

# THE THEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF RUDOLF BULTMANN

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**H**OW DOES one briefly explain the theological significance of a man whose diversified writings extend from his first book review in 1908<sup>1</sup> to the present decade?<sup>2</sup> Is it possible for a short essay to disclose a fundamental unity in topics which range from source criticism, the history of religion, literary criticism, classical philology, technical exegesis, Gnostic studies, existential philosophy, and hermeneutics to the Gifford Lectures, the theological essay, popular and literate dialogue about the Church, demythologizing, and the relation of the New Testament to daily life?<sup>3</sup> If the theological significance is judged in terms of intellectual climate, moral force, and scholarly style or by the more tangible but subtle influence on several generations of scholars, then the theological significance seems almost as elusive as it is palpable.

Fortunately, diversity of form and subject is more apparent than real. The theological atmosphere and problematic shaped by Bultmann may be traced to concepts and procedures available to any critical reader. While it is quite correct to note, as did Hans Jonas on the *Feiertag* celebrated in honor of Bultmann in Marburg, November 16, 1976, that it is impossible to separate the man from his writings, for he lived as he wrote,<sup>4</sup> we are not here primarily concerned with Bultmann's personal psychological integrity, striking as it is. It may, however, be accurate to say that this escalating unity of life and work is grounded in the one objective to which Bultmann committed himself: the mediation of the Christian tradition, the attempt to make a particular religious vision and its theological interpretation fruitful for the present and future.

<sup>1</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, "Der literarische Charakter der neutestamentlichen Schriften," *Christliche Welt* 22 (1908) 378 (two paragraphs).

<sup>2</sup> His last commentary, *Der Zweite Brief an die Korinther* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1976) was transcribed from class lectures given in Bultmann's last semester at Philipps-Universität, 1951, by Erich Dinkler. Some shorter articles will be appearing shortly. Apart from the sermons, Bultmann's unpublished material is slight.

<sup>3</sup> A bibliography of Bultmann's own writings may be found in Rudolf Bultmann, *Exegetica* (ed. Erich Dinkler; Tübingen: Mohr, 1967) 483-507. I have assembled another bibliography including books, articles, and reviews emerging directly from the work of Bultmann.

<sup>4</sup> Interviews with some of Bultmann's colleagues, friends, and students are spontaneously unanimous in this judgment.

While aspects of Bultmann's theological significance are impressively conspicuous in his personal religious synthesis available to research, for the larger literate public his theological significance resides in the clarity and consistency with which he perceived the enterprise of mediating the Christian tradition and in the comprehensiveness with which he executed the venture. Even here, his theological significance is not simply the exhaustive scope and symmetrical integrity of his conceptual and operational framework, but as much the heuristic nature of that structure.

The intention to mediate the Christian religious and theological tradition proceeds first as ontological process, as motion toward a term, as intentionality oriented to understanding. The process creates, apprehends, and expects progressive epigenetic differentiations of consciousness. This unity is dynamic and corresponds to life primarily and to reflection secondarily. When accomplished, the intentionality appears as a logical terminus, as quiescence, as systematized acts of judgment and decision. Epigenetically differentiated consciousness appears as finished and synthetic. This unity is logical and corresponds to reflection primarily and to life secondarily. To the first process corresponds a genetic or historical analysis, the attempt to understand dynamics. To the second, an analysis of system, the effort to comprehend the total arrangement. Both avenues indicate that Bultmann's theological significance is his outline of a hermeneutical field, his grasp of the elements constituting that field, his understanding of the operations adequate to the field and its elements, and the radical execution of the operations congruent to the field and its elements. So does the Christian tradition enter man's horizon to ennoble and transform existence.

#### GENETIC ANALYSIS

Rudolf Karl Bultmann was born on August 20, 1884 in Wiefelstede, Oldenburg. His father was an Evangelical-Lutheran pastor. His paternal grandfather was a missionary, his maternal grandfather a pastor in Baden. Though his autobiographical reflections are meager,<sup>5</sup> we know<sup>6</sup> that the classical training of his gymnasium years, 1895-1903, particularly his study of Greek, developed a deep interest in the classics, classical philology, literary criticism, and in humanistic education as such. Of the latter he later wrote: "humanistic education does not at all

<sup>5</sup> Brief biographical notes are available. See Rudolf Bultmann, *Existence and Faith* (tr. Schubert M. Ogden; New York: Meridian, 1960) 283-88; *Karl Barth-Rudolf Bultmann Briefwechsel 1922-1926* (ed. Bernd Jasper; Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1971) 313-21.

<sup>6</sup> For personal details I am largely indebted to Mrs. Antje Lemke (daughter of Rudolf Bultmann) of Syracuse University.

pretend to have a direct and practical meaning for life, but rather is based on the view that the spiritual world transcends practical needs and has its own autonomous value for man. Humanistic education shapes the spiritual universe and furnishes man with a richness, a joy, and a happiness beyond the fulfilment of practical needs. This education *forms character, shapes the person.*"<sup>7</sup>

This early and lasting acquaintance with the intellectual wealth of the classical world enabled Bultmann to understand contrasts between the Greek and New Testament views of man and the world. The Greek tradition searched for an *archē*, a beginning point, a principle by which all else became intelligible, a principle which was ultimately God.<sup>8</sup> This is a *Weltanschauung*<sup>9</sup> which dissolves the riddle of life by the development of the *polis* and of *technē, epistēmē*.<sup>10</sup> Existence in the community founded by *nomos* leads to liberty. The paradigm of knowledge is the act of seeing.<sup>11</sup> Man is essentially, in this view, intellect.

