

BULTMANN'S MORAL THEOLOGY: ANALYSIS AND APPRAISAL

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RUDOLF BULTMANN is famous for his bold method of exegesis known as "demythologizing." But his daring interpretation of the New Testament is not merely an exercise in scholarship; he is motivated by pastoral concern.

The gospel of Christ, Bultman believes, no longer governs men's lives, even imperfectly. It is not intellectually acceptable to men today, because it is framed in a picture of the world no longer valid for men conditioned by science, technology, and their present understanding of their own natures.¹ If the gospel is to be a guide for human existence today, its fundamental message must be disengaged from its ancient "mythological" setting. The message must be "demythologized," interpreted in a way understandable by and acceptable to twentieth-century men.²

In his exegesis, therefore, Bultmann is seeking a viable guide for human existence. We can say he is seeking a moral theology, although this term has connotations he probably would not approve. Study of Bultmann's thought, consequently, is incomplete without some evaluation of the moral theology which emerges from his interpretation of the New Testament.

In general, the moral theology which Bultmann draws out of the New Testament follows the tendencies of all modern efforts to renew Christian morality. It opposes legalism, formalism, and complacency, and stresses personal responsibility and action in the present moment of history in response to the needs of men. Bultmann's moral program follows these tendencies, not only because any thinker reflects the preoccupations of his age, but also because Bultmann's thought has contributed to this tendency in our time.

This essay will begin with the goal of Christian life as Bultmann sees it. This first step will require a look into the nature of man as Bultmann conceives it. These ideas will lead to certain characteristics which he assigns to Christian existence followed by the principal acts by which Christian existence is realized. Evaluations of Bultmann's ideas will be inserted at convenient junctures.

¹"New Testament and Mythology," in *Kerygma and Myth* (ed. Hans Werner Bartsch; New York, 1961) pp. 3-8 (hereafter *NTM*). See also *Jesus Christ and Mythology* (New York; 1958) pp. 16-21, 36-38 (hereafter *JCM*).

²*NTM*, pp. 9-16; *JCM*, pp. 18-21, 43-44.

THE CRISIS OF DECISION

According to Bultmann's analysis of the New Testament, man is to be conceived, not as a being composed of body and soul and faculties, but as a living unity continuously on the move. He is a thinking, willing subject, ceaselessly in pursuit of life in some specific, concrete form. He is forever choosing from among the possibilities open to him at the moment. Thus he is constantly making himself a new subject of thinking and willing, with new possibilities. He is always pursuing his own self, finding himself, projecting himself again toward a new self out of the possibilities of the present. Man lives in intentionality, in a never-ceasing process of tending toward the future by his choices.³

To live humanly is to be at every moment in a crisis of decision, because decision determines a man's essential character, makes him a sinner or a just man.⁴ Every moment, therefore, is the last moment, the last hour. In His teaching, Jesus used the mythology of messianic, eschatological expectations familiar to contemporaries to impress upon them the urgency of their situation as human beings in a perpetual crisis of decision.⁵

Because man's essential being is to be in a crisis of decision, only the action before man at the present moment is a genuine future. A genuine future must be something truly new, not yet existing, but at the same time determining the present moment's decision. What is under control and merely waited for, not determining the decision of the present, is not genuinely future; what is merely a possibility which could be or not be, and therefore not determining the present, is likewise not a genuine future.⁶ The goal of Christian existence is, therefore, no further away than the action which lies before man at the present moment. To relativize this action, to order it as a means to some ideal to be achieved or maintained, robs it of its absolute character as the moment of decision, that is, as constituting man's being now.⁷ Any future except the action before a man at the moment is fantasy, mere theory, incapable of giving real future existence.

The Kingdom of God

Jesus' message is a call to decision now for the kingdom of God. In His eyes, the value of a man lies in his decision now, not in the intrinsic value of his nature or some nobler part of his nature or some supernatural gift bestowed on him.⁸ Bultmann interprets the parables

³ *Theology of the New Testament* 1 (tr. Kenrich Grobel; London, 1952) 209-10 (hereafter *TNT*).

⁴ *Jesus and the Word* (tr. Louise P. Smith and Erminie Lantero; New York, 1958) p. 198 (hereafter *JW*).

⁵ *JW*, p. 52.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 51, 142.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 100-101.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

of Jesus as calls to decision. Gospel accounts in which the primitive Church perhaps put certain words on the lips of Jesus reflect the early Church's understanding that His message is fundamentally an invitation to decision.⁹

Jesus' proclamation that the kingdom of God is at hand announces the need to be ready and open for the kingdom of God in the decision called for in the demands of the moment.¹⁰ The future which determines the present, Jesus declares, must be the kingdom of God. But choosing the kingdom of God, projecting himself into this future, man immediately is confronted by the demand for another choice in a new present. Once again he is at the last hour, faced with the necessity of choosing for or against the kingdom, of constituting himself a just man, saved and delivered, or a sinner, enslaved and condemned. Thus the kingdom is always future, always at hand, but determining the present by constraining man now to choose for or against it.

The kingdom of God is not some dark, mysterious realm or state which lies at the end of some long road of life, something far off to be speculated about, a pseudo future, that which does not yet exist or is not yet possessed but is under control and simply awaited. The kingdom is not some highest fulfilment, whether this be conceived as mystical union with the divine, or cultivation of the human spirit, or development of an interior life. The kingdom is nothing other than the will of God manifested in the demands of the present moment as a possibility for the future.¹¹

Hence Jesus must not be conceived as simply a teacher and law-giver providing information about some mysterious, distant reality called the kingdom of God or the kingdom of Heaven, and instructing man about the conditions of human activity necessary to qualify for entrance into that realm. Although Jesus expected the end of the world, as did others with whom He shared the apocalyptic vision of the age, He was unique in not allowing this expectation of an imminent end of the world to influence His message. For Him, every moment is the last moment for every man as man: every moment demands a decision for the will of God, otherwise a man ceases to be truly a man, to have authentic existence as a creature of God, what he really is. Hence Jesus was not preaching an interim ethic, a code of conduct to be followed until the world came to an end and the kingdom of God arrived. No, the kingdom is already at hand among men in the demands of the present situation.¹²

The kingdom of God is wholly miraculous, wholly other. It does not

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 30-31, 34. ¹⁰ *TNT* 1:9; *JW*, p. 131. ¹¹ *JW*, pp. 35-36.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 39, 92-93, 129.

