking is heard through personal encounter at the "existential level" (and this is brilliantly emphasized by Bultmann) and more fully understood and propagated on the essential level (and this is incorrectly excluded from Bultmann's theology). The result of the exclusively existentialist emphasis is possibly suitable for the revivalist but hardly adequate for the theologian, who feels he must think about the entire deposit of faith, not simply one or other aspect of the faith.<sup>27</sup>

#### THE MODES OF COGNITION

Problems thus far discussed become more clearly outlined in the long demythologizing dialogue which has made quite explicit the cognitional modes admitted by Bultmann. The complicated nature of the relation of faith to history, the climate favoring the intersubjectivity theory Bultmann accords to the preached Word, the long history of psychological antipathy aroused by the term "dogma"—all these tend to make arguments adduced against Bultmann's position sound less convincing and quite problematic. But in the demythologization controversy, the extreme limitations of Bultmann's theory of cognition and his inability to judge the very process he wishes to interpret, i.e., myth, have become noticeable and widely acknowledged.

Macquarrie correctly observes that Bultmann has two frames of reference: modern scientific thought, which conditions the present-day man and which operates on an impersonal object level; and "existential" knowledge, which operates on the individual, subjective level, the area of decision, committal, encounter, the area of specifically religious concern. One notes, despite the wide diversity of definitions of myth,<sup>28</sup> that Bultmann's concept of myth in the New Testament is not directly opposed to scientific, objective, reflective understanding, and that perhaps mythological and symbolic thought can be legitimate modes of understanding, are not limited to older and more primitive civilizations, and can obtain their corrective in a dialectic with objective, critical, scientific understanding. Theologians as diverse as Sonntag and Lonergan seem to agree that it might be better to make a distinction

<sup>27</sup> Amid this criticism let it be recalled that Bultmann has brought to attention and consideration the fact that there are aspects of the Christian revelation incapable of syllogistic inference or strict demonstration. Many existential philosophers and theologians are behind this new and personalistic approach. This modern intersubjective emphasis, when justified and controlled, can be of great assistance to a sound and significant Christian apologetic.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. John L. McKenzie, S.J., "Myth and the Old Testament," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 21 (1959) 265-67.

between metaphysics and myth, between the tutored and the untutored desire to know, between scientific understanding and the personalizing, intersubjective, symbolic mode of cognition. Hence, two legitimate modes of thought would be preserved, and the untutored desire to know as expressed through myth would be interpreted through scientific, critical, reflective understanding rather than through an existential interpretation which itself is on the same level as the intersubjective understanding it seeks to judge.

When one examines Bultmann's alteration in the original definition of myth proposed at the beginning of the controversy and then turns to his de-emphasis on the meaning of myth,<sup>29</sup> several affirmations appear apposite. First, Bultmann, in facing the problem of defining myth, may seem to fall into a verbal contradiction. Secondly, he might be said to extricate himself from the problem by coming to a distinction quite close to that given by Lonergan,<sup>30</sup> a description based on distinctions between myth and metaphysics, mythic consciousness and critical self-knowledge, mythic expression and developed expression. Thirdly, since Bultmann has no formulated and critical metaphysics, he must make the opposition not between myth and metaphysics but between myth and scientific thought; for Bultmann is in no position to judge the truth of terms arising from the polymorphism of human consciousness. Fourthly, because these distinctions are radical, complete, exclusive, and not based on any metaphysics which is capable of judging mythic consciousness or the untutored desire to know, Bultmann must deny that there is any truth at all in mythic consciousness and its product, myth, save that contained in an understanding of human existence as extracted through the existential interpretation. He must, in the very nature of his preunderstanding, end up with the conclusion "that there is no valid intellectual process except scientific thought."<sup>31</sup> Fifthly, because Bultmann has no metaphysics capable of judging all knowledge, and because his criterion of the intellectual process is empirical scientific thought, Bultmann will exclude mythic consciousness as incapable of reaching particular and partial intuitions of truth. Sixthly, because nobody escapes metaphysics, Bultmann must posit his own intersubjective mode of cognition, the "existential" encounter; and this intersubjectivity will remain unrevised by the incandescence of scientific, critical, reflective understanding, thus leading to all the problems of uncontrollable subjectivity: an overemphasis on the

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Rudolf Bultmann, *Kerygma und Mythos 2* (Hamburg-Volksdorf, 1952) 180.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. *Insight*, pp. 538-45.

<sup>31</sup> McKenzie, *art. cit.*, p. 270.

exclusive nature of Christian revelation, injustice to historical facts, uncritical postulation of Christ's presence in the preached Word, and a total prescindion from the quest of the human mind to go from description to explanation, from the personalistic to the objective, from God as He is for me to God as He is in Himself.

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