In marked contrast is the New Testament, which does not search for an originating principle but believes in God the Creator. The enigma of life is solved neither by theoretical knowledge nor by a social community, but rather by belief in a creating, preserving, and encountering God who works in man's personal history. For biblical man, knowledge is primarily the auditory model and the internalized response to the word which "is spoken to and within the historical existence of man."<sup>12</sup> Because the word is received in the world of interiority and because man's response to this word constitutes his *Dasein*, the New Testament portrays man essentially as will.

The classical inheritance was an antecedent for the theological curriculum upon which Bultmann entered after finishing *das Abitur* examination in 1903. He studied theology for three semesters in Tübingen, two in Berlin, two more in Marburg. He cites as influences in Tübingen the Church historian Karl Müller; in Berlin, the Old Testament professor Hermann Gunkel and the historian of dogma Adolf Harnack; in Marburg, the New Testament professors Adolf Jülicher and Johannes Weiss, the systematic theologian Wilhelm Herrmann.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, "Humanismus und Christentum" (1948), *Glauben und Verstehen* 2 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1952) 147 (hereafter *GV*).

<sup>8</sup> Bultmann, "Das Verständnis vom Welt und Mensch im Neuen Testament und in Griechentum," *GV* 2, 66.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* 69.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* 59.

<sup>11</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, review of Max Pohlenz, *Der hellenistische Mensch*, *TLZ* 75 (1950) 596-600. Cf. also Bultmann's review of Thorlief Boman, *Das hebräische Denken im Vergleich mit dem griechischen*, in *Gnomon* 27 (1955) 557.

<sup>12</sup> Bultmann, "Humanismus und Christentum," *GV* 2, 141.

<sup>13</sup> Jaspert, *Briefwechsel* 314. Bultmann, *Existence and Faith* 283-84.

In Berlin, as elsewhere during his life, he attended concerts and the theater and visited museums. This appreciation of the arts led to his later observations that aesthetic appreciation demands distance from the object and therefore cannot be confused with religion. Despite his lifelong love of Bach and Mozart (he was an accomplished pianist and would play something from Bach each morning) and his persistent suggestions that students read novels, attend the theater, and understand the modern mind, Bultmann made a radical distinction between culture and religion. "Culture is the methodical unfolding of human reason in its three realms—the theoretical, the practical and the aesthetic."<sup>14</sup> But religion is a pervasive and internalized experience of absolute dependence<sup>15</sup> which enables the individual to achieve authentic human existence.

### *Professional Work*

Bultmann's professional activity began in 1907, after he had taught one year in the gymnasium at Oldenburg, when he accepted the position of *Repetent* in the *Seminarium Philippinum* in Marburg. Here he worked on his *Promotion* and *Habilitation*. He received the Lic. Theol. in 1910 for his work *Der Stil der paulinischen Predigt und die kynisch-stoische Diatribe*, a topic suggested to him by Weiss. In 1912 he received his *Habilitation* with the treatise *Die Exegese des Theodor von Mopsuestia*, a subject proposed by Jülicher. By 1912 Bultmann had published five articles and eight book reviews, all of which pertained directly to the historical-critical study of the New Testament. Articles published from 1913 to 1921 remain specifically focused on New Testament criticism. In 1918 he wrote "Die Bedeutung der Eschatologie für die Religion des Neuen Testaments,"<sup>16</sup> a motif that was later to become central in his theology, for "it is in eschatology that the transcendent character of the concept of God is clearly manifested."<sup>17</sup> The exegetical period to 1921 is characterized by Bultmann's pertinacious use of the New Testament and primitive Christian literature as a starting point for all subsequent reflection. That Christianity be measured by the New Testament word is likewise his aim in *Die Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition*, written in Breslau and finished in Giessen, where Bultmann had succeeded Bousset in 1920.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, "Culture and Religion," *The Beginnings of Dialectic Theology* 1 (ed. James M. Robinson; tr. Keith R. Crim and Louis De Grazia; Richmond, Va.: John Knox, 1968) 209.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* 210.

<sup>16</sup> *ZTK* 27 (1918) 76-87.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* 87.

<sup>18</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *Die Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1921).

By 1921 Synoptic source criticism had somewhat reversed the momentum of the almost universal assumption of a consistent development in the life of Jesus. The gradual liquidation of this supposition needs only mention here. Wrede's *Das Messiasgeheimnis in den Evangelien* (1901),<sup>19</sup> showed that Mark's Gospel is a reflection of early Church theology, and that the author arranged the material he had received from tradition. This suggested a specific task for historical research. Johannes Weiss, in *Das Urchristentum* (1903), set out to find the historical material while assuming the reliability of the Papias tradition that Mark was the interpreter of Peter. This search indicated the complexity of the material and the dimensions of the problem facing historical reconstruction. Wellhausen's commentaries of 1903, 1904, 1909, and 1911 revealed that the tradition "consists of individual stories or groups of stories joined together in the Gospels . . . and he also showed how pieces of primitive tradition alternated with secondary material."<sup>20</sup> This called for study of the stages in the process of redaction; and the methods used by Gunkel for the Old Testament were applied to the New. "The distinction of traditional from editorial material is the real subject of K. L. Schmidt's *Der Rahmen der Geschichte Jesu* (1919)."<sup>21</sup>

What is here significant for the theologian is Bultmann's securing his understanding of Christianity and its theology in the vehicles of literary, historical, and comparative activity. He rejects, for example, any attempt to transcend the imperfect but promising methods of literary criticism and historical analysis; surrogates lead to psychologizing or to projection or to a "construct of reverie."<sup>22</sup> So certain was Bultmann of his methods that he spent almost no time answering critics who accused him of skepticism. Critical method affirmed that the material collected in the Palestinian Church was not random but dictated by the apologetic, polemic, hortatory, and cultic needs of the Church. Since the Church did not create new literary genres<sup>23</sup> but employed those found in their rabbinic environment, careful comparison and contrast is required. The Hellenistic community took the Palestinian tradition and modified it in accord with their needs. This they shaped into the gospel.