develop out of creation; it is not a final flowering of creation. If it were such, it would not be a genuine future, as this was described above: something which does not yet exist but determines the decision of the present, giving man his very being. The kingdom is not within the power of man, something natural to him. Man cannot constitute it through fellowship and common action. It cannot be realized in any organization of world fellowship. It cannot even be thought of as a historical reality which is the result of God's working in the world, a reality planted by God in the world, and, under His influence, developing toward completion.¹³

Men can lay no claim to the kingdom of God. Not only can they lay no claim to it because of their humanity; they cannot even lay claim to it on the basis of having been chosen by God to be a nation set apart as the Jews were.¹⁴

For Jesus, the kingdom is a transcendent event, the ultimate Either-Or which constrains man to decision, confronting him at every moment in his history. It is the will of God in the concrete situation of the present moment demanding obedience.¹⁵

Negative Characteristics

Given the foregoing interpretation of man's nature, of Jesus' message, and of the kingdom of God, Bultmann's idea of the Christian life assumes certain characteristics. Again and again he inveighs against mysticism.¹⁶ It implies, for him, a dualism in the nature of man: man composed of body and soul, matter and spirit; a self imprisoned in a body. Mysticism, as he describes it, involves a "higher part of man," a "true self," which overcomes or escapes the body or matter and returns to its origin. Or he speaks of mysticism as a loss of self as an independent personality in the stream of life.

But Jesus and the best interpreters of His message, Paul and John, do not know of such a dualism in the nature of man.¹⁷ If the words "body" and "soul," "flesh" and "spirit," are found in the New Testament, they must be interpreted, as Paul is shown to do,¹⁸ not as parts of man, but as modes of man's tending toward the future by his choices. Man in the New Testament must be understood existentially, as a unity projecting his whole self into the future. For such a man, there

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 36-38, 158-59. ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 46. ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 55-56.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 48, 153; *TNT* 1:199, 335; 2:67, 86.

¹⁷ *JW*, pp. 47-48; *TNT* 1:209-10; 2:9-10.

¹⁸ *NTM*, pp. 17-18; *TNT* 1:191-210, 232-38.

simply is no such thing as mysticism, because man existentially understood is a living unity.

Bultmann rejected mysticism also because the kingdom of God is not the fulfilment of the highest part of man or a realm which the spirit can reach, as we have seen. The kingdom is the will of God in the present moment of history calling for a decision which determines the whole man in his historical existence.

Bultmann opposes asceticism.¹⁹ In his mind, asceticism is also based on the assumption of a dualism in the nature of man, and on the assumption that matter, the body, nature, or whatever one wishes to call the lesser element, is evil. Ascetical annihilation is not called for by God. No antiworld attitude is found in Jesus. Virginity is foreign to Jesus' thinking. Earthly goods are not evil in Jesus' mind, but the bad will of men puts them to evil use: to self-indulgence, greediness, self-complacency. Asceticism assumes that it is attaining an ideal: freedom from the dominion of a lower, evil force. But the nature of man is not so composed; man is one being constantly choosing what he is to be, a just man or a sinner.

The kingdom of God, moreover, is not a realm to be reached by sloughing off the lower part of self and escaping the evil clutches of the material world and nature.

Bultmann dismisses sacramentalism.²⁰ He conceives sacramentalism to be based on a metaphysical dualism between the divine and created nature, with the assumption that nature is really worthless in comparison to the intrinsic worth of the divine. Sacramentalism implies that nature has no value, is not truly good, except as the conveyor of the divine. When sacramentalism gets out of hand, as Bultmann thinks it did in the early postapostolic Church, it invests everything in nature—social institutions, offices, laws, ceremonies—with a divine origin and efficacy in order to give value to the constituents of everyday life.²¹

Sacramentalism is not only foreign to Jesus (He did not institute baptism or the Eucharist),²² but it stands in the way of the personal relationship between God and man. Man receives God's forgiveness in a personal act of God toward man, who in turn receives God's forgiveness personally. But such a personal exchange can be known only by the individuals involved. God's graciousness cannot be manifested in some external act. A personal act of God and sacramental grace are contradictories.²³ According to Bultmann, the Gospel of John expresses

¹⁹ *JW*, pp. 48–50, 80, 98–104, 187. ²⁰ *TNT*, 2:92; *JW*, pp. 137, 153.

²¹ *TNT* 2:110. ²² *JW*, pp. 153; *TNT* 1:148. ²³ *JW*, p. 210.

awareness of the trend to link Jesus' message with sacramentalism, and was written precisely in opposition to sacramentalism—an interpretation of the fourth Gospel which runs counter to that of many scholars, notably Oscar Cullmann.²⁴

Limitations in Bultmann's Approach

We must admire the immense labor, the extensive biblical knowledge, and the metaphysical acuity of mind which Bultmann has dedicated to developing an up-to-date apologia for the message of Jesus and for Christian existence. But has Bultmann rightly assessed the mentality of modern man? He characterizes modern man as conditioned by science and technology so completely that he cannot understand and accept the world picture found in the New Testament. Are there not, however, "two cultures" in the modern world, that of science and that of the humanities? Are not thousands of minds shaped more by the arts than by science and technology?

Bultmann, I suspect, would answer: it may appear so on the surface, but beneath, artists and those influenced by the arts are conditioned by science and technology, and are expressing their scientifically and technologically conditioned self-understanding in mythological terms. What the arts tell us of reality has to be assessed in terms which do not conflict with the world view presented by modern science and technology. For those who are formed in the humanities, a double apologetic is necessary: they must first be shown that their art and poetry really express a scientifically conditioned self-understanding; then they can be shown that for such a self-understanding, an interpretation of the New Testament in existentialist terms makes it meaningful for them.

But for those formed by the humanities, by art and poetry, is this demythologizing of their culture acceptable? Are they willing to admit that science and technology are the absolute criteria of all knowledge, and that the only valid ontology is existential analysis? If they are not, then Bultmann's apologia has its limitations.

A second questionable factor in Bultmann's thought is his use of existentialist philosophy. His use of philosophy, even a contemporary philosophy, to interpret the Christian message is not the problem; Christian theologians have done that from the beginning. To use a philosophy to interpret the Christian message is one thing; to reduce the Christian message to a philosophy is quite another, and Bultmann comes perilously close to such a reduction.

²⁴ *TNT* 2:36; cf. Oscar Cullmann, *Urchristentum und Gottesdienst* (4th ed.; Zurich, 1962) pp. 38, 57-58, 111-12.