It gradually became clear that the theology formulated before the development of the historical-critical method could only be maintained by ignoring the realities of scholarship. Such a procedure would ulti-

<sup>19</sup> Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition* (tr. John Marsh; New York: Harper & Row, 1963) 1.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* 2.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* 3.

<sup>22</sup> Bultmann, review of F. Spitta, *Die Auferstehung Jesu*, in *TLZ* 44 (1919) 124.

<sup>23</sup> Bultmann, *Synoptic Tradition* 368.

mately lead to alienation not only from theology but from the Christian tradition. Intellectual consistency demanded a theology capable of shaping itself to new realities.

### *A Thematic Shift*

Bultmann's writings of the 1920's witness a significant thematic shift to the moral and practical demands for a theology adequate to the pioneering achievements of the historical-critical method. The new thematic was occasioned by a series of subtle and persistent developments in and out of Marburg which do not need elaboration here. A major current was Bultmann's disenchantment with liberal theology, a dissatisfaction that contributed to his efforts to develop a dialectical theology congenial to the Barthian programmatic outlined in the 1919 *Römerbrief*. The temporal location of this decisive turn is 1925; its primary documentation, "Das Problem einer theologischen Exegese des Neuen Testaments;"<sup>24</sup> its secondary instruments, "Welchen Sinn hat es, von Gott zu reden?"<sup>25</sup> and the review of Peterson's book *Was ist Theologie?*<sup>26</sup> Bultmann moves to a new stage of meaning, to the formation of new theological concepts sufficient to the new theological problematic.

The turn in Bultmann's thinking was not sudden. Its antecedents lay in some articles written shortly before 1925. Two, from 1920, discuss the more general subject of religion: "Religion und Kultur"<sup>27</sup> and "Ethische und mystische Religion im Urchristentum."<sup>28</sup> The first distinguishes religion from culture and undoubtedly manifests a Neo-Kantian trend fostered by the Marburg Neo-Kantians Cohen and Natorp, a theme which merits investigation elsewhere.<sup>29</sup> The "Ethische" article reflects not only the role that biblical criticism plays in understanding primitive Christianity but also the function this criticism has in the revision of theology. F. C. Baur, who saw "the history of primitive Christianity as a unified, linear development in three stages, characterized by Jesus, Paul, and John,"<sup>30</sup> represents a classical mentality in opposition to the new era of historical consciousness. His theology, "the spiritual content of the message of Jesus, consciously developed and formulated in Paul

<sup>24</sup> *Zwischen den Zeiten* 3 (1925) 334-57; translation, *Beginnings of Dialectic Theology* 236-56.

<sup>25</sup> *TBl* 4 (1925) 129-35.

<sup>26</sup> *Christliche Welt* 39 (1925) 1061-62.

<sup>27</sup> *Christliche Welt* 34 (1920) 417-21; *Beginnings* 205-20.

<sup>28</sup> *Christliche Welt* 34 (1920) 725-31, 730-43 (Originally a lecture given at Wartburg, Sept. 29, 1920, and a reaction to Barth's *Römerbrief*); *Beginnings* 221-35.

<sup>29</sup> One of the very few to discuss this problem is Roger A. Johnson, *The Origins of Demythologizing* (Leiden: Brill, 1974).

<sup>30</sup> Bultmann, "Ethical and Mystical Religion," *Beginnings* 221.

and continued in John,<sup>31</sup> accepted by all confessions but for different reasons, could not survive scrutiny.

The facile theological approach to Scripture, an inheritance of a less historically conscious world, was challenged by Wrede's *Paulus* (1905), the investigations of Hellenism, principally by "Reitzenstein and Wendland among the philologists, and Bousset and Heitmüller among the theologians; it is primarily Bousset's brilliant work *Kyrios Christos* (1913) which allows an entirely new picture of history to emerge."<sup>32</sup> This turn to critical history was not unanimously accepted, particularly by those concerned with the organizational and sociological aspects of Christianity.<sup>33</sup> "The modern direction of piety, in its turning away from historical work, has been characterized as Gnosticism. This is correct to the extent that piety wishes to tear the connection with historical forces into shreds, and completely reinterprets history as myth, as appears to me to be the case in Barth's *Epistle to the Romans*."<sup>34</sup> Theology could not remain Gnostic. Nor could it survive in an isolated compartment of man's consciousness. Bultmann noted that "the task of critical-historical theology (indeed, of all theology) can never be to establish piety, but only to lead to reflection, to help clarify and purify the intellectual consistency of consciousness."<sup>35</sup>

### 1925

In the central 1925 essay, Bultmann holds that theological exegesis—in contrast to rationalistic, Hegelian, naturalistic, biological, and psychological views of history and of man—must operate not from a detached, disinterested, supposedly neutral viewpoint. Biblical texts are not "to be inspected" from a distance, but are rather accepted as statements meant "to determine the existence of the reader."<sup>36</sup> This is because "there are perhaps fundamental realities in history which may be grasped only by giving up a detached position, only by being ready to take a stand."<sup>37</sup> The subject matter, "die Sachen,"<sup>38</sup> of the Bible is possibilities for understanding human existence. This subject matter is

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. 221.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. 223.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. 229. "It is said...that interest in history and its documentation has unfortunately diminished" (Bultmann, review of K. Bihlmeyer, *Die apostolischen Väter*, in *Christliche Welt* 39 [1925] 1064).