He continues to use biblical language, to speak of modern man's need to believe in "the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ"; he regards Christian existence as a "grace." The vocabulary of traditional Christianity is there in Bultmann's theology. He gives meaning to all these words by a dexterous use of existentialist categories that strikes our imagination and provokes reflection on the deep meaning of the gospel. If he were saying that he is merely giving an interpretation of the faith in terms of existentialist philosophy in order to make the faith understandable and acceptable to those who have such an understanding of reality, or if he were saying that he is proposing one way of conceptualizing the Christian gospel, then we could admire his use of existentialism.

But he seems to be saying more. He is assuming that existentialism is valid, and that it alone is valid, or at least that all other ontologies are irrelevant and have nothing especially valuable to contribute to an understanding of reality and Christian existence. He seems to be trying to make Christianity fit existentialism, rather than trying to make existentialism one among the many servants which help to explain Christian faith.

Bultmann himself is aware of this objection to his work and he takes it up explicitly, for instance in *Jesus Christ and Mythology*.²⁵ Close reading of his idea of what biblical interpretation is and should be reveals that he is well aware of the limitations of his approach and of the precise sort of knowledge to be gained from it. He is seeking what the Bible has to say to us personally about human life in relationship to God, with the center of attention not on God but on human existence. Because existentialism's concern is human existence, it is the most apt tool to acquire an understanding of human life; the Bible, the New Testament specifically, provides an understanding of the relationship to God which must be included in human life, but about which existentialism says nothing; nor can it.

This method, however, tends to reduce the Bible to a foil against which the contemporary philosophies of any age can engage in a duel for the purpose of developing along theistic and Christian lines. The Bible becomes a collection of formal statements without any particular content, statements which are supratemporal, transhistorical, transcultural, to be used by each and every age as packaging for its own interpretation of reality. It may indeed tell us something we would not derive from nature and reason alone, but what it tells us becomes rather arbitrary, relative, and contingent, dependent upon

²⁵ *Op. cit.* (n. 1 above) pp. 45-59; see also "Bultmann Replies to His Critics," in *Kerygma and Myth* (n. 1 above) pp. 191-96.

the philosophies of each generation of men. Despite Bultmann's assertions that he is in reality reinforcing the historical quality of Christian revelation and God's action for man,²⁶ his use of the Bible appears to take the Bible out of history in order to make use of it in history according to the exigencies of any age. An example will illustrate this.

Bultmann skilfully shows that St. Paul understands man existentially.²⁷ His case is impressive. But is this the only interpretation of Paul which is possible and wholly adequate? Are we certain that this is Paul's understanding of these words and sentences, that he did not understand them in some other way, in terms of some philosophy, at least implicit, other than existentialism? God's revelation to us has been providentially conveyed to us in Paul's categories of thought. If we are to hear God's word, we must be careful not to dismiss any of the realities pointed to by whatever categories God used to speak to us in and through Paul, simply because existentialist philosophy does not have those same categories.

The limitations of existentialist philosophy as an interpretation and explanation of reality must be recognized, along with its consequent limitations for interpreting the revelation of God in and through history. An existentialist perpetually hangs on the cliff's edge over the abyss of idealism and solipsism, avoiding the plunge only by repeated denial of them.

Existentialism bypasses the notion of substance. Substance is not denied outrightly; it is implied in the "I" who lives or exists. But the notion is not developed, because the center of attention is not the "I" who lives but the process of living. Unconcern about substance is reinforced by a repugnance toward the idea of substance, which is conceived in a Platonic sense, rather than in Aristotle's sense of first substance in material beings, with all the connotations of existential contingency implied in this sense. Without a notion of substance, however, change—including living in intentionality—is not fully explained.

Existentialism also bypasses the problem of efficient causality wherever it appears. It does not bother to say why or how things can change and do in fact change, that is, actually proceed from potentiality to actuality.

The existentialist philosopher may consider these problems insoluble, or of secondary importance, or irrelevant to his pursuit. But they are problems; reality poses them to the wondering mind. The answers to them influence our concept of moral man. When one at-

²⁶ "A Reply to the Theses of J. Schniewind," in *Kerygma and Myth*, pp. 110-18.

²⁷ See n. 18 above.

tempts to interpret the New Testament with existentialist philosophy, one must bear in mind that the very tool he uses is inadequate to disclose exhaustively the whole of reality naturally apprehended, and hence this tool is inadequate for a complete interpretation of the New Testament.

The deficiency of existentialist philosophy taken as a norm, and not merely as a limited tool of interpretation, appears in Bultmann's rejection of mysticism, asceticism, and sacramentalism. He sees all of these as based on metaphysical dualism, with a pejorative evaluation of the body or the created. Existentialism knows nothing of such dualism. With existentialism as his razor, Bultmann excises from the message of the New Testament, as distortions of the Christian message for us today, any traces of mysticism, asceticism, and sacramentalism.

But is existentialism capable of explaining change without some sort of dualism? Is existentialism correct in knowing nothing about dualism? Or does it merely accept a description of change without trying to explain how it can take place? If existentialism is not interested in explaining change, which seems to be the case, and consequently posits no dualism, then on the grounds that existentialism has no dualistic concepts, one is not justified in casting out of the New Testament a priori any ideas of mysticism, asceticism, and sacramentalism as foreign to Christian faith. One must ask the Bible what it says, and if it says something about any one of these realities, this must be listened to, whether or not an existentialist set of categories provides for it. Any other course of procedure makes man, not God, the measure of Christian faith, whatever protests to the contrary may be made.

Bultmann's antimysticism, anti-asceticism, and antisacramentalism can be criticized on the grounds that what he attacks in each is a distorted understanding of the realities meant to be designated by these words. Bultmann has every right to attack false understandings of these words which are incompatible with Christianity; if he wishes, he is free to use these words to signify distorted views of reality; but in both cases he should make it clear that this is what he is doing. Otherwise an uncritical reader, in the process of rejecting distortions of Christian existence which take shelter under these names, rejects also essential elements of Christian existence which go by the same names.

In this apparently unqualified rejection of mysticism, asceticism, and sacramentalism, the potential damage to people's security in the pursuit of Christian existence and the break with traditional Christian expressions are all the more unfortunate in that Bultmann includes in the Christian life the realities which are meant to be designated by

these words. Not only does he include them; he admirably explains them to a certain extent. This brings us to a more positive appraisal of Bultmann's thought.

Renunciation

In place of asceticism, Bultmann refers to renunciation, sacrifice, or unworldliness.²⁸ For him, these words do not connote the dualism and denigrating attitude toward the body, material goods, and the world of nature which asceticism implies. A Catholic theologian more or less at home with the word "asceticism" finds Bultmann's description of unworldliness a good description of what Christian asceticism is supposed to be: readiness for God's demand, and renunciation in fulfillment of God's will.²⁹ In sound theology, asceticism has not been regarded as an exercise in self-mastery, or as a sloughing off of the body and matter to free the soul for flight to another realm. It has been regarded as the necessary by-product of dedication to God's will, which involves a rejection of worldliness—not the world as such, but the standards of greed, pride, and abuse of things which sinful men take as the norm of conduct. Admittedly, Manichean ideas can creep into asceticism in its preaching and practice, and they have done so. Because of this danger, Bultmann does a service in reminding us to distinguish Christian asceticism from its distortions.

The ascetic, according to Bultmann, forgoes marriage and embraces virginity because he looks down upon the body and temporal values. Not so the Christian; he or she embraces virginity only because the kingdom of God, whose demand appears in the concrete situation of life, calls for total obedience, a radical surrender of self which in the situation precludes marriage.³⁰ We cannot quarrel with Bultmann too much on this point: Catholic theology has always maintained that not virginity itself but virginity for the sake of the kingdom is a special good.

Bultmann's total understanding of virginity does not tally perfectly with Catholic thought on virginity; but it is noteworthy that Catholic "asceticism" does not put value on material virginity but on virginity for the kingdom. Bultmann's sweeping rejections of asceticism and virginity are based on conceptions of these facets of life which are too simple, too crude, not founded in authentic Christian tradition. Nevertheless, his approach to the meaning of virginity in the Christian life serves as a reminder of its true value.

In a similar way, Bultmann is opposed to a state of poverty as having any special value for salvation.³¹ All that Jesus demands is the

²⁸ *JW*, pp. 99, 187; *TNT* 1:11.

²⁹ *Loc. cit.*

³⁰ *JW*, pp. 99-100, 104-5.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

readiness to sacrifice property, or to use it, for the kingdom of God, for the fulfilment of God's will in the concrete situation. Simply being without material possessions is not a better thing.

Once again we must agree with Bultmann that the poverty called for by Jesus is primarily an attitude toward temporal goods. The "ascetical" writings of Christian saints through the centuries have always affirmed this, although they have also recognized the temptation present in having an abundance of material goods at hand, and the help in doing God's will that comes from a scarcity of possessions.

Sacraments and Mysticism

Bultmann's rejection of sacramentalism does not rule out the existence of sacraments, although obviously he must interpret them in his own way. What he says about the function of sacraments for Christian existence deserves attention. Baptism, he notes, is not merely a sign of a subjective religious experience or process. It must be seen in relationship to the Word. As the Word announces the salvation event in Jesus Christ and thus makes this saving event present for men in general, confronting them with a call to choose the kingdom, the sacrament of baptism makes the salvation occurrence present *for me*, an individual.³² Although the total understanding about what is involved in the sacraments differs, we find recent Catholic theology also seeing the sacraments as conveying God's grace precisely to the individual.³³

The mysticism which Bultmann so frequently opposes is not mysticism in the Christian sense, at least as it has been understood and respected in Catholic theology. Bultmann writes of Paul's idea of faith involving knowledge and the growth of this knowledge.³⁴ This gnosis is a gift of the Spirit. It is

knowledge of the will of God—i.e., one's grasp of ethical duties—elsewhere it is knowledge of the mysteries of salvation or of the eschatological occurrence. For by the power of the Spirit knowledge can soar aloft to a "wisdom" which lies beyond the paradoxical, foolish-seeming "wisdom" of the proclaimed cross; this higher "wisdom," however, is reserved for "mature" Christians. There is a Spirit-given "searching of the depths of God" (1 Cor 2:10).³⁵

This description of the knowledge aspect of faith and its development corresponds well with the Catholic theology of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the mystical life that flows from them, and the contemplation which latently or explicitly accompanies them.³⁶

³² TNT 1:312.

³³ Cf. Karl Rahner, *The Church and the Sacraments* (New York, 1963) pp. 21-23; E. Schillebeeckx, *Christ, the Sacrament of the Encounter With God* (New York, 1963) pp. 80-82. ³⁴ TNT 1:318, 326. ³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 327.

³⁶ It would be interesting to compare Bultmann's explanation of the growth of faith's

Bultmann tends to think of mysticism in its Eastern forms of loss of self in some vague abyss of being, or he confuses ecstasy—an emotional, sensible phenomenon—with mysticism, which is essentially a phenomenon of mind and will in Catholic theology.³⁷ Many problems confront us in Bultmann's discussion of the growth of faith's knowledge, of the Spirit's giving insight, etc., in view of his demythologizing the term "Spirit."³⁸ However, the mysticism which Bultmann finds so incompatible with the meaning of Scripture is not the mysticism of the Christian mystics and the best of Christian theology. That too may be opposed to his interpretation of the New Testament, but what disturbs the reader is Bultmann's failure to consider what the Christian mystics and the centuries of Christian theology have had to say about mysticism. He contents himself with a more or less popular notion of mysticism, and then proceeds to deny that mysticism has any place in Christian existence on the basis of his existentialist view of reality.

If we put aside Bultmann's prejudices about the meaning of mysticism, and consider what he has to say about the knowledge aspect of faith, its development, objects, conditions, and what it is to be distinguished from, namely, "free-floating speculation or a neutrally investigating science,"³⁹ we can enrich our appreciation of the development of faith, the mystical life. This, admittedly, is poorly understood by the average Christian, who, like Bultmann, tends to think of the mystical life exclusively in terms of ecstasy or the loss of self in the abyss of being.

Prudence and the Present

Of particular value is Bultmann's highlighting of man's critical situation as a free, moral being. At every moment man is in a crisis of decision, confronted by the kingdom, called to the choice of becoming a just man or a sinner; and once he has chosen, he is not then fixed in a state which he has merely to maintain. Rather, he is called again to choose his being as righteous or a sinner.

While this existential interpretation of man's moral existence strikes us as perhaps an overly dramatic view of reality, it does serve to focus attention on a critical facet of the ethics of Aristotle and the moral theology of Thomas Aquinas: the indispensable activity of prudence in the moral act. By prudence man decides and orders himself to act now, in this situation, in this way, in order to incarnate in concrete

knowledge with Jean Mouroux's study of faith in *I Believe* (New York, 1959), in which the mystical life is described as the development of faith.