<sup>34</sup> Bultmann, "Ethical and Mystical Religion," *Beginnings* 230.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Bultmann, "Das Problem einer theologischen Exegese des Neuen Testaments," *Zwischen den Zeiten* 3 (1925) 334–57; *Beginnings* 238.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

intelligible only if the interpreter himself has a relation to the subject matter. Without such a relation to the subject matter, historical and psychological exegesis "establish primarily that this or that has been thought, said, or done at a particular time and under such and such historical circumstances and psychological conditions, without reflecting on the meaning and demands of what is said."<sup>39</sup> A relation to the subject matter enables the interpreter to understand texts as possibilities for "the concrete individual."<sup>40</sup> Only a relationship to the subject matter mediates meaning and reality. Traditional historical exegesis asked "'What is said?' We ask 'What is meant?'"

### *Theological Interpretation*

In the quest for theological meaning Bultmann now introduces two terms which are really modes of access to the Bible: *Sachexegese* and *Sachkritik*. *Sachexegese* is largely identified with the traditional historical exegesis, the identification of what is said and what is done. *Sachkritik*, on the other hand, "comes to what is meant by what is said, and yet measures what is said by what is meant."<sup>41</sup> In simple factual material both exegeses may coincide. *Sachkritik*, as a presupposition of theological interpretation, is the quest for meaning, the search for the subject matter. It is an orientation to meaning grounded in the interpreter's relation to the subject matter. "What is available to the interpreter depends on how responsive he is to the range of human possibility," on "what sort of interpretation . . . the exegete has of himself as a man."<sup>42</sup> All textual interpretation is determined by self-interpretation. The romanticist interprets texts aesthetically, since he understands man's essence to be form. The idealist sees the texts as a gradual unfolding of spirit, because he already interprets the essence of man as reason and the intellectual evolution of ideas. The psychologist apprehends texts in terms of "psychic conditions, moods, and experiences,"<sup>43</sup> for he defines man in psychological categories. All these projected self-interpretations view man in general terms, as a particular instance of a universal law, as a member of a species. As such, they view texts from a distance. Such interpreters consider themselves as "basically in control of what is said or what is meant."<sup>44</sup> Without conscious intent the interpreter shapes the texts to his design.

The theological posture of which Bultmann writes is characterized by the epistemic principle of *Sachkritik*, that is, the approach to texts first requires a relation to the subject matter which is appropriate to the way in which the texts present the subject matter. So must the interpreter

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. 239.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. 241.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. 242.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. 243.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.



not assume that he is in control of his existence or specify the type meaning he will derive from the Bible. For such an interpreter, human existence is a riddle, an enigma, a problematic, a mystery, a question. The interpreter's life is apprehended as constituted by a series of individual and unique events which consistently demand decisions—decisions which are capricious unless made against some measure of meaning. Such awareness manifests existence as historical in the sense that existence is "existential possibility." "In general, it can be said that interest in a particular area of history (if the work in it is not pure busywork) rests on a conscious or unconscious choice among the various possibilities for making human existence accessible and that, insofar as this choice results from existential vitality, this vitality will continually be effective in the historical task."<sup>45</sup>

Theology always remains "the conceptual presentation of man's existence as an existence determined by God."<sup>46</sup> Bultmann identifies exegesis with historical theology, because exegesis should lead to historical and theological affirmation in a symbiotic fashion. Systematic theology is the presentation of "the interpretation of man found in the texts, and in such a way that it brings this interpretation out of the concepts of the past into the concepts of the present."<sup>47</sup> "Systematic" here means organized, coherent interpretation and translation. But exegesis and systematic theology coincide. "Since textual interpretation cannot be separated from self-interpretation, and self-interpretation becomes explicit in New Testament exegesis, and since, on the other hand, the self-interpretation of man as a historical individual can occur only in the interpretation of history, the result is that theology and exegesis—or systematic and historical theology—fundamentally coincide."<sup>48</sup> And "theology is always a scientific enterprise, since it has the task of conceptual thinking."<sup>49</sup> Like all sciences, theology demands evolution in the genus of meaning. Though limited, theology is indispensable; for it is theological work that takes a text written in the past and translates that text "into present-day concepts."<sup>50</sup> Because the subject matter is mediated by words, the task of understanding and translating is subject to very precise disciplines. Exegetical work involves "the entire history of the words of the text,"<sup>51</sup> the lexicographical work, the linguistic research, "as well as all research into concept and the history of religion."<sup>52</sup> Not only must the interpreter have a relation to the subject matter but at some point he must submit this relation to critical analysis. This analysis not only releases the energy of the text but also

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. 250–51.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. 252.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. 253.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. 254.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. 255.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. 256.

enables one to distinguish clearly the religious world of faith from the theological world of intellectual articulation. Theology is most effective when it combines its idealistic goals with its pragmatic possibilities.