³⁷ Cf. Bultmann's "submersion of self in the stream of life" (*JW*, p. 153) or his "world-canceling ecstatic experience" (*TNT* 2:86). ³⁸ *TNT* 1:333-37. ³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 327.

action the will of God for these circumstances. Catholic moral theologians have generally paid little attention to prudence and its acts of counsel, judgment, and command. Failing to do this, they have failed to focus sufficient attention on, and bring to awareness in others, the role of personal responsibility in Christian existence.

Without a developed doctrine of prudence, responsibility is shifted from the individual to law and to legislators. By their very nature, these cannot determine concrete acts apt for every particular situation. When laws or legislators fail to provide direction for individual situations, which is inevitable, people begin to complain, and often reject law itself as an insufficient guide to life and even as destructive of human freedom and fulfilment. Bultmann deserves credit for focusing the spotlight on decision and personal responsibility in Christian existence. Unfortunately, he does not have an articulated doctrine of prudence and falls into an ambiguous attitude toward law.

Bultmann also preserves us from a Christian existence which lives in a world of fancy, an imaginative world, secure, uninvolved with the events of history here and now. Human existence is historical existence. The real future is not some far-distant kingdom more imaginary than real, to be dreamed about in dark, quiet chapels. The real future, that which compels man to be for or against God, just or sinner, godly or worldly, is the action that lies before him.⁴⁰ Lack of social concern among many Christians has resulted from a religious existence which has put *all* its hopes in another world beyond history. Bultmann's insistence upon each moment as containing the possibility of the kingdom should turn the Christian's concern to the needs of men, whom Jesus, in God's name, calls them to love here and now as they are.

RADICAL OBEDIENCE

Man is in fact continually confronted with a call to decision. Insofar as dualism is in Jesus' teaching, it is a dualism of decision for the kingdom or for the world, that is, for the standards of man's sinful, autonomous self.⁴¹ Salvation means decision, committing the whole self to God in the concrete situation. It does not mean the soul's conquering the body or the eternal part of man escaping the temporal, but simply man's being for or against God. In a word, salvation means obedience.⁴² The kingdom claims man's will in obedience.⁴³

Jewish morality and ethics are essentially obedience to the will of God, according to Bultmann. In the Jewish mind, God is primarily Will.⁴⁴ Man's true relation to God is obedient surrender, as would be

⁴⁰ *JW*, pp. 51, 132. ⁴¹ *TNT* 2:21. ⁴² *JW*, p. 48.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 33. ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

expected of a being whose nature is to be willing, deciding, choosing subject of intentionality. This is not an ethic of self-fulfilment, of virtues, of values, of rewards, but of dependence on the will of God: obedience.⁴⁵

God's will was made known to the Jews in the law. Hence the Jews developed their morality of obedience to God's will in a morality of obedience to the law. As time passed, obedience to the law was regarded as necessary simply because the law had been given. The content of the law was no longer taken into consideration as important, but only the formality of the law, the fact that something had been commanded. Obedience became formal obedience, that is, fulfilling some prescription of the law dutifully simply because it was a prescription of law, even though its content was not seen as meaningful and did not correspond to actual needs.⁴⁶

Jesus, like other rabbis, accepted and explained the law. But Jesus differed: he required radical obedience. Radical obedience means the complete surrender of the whole of one's being to the content of the law. The Sermon on the Mount is not a series of precepts for organizing one's exterior conduct. It is a call to commit one's whole self to the fulfilment of the law—and not simply because a command has been given, but because the circumstances of life demand it, or, more precisely, the will of God manifest in the circumstances. Jesus, for example, would not desire a man to avoid divorce merely because He said it should be avoided, but because a man perceives that the circumstances require him to avoid it.⁴⁷

Out of the crisis of decision must come, not simply obedience to the law, but radical obedience to the will of God. Radical obedience requires a complete surrender of man to the will of God. Radical, or essential, obedience cannot be motivated by formal authority, by law as law quite independently of its content. Essential obedience consists in an inner embracing of and assenting to the content of the command; one must know, understand, and affirm the content of the law in order to have radical obedience.⁴⁸ Jesus' call to be perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect (Mt 5:48) is a call to an exact, true, wholly undivided, unwavering decision of radical obedience to God's will.⁴⁹

According to this view, no room is left for indifferent or neutral acts, or acts over and above what is required.⁵⁰ Every decision is either for or against the will of God revealed in the situation of the moment. If a law covers the situation, then man responds according to the law, not because of the law, but because of the content of the law, which

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 67-70. ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 66. ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 64, 73-78, 90-93.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 77; TNT 1:12. ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 119-20. ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

in this case answers the will of God made known in the circumstances. If no law covers the circumstances, man must respond responsibly on his own as the situation itself demands; not to act is to choose not to do God's will. Man cannot excuse himself either by choosing some law irrelevant to the situation or by choosing one of several laws regardless of content, then saying that he is, after all, obeying the law and that no more is required of him.

Radical obedience is not an ethic of works earning a reward. If Jesus recognizes that reward and punishment are meted out to men, He sees them as consequences of their deeds rather than as motives for conduct.⁵¹ Radical obedience rules out an ethic in which the good for its own sake is the motive.⁵² It frees one from formal authority, both law (including that of Scripture) and the men whose profession is to interpret the law.⁵³ A man is responsible only to God.

Some Problems

Radical obedience is a key concept in Bultmann's moral theology.⁵⁴ In view of this concept, however, we may very well ask if he is not proposing a perfectionist morality. I do not mean a morality that would consist in positing actions whose aim is to measure up to an ideal; he clearly rules this out. I mean a morality that would demand so complete, unequivocal, and absolute a surrender and commitment to God that no one could give it. True, any commitment to God's will must be the result of God's grace; and God's grace can accomplish the absolute and total surrender Bultmann describes. But in fact, are the only instances of God's grace such radical surrenders to His will? If so, who is saved? Is there no room for growth in Christian existence? Does it not make more sense to speak of radical obedience as a term towards which the Christian tends, rather than a condition which first must be met before one can be called a Christian? Perhaps, after all, Bultmann is proposing a goal-striving perfectionist-morality, despite his disclaimers.

Another problem about radical obedience is its identification with man's recognizing and assenting to the content of the law, with man's understanding materially what is being asked and deliberately embracing this content. We might ask Bultmann: Is this the kind of obedience with which Abraham responded to God's command to take his own son Isaac and sacrifice him? Did the prophets understand the content of every command that came to them from God and embrace the *content* wholeheartedly? Is there no mean between formal obedience, which, according to Bultmann, is a halfhearted observance of a command

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 78-79. ⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 79-80, 84. ⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

⁵⁴ See Thomas C. Oden, *Radical Obedience* (Philadelphia, 1964).

simply because it is a command, and radical obedience, which involves an understanding and affirmation of the content of the command?

Radical obedience could be had by grasping the need to fulfil a command as command, even though its content is not understood or embraced, because a man in authority has the right to direct the actions of others toward the common good. The concrete situation confronting a person may be simply this: some legitimate superior commands me to act; I do not understand or agree with the content of his command, but the will of God manifest in this situation requires me to obey, for the will of God surely includes obedience to legitimate authority, as long as legitimate authority does not command what is clearly contrary to the law of God.

Situation versus Law

Radical obedience demands commitment to God's will expressed in the circumstances of the moment. If the content of a law corresponds to the situation, then we speak of radical obedience in submitting to the law; but if the law is obeyed simply because it is the law and not because its content corresponds to the needs of the present, then we may not speak of radical obedience. The measure of what is to be done, then, is not the law but the concrete situation. The concrete situation of the present moment calls into question every standard of morality, even Scripture, in the search for the will of God.⁵⁵ No authority or theory can take away from man his responsibility to know what is required of him.⁵⁶

How does one recognize God's will in the situation? Bultmann claims that no special practices are designated for the man of faith.⁵⁷ The Christian needs no particular rules about how to conduct himself.⁵⁸ Jesus taught no ethics, that is, a valid theory of what to do and not to do; any such theory would come from a view of man, and would make man rather than God's will the measure of morality.⁵⁹ Jesus taught and demanded decision, which means that man must know what to do and what to leave undone, and cannot avail himself of some standard from the past or some universal principle.⁶⁰ "When a man asks after a way of life, there is nothing particular to say to him. He is to do what is right, what everyone knows."⁶¹

Laws, precepts, norms of morality, virtues, ideals—these are inadequate to satisfy the ethical demand of God, because this demand is unique in each instance. Each concrete situation confronts man with a unique expression of God's will and calls for a unique decision. No

⁵⁵ *JW*, p. 87. ⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 108. ⁵⁷ *TNT* 1:324. ⁵⁸ *JW*, p. 109.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 84-85. ⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 88. ⁶¹ *JW*, p. 97; cf. p. 113.

statute, law, norm, or ideal can embrace specific instances; there are always unprovided-for cases.⁶²

Even if law were not inadequate for decision-making in response to God's will, law is still dangerous to Christian existence. Law threatens Christian existence with sin, either because it offers an occasion to transgression, or (and this is the predominant danger) because it evokes an effort to fulfil it, thereby leading man to put his confidence in himself rather than in God, what St. Paul calls "boasting."⁶³ Living according to law implies deriving life from creatures, because law expresses what man thinks he is or should be. Hence he who acts according to law in the sense of trusting it to give him righteousness is relying for salvation on man rather than on God. Even if a man has faith, he cannot be saved by the law, attain justice through law; he may use it as a guide, a suggestion, a counsel, but he must rely on God for his justice, deriving it from God's will manifested in the present situation.⁶⁴

Is Bultmann antinomian? It certainly appears so from what has been said so far; but his position is subtle, perhaps even self-contradictory. Actually Bultmann is not unqualifiedly opposed to law. He speaks of the Old Law as having come to an end with Christ, but only insofar as it could claim to be the way to salvation, that upon which man could rely to be just. Insofar as the Old Law contains God's demands, it is still valid. To what extent does it contain God's demands? To the extent that it embraces situations still actual in history. Hence the ceremonial laws of the Old Law have come to an end, for since Christ they no longer reflect the concrete circumstances of worship.⁶⁵

Not the law itself nor the works prescribed by the law are to be rejected, but the attitude which they imply, namely, boasting.⁶⁶ Boasting, in Bultmann's interpretation of Paul,⁶⁷ is declaring one's ability and autonomy in achieving life, in attaining authentic human existence, in decision-making which achieves a true future. Boasting is setting one's own humanity up in the place of God, whose will alone gives life, authentic existence, a true future. To live by law and its works is to follow humanly-devised concepts of what should be done, and to trust these actions to give life. As long as law has a major place in one's ethical life, the temptation to boasting is always present, and more than the temptation for sinful man. To avoid boasting, Bultmann would like to excise law from morality altogether, but he refrains from doing so, and instead warns against the attitude inevitably annexed to it.

Bultmann distinguishes between obedience (*Gehorsam*) and ac-

⁶² *TNT* 1:12; *JW*, p. 85. ⁶³ *TNT* 1:242. ⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 264, 267.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 341. ⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 315-16. ⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 242-43.

accomplishment (*Leistung*), between deed (*Tat*) and work (*Werk*).⁶⁸ Obedience is surrender to or reliance on God's will; it constitutes men as just. Accomplishment implies autonomy, achievement through one's own capability; it constitutes man a sinner, one who relies on creatures rather than God. Obedience to God's will manifested in law is acceptable; but accomplishment of a work in fulfilment of the law is reprehensible. When one obeys God, he does a "deed," and this is necessary to constitute a just man; but when one fulfils a law, he does a "work" of the law, which implies autonomous self-fulfilment. Not deeds but works of the law are condemned by New Testament ethics.

Bultmann recognizes traditions and regulations arising in the eschatological congregation of the early Church, though it is with reserve that he speaks of "regulations." Such regulations "are created from case to case by the free sway of the Spirit."⁶⁹

Hence, while apparently taking a stand against law, Bultmann does not reject it altogether. He avoids a morality of law-fulfilment, because such morality is incompatible with radical obedience and individual responsibility. But he is aware that, in setting aside law in favor of the concrete situation as the conveyor of God's demand, he opens the door to subjective arbitrariness in moral conduct, and this he wishes to avoid. Why can he not reconcile law and the demand of the situation? The answer lies in his concept of law.