### 1926-1930

From 1926 to 1930 Bultmann repeats his 1925 definition of theology. "The character of theology, however, as distinct from preaching, is that it does not speak to concrete persons."<sup>53</sup> ". . . Theology is the process of reflection and argumentation (thus, also, criticism), always in flux, whereas dogmas are the specific results of theological work."<sup>54</sup> "Dogma can in no way be the subject matter of theology; rather, it is its goal, its perfection."<sup>55</sup> "The only subject matter of theology is God's revelation . . . ."<sup>56</sup> "Theology, in its form, is the exegesis of Scripture; in its content, revelation."<sup>57</sup> "The object of theology is nothing other than the conceptual presentation of man's existence as determined by God—that is, as man must see it in the light of Scripture."<sup>58</sup>

Theology is scientific and personal reflection about man's existence as determined by God.<sup>59</sup> Theology is absolutely necessary, particularly for evangelical belief, if belief is to attain its true object. The object of belief is the eschatological event of Jesus Christ, which determines man in a new fashion.<sup>60</sup> The meaning of this event is not appropriated by the Greek search for a beginning principle, but by encounter with the event through the preaching. If the object of theology is something other than the activity of God in Christ, then one does not have theology but rather some sort of philosophy of religion.<sup>61</sup>

### *Philosophy and Theology*

On the other hand, philosophical terminology must be used to explain existence in Christian faith. "Because scientific theology speaks through concepts, it is always dependent on the accepted, traditional conceptual and contemporary structures, and on the tradition of a prior philosophy. Theology has no more urgent task than that of learning the

<sup>53</sup> Bultmann, "The Question of 'Dialectic' Theology: A Discussion with Erik Peterson," *Beginnings* 268.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.* 271.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.* 272.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.* 274.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, "Zur Frage der Christologie," *Glauben und Verstehen* 1 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1933) 89.

<sup>60</sup> Bultmann, review of Ernst Lohmeyer, *Vom Begriff der religiösen Gemeinschaft*, in *TBl* 6 (1927) 66-74.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.* 72.

basic philosophy of its time, for it is this philosophy which has the critical task of analysis and conceptual translation . . . philosophy performs for theology its old service as *the handmaid of theology*.<sup>62</sup>

But theology and philosophy are distinct. The object of philosophy is the natural man; of theology, the man of faith. Philosophy deals with the abstract, the universal, existentiality; theology, with the concrete, the singular, factuality. Philosophy understands existence ontologically; theology, ontically. Thus, if a philosophy purports to treat "all knowledge possible for an existing individual," then theology can in no way associate itself with such a philosophy, since the philosophical pretension would exclude the totally new understanding of man available in revelation. In the modern world a philosophy must arise from the historicity of man, the fact that man's being is a *Sein-Können*.<sup>63</sup> And this not only because of the new awareness of man's historicity, but because the Bible presents man as a *Sein-Können*.<sup>64</sup>

By 1928 Bultmann had not only settled on the need for a philosophy suitable to translate the biblical understanding of man, but had begun to employ the thematic categories of Heidegger, who taught at Marburg from 1923 to 1928 and with whom Bultmann, in addition to personally close relationships, had conducted a joint seminar.<sup>65</sup> One either consciously selected an appropriate mode of philosophical discourse or uncritically and unconsciously assumed some past tradition. So Bultmann could say of Barth's *Dogmatik*: "More importantly, it renounces either a tacit or thorough confrontation with modern philosophy and naively assumes that old metaphysics from patristic and scholastic theology."<sup>66</sup> A consciously assumed modern philosophy is of service to future generations. "In my opinion, a dogmatic theology must think of future generations as well as of the needs of pastors and the faithful. What modes of thought exist today among the educated and in periodicals? Must theology always come *post factum*?"<sup>67</sup> In the answer to this letter of Bultmann, Barth admits the validity of the position but chooses to go another way.<sup>68</sup> Here one finds the fundamental difference between Barth and Bultmann.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. 73.

<sup>63</sup> Bultmann, "Die Bedeutung der 'dialektischen Theologie' für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft," *GV* 1, 118.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Bultmann's 1930 article "Offenbarung im NT," *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart* 4 (2nd ed.; Tübingen: Mohr, 1930) 662-64; also "Paulus," *ibid.* 1019-45.

<sup>65</sup> For a description of the whole period, cf. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophische Lehrjahre* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1977).

<sup>66</sup> Jaspert, *Briefwechsel* 80.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid. 82. One must recall the generally high level of German newspapers.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., footnote, p. 83.

*Theology and Church*

How precisely is theology related to the Church, particularly to authority in the Church? This question is answered in a *Denkschrift* only recently published.<sup>69</sup> Here one finds in its clearest and most concise form the role that theology plays in the life of the Church, a role that is consistently challenged by virtually all Christian denominations because it must be basically sustained by commitment to the uneasy equilibrium between an imperfect and evolving theology and the opaque certitude of religious faith.

Bultmann divides his answer into two theses. The first: "*In the Protestant Church there can be no administrative court or structure which determines correct teaching or authoritatively distinguishes between correct and incorrect teaching.*"<sup>70</sup> The reason is that "the object of Church doctrine and of theology is the revelation of God in history."<sup>71</sup> But the object of a discipline that is primarily historical is not an object at hand, as is the case, for example, in the natural sciences. The intelligibility of the object in theology is only perceived when one takes a position, makes a decision, believes. This is a matter of personal choice. As it would be absurd in political or intellectual history to seek to establish one norm which would control true and false teaching, so too is it in theology. But "the historical disciplines, such as theology, *have one court of appeal and control*, and that is *the object itself* which motivates theological investigation."<sup>72</sup> The historical disciplines must be free, and this includes the freedom to make errors; for only if theology has the freedom to make errors can it possess the possibility of arriving at truth. Any proceeding directed at minimizing the possibility of error will correspondingly diminish the possibility of attaining truth. Attempts to curb error falsely assume that the Church is dependent on the vicissitudes of theological research. "As a matter of fact, *the Church does not live through theological research* but rather lives by virtue of *the object* of this research, the revelation of God."<sup>73</sup>

Historical disciplines do not establish man's relation to history, but rather seek to understand the already existing relationship. "Every nation and period has *the* historical knowledge which corresponds to its relationship to history. The historical disciplines elevate this relationship to conscious reflection, clarify and purify it."<sup>74</sup> As the factual political and intellectual life relentlessly serves to control the *Geschichtswissenschaften*, "so is the factual life of the Church the *only* controlling authority for theology."<sup>75</sup> It would be a contradiction to have an

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. 242-47.<sup>70</sup> Ibid. 243.<sup>71</sup> Ibid. 244.<sup>72</sup> Ibid.<sup>73</sup> Ibid. 245.<sup>74</sup> Ibid.<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

authoritative mode of control, for this office would itself have to be regulated by the life of the Church. An authoritative office would have to use theological norms to judge truth and falsity. But where is the guarantee for the rectitude of such theological norms? The life of the Church, however, superintends theology by its pervasive consciousness that there is such a thing as true and false teaching. But decisions about true and false teaching are the work of theology.<sup>76</sup>

Bultmann's second thesis is: "*The pretence on the part of Church administration to control theological faculties presumes an entirely false understanding of the relation between Church authority and theological faculties.*"<sup>77</sup> Certainly the Church has the right to exercise control over theological faculties in the fashion described in the preceding paragraph. But, in Protestantism at least, governing bodies are not the Church. Administrative groups can only judge theology through theology, which then establishes two sources of theology. Even if administrative bodies remove theological control from theological faculties, they then paradoxically inherit the very possibilities of error which they are attempting to curb. This would lead to the need for another controlling body, and so on *in infinitum*. Bultmann admits the infinite series would not occur in practice. What would take place is that administrative bodies would apply the theology they had learned in the past to judge present theology. The theoretical and practical possibilities lead to absurdities.

### *Theology and Society*

Does the theology whose object is God, the revelation of God in Jesus, the eschatological event, play a role in society, the body politic? Since Scripture does not deal directly with the political as such, Bultmann wrote only of the political order when its demands on man contradicted the claims of God. One does find, however, scattered throughout his technical articles rejection of entities such as blood, nation, and race when these are raised to the status of transcendent entities.<sup>78</sup>

The Hitler period brought forth two statements from Bultmann. The first, against racism and the attempt to justify racism on scriptural grounds, is "Der Arier-Paragraph in Raume der Kirche."<sup>79</sup> The central issue was whether governmental laws and determinations could apply

<sup>76</sup> Ibid. 246.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. Bultmann, "Paulus," *RGK* 4, 1032, where Bultmann equates "pride, whether based on national or social excellence," with "a revolt against God"; 1034, where one aspect of the realm of the flesh is "nationalistic qualities." Also "Die Frage der natürlichen Offenbarung," *GV* 2: as pseudo powers, assuming the power of God: "the power of blood" (83), "the influence of blood" (85).

<sup>79</sup> *TBI* 12 (1933) 359-70.

to the Church. Could the "Arier-Paragraph," which limited offices in the Church to Arians and would have non-Arians removed from Christian-Arian communities to communities of their own, be maintained? No, maintained Bultmann, for such a procedure denied the dignity of the non-Arian Christian and negated the meaning of baptism.<sup>80</sup> The grace of God is received by man and "must go beyond everything which is more pleasing and enjoyable for the natural man than is the grace of God."<sup>81</sup> Nor can one distinguish a *Volkskirche* and a *Missionskirche*, except as sociological phenomena. The Church is not constituted by any worldly measures; it "remains always the transcendent, eschatological entity."<sup>82</sup>

The message of the Church comes neither from a particular people nor from human genius. "The preaching of the gospel makes its demand of a people but does not develop out of the people."<sup>83</sup> The preaching which comes from outside of man is ultimately that of the cross, which stands in direct contradiction to human and worldly ways of thinking. It is because the human and worldly is so pervasive and inviting that human nature needs a church which is not bound up with the world of culture, race, or nature. Agreeing with Barth, Bultmann says the Church stands or falls only in its relation to its Lord.<sup>84</sup>

The second statement of the Hitler period is a lecture given at the beginning of the summer semester, May 2, 1933, in which Bultmann reflects on the theological task in the climate of Nazi socialism.<sup>85</sup> The lecture discusses the political atmosphere in terms of possibilities for the future and the responsibility of the theologian in the face of these possibilities. Concretely, the theologian must establish the foundation and significance of belief in the present situation, develop the pragmatic claims of faith.

Bultmann first recalls some of the data of faith. God is the creator of a world in which man achieves his destiny by encounters and demands made in present situations. Man is determined by ordinances of creation which specify his mode of existence as a man, as a member of a race, of a community, as gifted or not. The ordinances of creation should not be construed as God; nor is He here immanent. Since God is not only the creator but also the judge, man's relation to the ordinances of creation must be a critical one. "Everything — possessions, rights, people, state — can become for man an occasion for sin, i.e., a means whereby one

<sup>80</sup> Ibid. 362.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid. 363.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid. 365.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid. 369-70.