Bultmann's Concept of Law

Bultmann's stress on radical obedience coincides to some extent with the importance of prudence in the moral theology of St. Thomas, as we have seen with regard to decision, which is one aspect of radical obedience. Every action establishing man as just in the concrete, existential order presupposes the functioning of prudence, that is, counsel, judgment, and, most importantly, the concrete command "Do this," which is inextricably linked to choice or election on the part of the will. Christian action must issue from a personal decision or command to one's self to do this particular deed in response to the will of God confronting one in this situation.⁷⁰

Prudence cannot be "taught" in the ordinary sense; the acquisition of prudence is not the acquisition of information, ethical norms, precepts, ideals. No matter how much information of this sort a man has, no matter how high his ideals, only experience can teach him how to use these to discern the will of God in the demands of the moment

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 284, 315-16, 344; see German edition, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (Tübingen, 1948) pp. 279, 311-12, 340.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* 2:95. ⁷⁰ *Summa theologiae* 2-2, q. 47, a. 8.

and to respond to it.⁷¹ The reason for this is that the demands of each moment are unique, as Bultmann emphasizes, and the norms of morality do not cover specific instances. Personal initiative and responsibility must make the leap between general norms and the particular decision suitable for the concrete circumstances. Even if experience enables a man to take this leap with facility, accuracy, and courage, the prudential decision of today cannot be relied on blindly for the situation of tomorrow, because the whole world and all circumstances will have changed.

So far the thought of Bultmann and Aquinas are not far apart. Both are aware of the necessity of personal responsibility to discern the unique will of God in the situation existentially confronting each individual. Both are aware that laws, regulations, statutes, commands do not provide the precise answer to action in every particular set of circumstances. But from this inability of the law to cover the particular case, Bultmann draws a pejorative conclusion about law: he sees it more as a hindrance to individual responsibility and radical obedience than as a help. Indeed, he seems desperate to find some good in law, for he fears the consequences of abolishing it altogether, but he does not find much to affirm in its favor.

Bultmann's difficulty stems from his univocal thinking about command, and from a confusion of the abstract and concrete orders. He passes adverse judgment on law because it cannot cover every particular case, because there are always exceptions.⁷² Of course! Law is command which is abstract and general, whereas the command of prudence, personal decision, is concrete and particular. The former was never meant to replace the latter, and if people tend to substitute the law for personal decision, this is a failure in human understanding of the role of law, not in the nature of law. To reject law because it is not personal decision shaped to the particular situation like a glove for the hand, mistakes the nature and purpose of law: law is only a guide to assist the individual in forming a decision. It is one thing to question the applicability of a law, quite another thing to question the law itself.⁷³ A gap always exists between the abstract and concrete, the general and particular, but that does not invalidate the abstract and general.

What leads Bultmann to confuse the command of law as a general norm with the command of prudential decision that uniquely covers the particular case? In view of his existentialism, law can be only a collection of past decisions. A law is to be understood in a nominalist

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, a. 14, ad 3; a. 15, ad 2; q. 49, a. 1.

⁷² *TNT* 1: 12.

⁷³ This confusion appears, e.g., in *JW*, pp. 87-89.

fashion, as pointing to a collection of very similar decisions in very similar situations, but not pointing to any intrinsic, universal element in this multitude of instances. Hence, when a new situation arises, since the new situation is unlike those of the past and the decision called for must be unique, the law cannot be applied to the situation. Only after the decision has been made may it be decided that this decision was sufficiently like certain previous ones, so that it can be classified under that law which signifies that collection of decisions.

This concept of law corresponds to Bultmann's concept of man's nature. As a being in intentionality constantly in search of his own self, his nature is ever changing. Law can do no more than report what man has been in the past; it cannot tell him what he should be in the future. Law is not, as it is for Paul Tillich, an expression of man's essential being confronting him in his existential estrangement.⁷⁴ As expressive of man's essential being, law does not provide man with a substitute for prudential decision, but it is not therefore automatically questionable in its radical validity as a norm of conduct. It is a guide, a pointer, indicating the general direction in which man ought to decide.

It should be borne in mind, moreover, that no situation is governed by only one law. Man's essential being is rich and complex; it cannot be expressed in one law, even in all laws put together, for there is, after all, uniqueness in even the essential being of each individual. Precisely because man's essential being is so rich and complex, man finds many demands made on him in any situation, and the actualization of his essential being is a complex business. When confronted by a multiplicity of demands which appear incompatible with one another, man's responsibility is to choose to follow those demands which appear more important to him in conscientious appraisal of the situation. Man is limited in his ability to act; often he is physically impeded from doing what ideally should be done. If a man happens to decide to save his drowning wife rather than his drowning mother, this does not mean that he has questioned the validity of the law to respect and care for one's parents, or that the concrete situation put the validity of that law in question from the start. The problem is simply the applicability of a law by a finite being in complex and difficult circumstances.

Univocal thinking, confusion between the abstract and concrete, the general and particular, between principles for action and their applicability to circumstances, a nominalist conception of law, and fundamental existentialist categories of thought—all are at the root of Bult-

⁷⁴ *Systematic Theology* 2 (Chicago, 1963) 46-47.

mann's inability to handle adequately the problem and place of law in Christian morality.

In spite of these shortcomings, however, he does give us valuable insights into the dangers of law in the ethical life: the temptation to boast because we live by the law, and the temptation to substitute law for personal decision rather than to use it as a guide to find God's will in the present moment of our lives.

LOVE

Bultmann's tendency toward antinomianism is checked by his insistence upon the objectivity of what is to be done, namely, the will of God manifested in the concrete situation. This objective standard of human decision and action is pointed to by the commandment of love.⁷⁵

The commandment of love requires, first, love of God with the whole of one's heart, soul, mind, and strength. Self-understanding brings awareness of limitation. The concrete situation of self, as comprehended in self-understanding, presents the demand of God to submit finite self to the infinite Will. Radical obedience, submission, dependence upon God are called for. Thus love of God, radical obedience to the will of God, is the first commandment. Significantly, love of God is radical obedience to Him.⁷⁶

Since radical obedience to God involves submitting to His will manifested in the circumstances of the moment, and since those circumstances are constituted by interpersonal relationships, love of God is inextricably entwined with love of neighbor.⁷⁷ The commandment of love toward neighbor expresses the will of God as it determines conduct toward others in life's situations.⁷⁸ "As I can love my neighbor only when I surrender my will completely to God's will, so I can love God only while I will what he wills, while I really love my neighbor."⁷⁹

Love is not an emotion but an act of will deciding for the kingdom of God in one's conduct toward neighbor.⁸⁰ It is not pursuit of bestowal of some humanitarian good, such as the dignity of man or the triumph of spirit over bodily conditions. Nor is it a longing for a share in the divine essence. Consequently, the motivation of love is simply God's will, not human values or divine privileges.⁸¹

Love of God and neighbor requires overcoming or renouncing self and opting for the will of God which determines conduct toward neighbor. Man must set aside his own claims in favor of the demand of God mani-

⁷⁵ *TNT* 1:341-44.