<sup>85</sup> Bultmann, "Die Aufgabe der Theologie in der gegenwärtigen Situation," *TBl* 12 (1933) 161-66.

imposes one's own self-will, whereby one attempts to dispose of one's own existence."<sup>86</sup> The ambiguity of the ordinances is resolved only by overcoming oneself and thus establishing the ordinations of creation as powers for good.

The critical posture of faith is the positive ability to know not only of sin, the state of this world, but also of grace, which opens the question, how much do the demands of the present serve the command of love? The critical perspective forbids both talk and activity about nation and people to become abstract, as if a nation and a people had an existence independently of concrete, existing human beings who are my neighbors and who are thus occasions for love, which is the measure of all my actions.

To this point Bultmann develops the function of theology as clarifying the concrete possibilities and responsibilities of the believer. While the present affords opportunities to faith and the demands of love, so too is the present a seducer. It is the task of the theologian to expose the possibilities.<sup>87</sup> Bultmann turns to three concrete instances. The first, renaming the streets in Marburg. It is this occupation with triviality which indicates that the town magistrates, presumably Christians, do not grasp the seriousness of the present situation. The second example is insidious: widespread denunciations which poison the atmosphere and deny the free word. Third, and more ominous, is the practice of defamations, particularly of German Jews. This is directly opposed to the demands of Christian love. But thus do the voices of the present challenge Christian belief and raise the question "whether Christian belief will have validity for us or not."<sup>88</sup>

### *The Theologian as Subject*

The subject here is the individual who has proceeded through an epigenetic development in which consciousness is articulated into a hierarchic system of increasing differentiation and who has critically appropriated that differentiation. Man is his capacity to actualize possibilities of existence. Thus man's being is always a becoming; differentiations in consciousness both constitute and manifest becoming. The role of talent, training, and environment here is intriguing but beyond the point of this essay. Bultmann is continuously occupied with the process, particularly under the rubric of the theologian's need for responsible decisions based on adequate literary, historical, and comparative activity. Responsible decisions can only be enlightened ones when the interpreter critically exposes his own self-interpretation. Three 1939 essays (two book reviews and a brief article) are reflections and meditations on

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.* 163.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.* 166.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.* 165.

this theme. The context is how the theologian incorporates into his consciousness new understandings of history and eschatology.

It was J. Weiss who definitely turned exegesis into the direction of acknowledging that the preaching of Jesus, and indeed that of primitive Christianity, was eschatological. This insight refashioned the New Testament message and penetrated all theology. The eschatological dimension of Christianity becomes for Bultmann the central element in his own theology.

As important as the actual new understanding was the manner in which the interpreter arrived at such new knowledge. This, too, Bultmann claims to have learned from Weiss. It was the role of conjecture and hypothesis. In the context of letters to the Corinthians, Weiss postulated the existence of four epistles.<sup>89</sup> The hypothesis, generated by literary study, issued in a more comprehensive understanding of the two existing letters. Doubtful about the procedure at first, Bultmann became convinced that Weiss was on the right track. From Weiss Bultmann learned also that to refrain from hypotheses is to abstain from understanding, to withdraw from the responsibility of interpretation. "At the time of J. Weiss, because of frivolous literary hypotheses, there was a certain gratifying reluctance to engage in arbitrary and free textual conjectures. Hypotheses and conjectures are only in place when scientific exegesis has taken the trouble to explain the text in a satisfactory fashion but has failed to achieve this end."<sup>90</sup> It is a positive responsibility of the interpreter to propose hypotheses and conjectures.<sup>91</sup> Nowhere else in Bultmann's writings do we find such a concise and clear explanation of the role of hypothesis for understanding and for literary, historical, and comparative criticism. Hypotheses are then judged not in terms of truth or falsity but rather against their adequacy to the data, the fruitfulness of the understanding they generate. Substantiated hypotheses are valid until such time as other hypotheses prove to be more adequate to the data, more fruitful for understanding. There should likewise be a coherence of hypotheses, so that they provide an understanding of all the data. The pre-eminence of Bultmann's commentary on John, as well as his *Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, consists in his capacity to do the necessary critical work, to offer fruitful and coherent hypotheses, and to provide a total understanding. What Bultmann found in Weiss's great work *Das Urchristentum* is what his own efforts

<sup>89</sup> Cf. Bultmann, *Der Zweite Brief an die Korinther*. This brief commentary (n. 2 above) can serve as a summary of Bultmann's theology.

<sup>90</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, "Johannes Weiss zum Gedächtnis," *TBl* 18 (1939) 243.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.* 243-44.



were to produce: *eine Gesamtdarstellung*,<sup>92</sup> a comprehensive and unified totality.

Beyond the pedestrian requirements of historical research, Bultmann notes the need of artistic talent, particularly in literary studies. Weiss had both the artistic talent and "a particular refined sense of feeling."<sup>93</sup> Nonetheless, literary techniques can be transmitted in the classroom; for Bultmann notes that it was Weiss's aim to equip pastors for the scientific interpretation needed for pertinent preaching.

While Weiss advocated "a purely historical knowledge of what the text says,"<sup>94</sup> he did not live to see the evolution of a new problematic developing around the possibility of "purely historical knowledge," an evolution chaperoned by Bultmann, who asked: "Can one really understand what the text says if one does not already have, even as a 'purely historical' investigator, a relation to the subject matter with which the text material deals?"<sup>95</sup> Not only is the interpreter responsible in the realm of hypothesis; he is responsible in the domain of self-interpretation.