⁷⁶ *JW*, p. 114.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 114-15.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 117-18.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 112-13.

fested in the needs and claims of his neighbor.⁸² Forgiving one's neighbor is a way of setting aside one's own claims, so that forgiveness, like renunciation, is characteristic of Christian love.⁸³

If we speak of loving our neighbor as ourselves, this must be understood to mean that we do for neighbor what we would like to have done for us. This does not mean that our attitude toward self is an ideal or pattern to be followed; rather, it is an inclination to be overcome.⁸⁴ Denial of self, before both the will of God and the need of neighbor, plays an important part in Bultmann's development of the notion of love, but he refuses to call this self-denial asceticism.

Love has its positive aspect, however, though Bultmann shies away from defining it. He notes that the command of love is void of content.⁸⁵ This is linked with the idea which we saw earlier, namely, that no particular work is prescribed for the man of faith. What is done in loving neighbor, the content of love's deed, is determined by the circumstances of the moment; we are to love our neighbors as we love ourselves in every situation, and we all know what it means to love ourselves in any situation. Hence we already know the content of love's demand.⁸⁶ Jesus' ethic is the call to decide for what is already evident in every situation in which we encounter our fellow men. Needless to say, this is an oversimplification of what is evident in human life.⁸⁷

Bultmann offers two ways of understanding virtues and commandments in relationship to Christian love. Virtues and commandments may be considered as directions for character education or for denials of the world, the former view presupposing some humanistic ideal to be attained, the latter presupposing some Manichean dualism. Such an interpretation of the virtues and commandments is not in accord with the message of Jesus. But the virtues and commandments can be considered as modes of conduct in fellowship, directing man into the human community. Directing man into the human community, they are not denials of men and the world, but acceptance of them; as modes of conduct in fellowship, they are directives not for personality development, character education, self-fulfilment, but for self-denial, renunciation, in the service of others.⁸⁸

Bultmann's interpretation of love has the advantage of cutting through legalism and getting beyond humanism to bring men into encounter with God. In loving their neighbor according to the demands of the situation, men place their action, their decision, indeed their being, their real future in the hands of God, for it is God's providential action

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 112. ⁸³ *Ibid.*, pp. 116-17. ⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 115-16.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 94; *TNT* 1:19. ⁸⁶ *JW*, p. 115. ⁸⁷ See Oden, *op. cit.*, pp. 122-24.

⁸⁸ *TNT* 2:221-22.

which arranges the situations in which men find themselves moment after moment. Fulfilling the law of love in this way implies abandonment to God's providence, a complete forsaking of the security of human norms and standards. This interpretation also does justice to the love given neighbor, because the good done for neighbor is done for him in his own needs. To love him for some other reason than himself, even for God's sake, would be a failure to meet the demand of the situation, and hence a failure to love God.

Against Bultmann's idea of Christian love, however, we can point to the impracticality of his theory that we know what to do in every situation without the help of law, ideals, etc. Another criticism of Bultmann's idea of Christian love is its coldness: it is obedience. We agree with Bultmann that Christian charity is not an emotion or a feeling. Charity is essentially a function of the will. But it implies, not simply obedience, but rather the wish for the welfare of the other springing from an affection for the other—not a feeling of affection, but an orientation of the will toward the other bringing about an affective union, a sympathy with the other on a spiritual level.⁸⁹

FAITH

All that we have considered in the previous pages about the Christian life is made possible by faith. We will note only two points about faith.

Bultmann describes faith as making Christian existence possible.⁹⁰ Faith opens to man the *possibility* of choosing the kingdom of God. Faith provides what reason alone does not. Reason alone cannot perceive the demand of God in the situation of life. Faith *can* perceive this, so that a new possibility for choice and action is given. Although faith gives the believer something which the nonbeliever does not have, it gives only a possibility for Christian existence. The believer must actualize this possibility by obedience to the will of God, by loving God and neighbor as called for by the needs of the moment.⁹¹

This notion of faith's opening the possibility of Christian existence, of faith's requiring the complement of love of God and neighbor for actual Christian existence, corresponds very closely to the Catholic notion of faith as giving man a new vision of reality (Bultmann speaks of a new self-understanding)⁹² which, however, does not of itself confer the actuality of Christian existence, but must be completed by love.

The second point of note is that Bultmann does not regard faith as

⁸⁹ Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 2-2, q. 27, a. 2.

⁹⁰ *TNT* 1:329, 333; 2:26.

⁹¹ *Ibid.* 1:324, 333, 336-37, 344-45.

⁹² "Bultmann Replies to His Critics," in *Kerygma and Myth*, pp. 202-4; *TNT* 1:315.

an experience, a feeling, an emotion, it is not primarily trust or remorse.⁹³ It is obedience to the will of God insofar as it is the acceptance of the message of the crucified Jesus and the sacrifice of one's previous self-understanding.⁹⁴ Faith includes essentially a knowledge aspect, a doctrinal aspect (though, after demythologizing, the doctrinal content is rather meager).⁹⁵ This notion of faith is very much akin to the notion of Catholic theology, closer than that of many Protestants. Bultmann, of course, will have nothing to do with an infused habit or virtue or state of faith.⁹⁶ This is due to his notion of the nature of man; there is no place for such a reality in existentialist man. But then it becomes difficult to avoid the taint of Pelagianism, which must haunt any interpretation of the Scriptures which does not raise and answer the problems of efficient causality in the Christian life.

In this essay we have seen the backbone of Bultmann's moral theology: (1) decision in the present moment for or against the kingdom of God; (2) radical obedience to the will of God manifested in the present situation; (3) love of God in the love of neighbor, which is expressed by virtues and pointed to by commandments, but finally determined by the demands of the concrete situation; (4) faith making all this possible by obedient acceptance of a new self-understanding by which man perceives the action of God calling him to decision in the present moment.

The chief value of Bultmann's moral theology lies in his forcing us to concentrate on the present moment and its real content as critical for genuine Christian existence. He alerts us to look for the will of God in the concrete situations of life, and compels us to accept our responsibility to encounter God in them, rather than taking irresponsible refuge in institutions, authorities, and laws which in the final analysis cannot provide the ultimate decision of prudence but only guidance in its formation. The moral theology of Rudolf Bultmann makes Christian existence appear to be, not a consolation for the sad, nor security for the anxious, nor a shelter for the fearful, but a challenge for every moment of life.

⁹³ *TNT* 1:316-18, 324.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 314-15.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 318, 326-27.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 316.