When Bultmann turns to the more personal characteristics of Johannes Weiss—his dedication to "beautiful literature," his accomplishment as a pianist—he wonders "if this man can bring the same passion to his work as a theologian."<sup>96</sup> Somehow the unity of artistic taste and talent with scientific endeavor secured a personal theological synthesis that Bultmann can only explain through a living example. All the profane disciplines required for a fruitful theological interpretation are unified not by additional operations or extrinsic compulsion, but by their integration within the theologically differentiated consciousness of the interpreting subject. "As his artistic gifts benefited his scientific work, so too, when he exercised his musical talents, was he a theologian. His relation to Bach and Brahms made this especially clear."<sup>97</sup>

If the unity that Bultmann finds in Johannes Weiss, however rhetorically described rather than defined, is the unity of symbolic conscious-

<sup>92</sup> Ibid. 244. For a brief example of contrasting hypotheses, based on the same textual data, cf. Bultmann's review of Emanuel Hirsch, *Das vierte Evangelium in seiner ursprünglichen Gestalt verdeutscht und erklärt*, in *EvT* 4 (1937) 115–42, esp. 117.

<sup>93</sup> Bultmann, "Johannes Weiss zum Gedächtnis," *TBl* 18 (1939) 244. In a review of K. Refer, *Der Heiland: Das Wort und Werk Jesu nach den drei ersten Evangelien*, in *Monatschrift für Gottesdienst und kirchliche Kunst* 32 (1927) 164–67, Bultmann notes that the author never really got around to saying what he intended "because he is mired in the psychological and aesthetic categories of observation" (167).

<sup>94</sup> Bultmann, "Johannes Weiss zum Gedächtnis," *TBl* 18 (1939) 244.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid. 264.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

ness, a review of H. D. Wendland's *Geschichtsauffassung und Geschichtsbewusstsein im Neuen Testament*<sup>98</sup> indicates more concretely what type of conceptuality leads to a fruitful understanding of the New Testament and can be integrated into an increasingly differentiated theological consciousness.

First, the New Testament does not speak of a philosophy of history, nor does it propose any concept of history in the modern sense in which Christ would be comprehensible as an event within history, so that history would be intelligible in the light of the Christ event. The unity and intelligibility of eschatological occurrence are portrayed as mythical. "And precisely the events and persons which constitute salvation history are in the New Testament not historical but rather mythical phenomena."<sup>99</sup> The New Testament does not historicize myth; it mythologizes history. Therefore the eschatological consciousness of the New Testament is not to be confused with a historical consciousness that sees in the person of Jesus a source of intelligibility for past and future history. Eschatological consciousness is "not historical consciousness . . . but mythologized history."<sup>100</sup> The New Testament does not follow the Old Testament hope for salvation within history; it follows Jewish apocalyptic and radically mythologizes hope because of the consciousness that Christ is the end of history.<sup>101</sup> The new eon is "a mythical and not a historical entity."<sup>102</sup> Since the event of Christ transcends historical process, myth is the vehicle of explanation. And history ceases to be the measure of man.<sup>103</sup> The task of the theologian in the face of this new interpretation is to find out whether indeed the apocalyptic imagery is binding or whether one can find in the eschatological consciousness of history an interpretation that will do justice to the *Nein* which eschatological event utters to history. "Moreover, the question is whether this No, insofar as it determines the attitude of Christian living, can be made univocally possible (in which case the Catholic understanding of the world would be the only innerworldly execution of the possibility) or whether the Christian relation to the world can be legitimately realized in a dialectical understanding of the world (corresponding to the Lutheran view)."<sup>104</sup> The real problem for interpretation is concealed and complicated if the mythical portrait is uncritically accepted as an exact historical portrayal. To develop categories of intelligibility adequate to the eschatological intention of the New Testament requires a differentiation of consciousness proportionate to the new problematic.

<sup>98</sup> *TLZ* 64 (1939) 252-56.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.* 254.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.* 255.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.* 256.

*The Question of Truth*

Emerging from the consideration of eschatology as a dialectical relationship to the world was the larger issue of truth developed in another 1939 review.<sup>105</sup> Accepting one understanding of eschatology is eliminating others. How is this done? Or, what is the essence of Christian belief?

Throughout all the vicissitudes of Church history and the attempts of Christianity to express itself in a variety of thought forms, what expressions are true? "How has the deposit of Christian truth maintained itself and prevailed in the changeable history of the Church?"<sup>106</sup> Christian history is filled with examples of transient cultural symbols used to utter Christian self-understanding. "So, for example, is the Neoplatonic movement to be understood, namely, as the attempt to harmonize the Gnostic understanding of the world with Greek philosophy."<sup>107</sup> The theologian, and the historian too, as a matter of fact, must make judgments about the suitability of the thought forms to what they attempt to express. But such judgments presuppose that the theologian already grasps the essence of Christianity and is therefore in a position to make critical assessments about historical efforts to translate the Christian understanding. The alternative is to present a collection of "what was done" and "what was said" without reaching "what was meant" and "what was intended." But such a collection reduces the Church to a simple sociological phenomenon and makes authentic Christian belief a simple chance occurrence. "Considering the vicissitudes of Church history, what exactly is the essence of the Christian Church?"<sup>108</sup>

The problem is the same within the New Testament and in the writings of the postapostolic period. Is the naive piety of monarchianism, as opposed to the more speculative Logos discussions, really Christian belief? Is Clement of Alexandria, in whom Lietzmann claims to find the philosopher, the Gnostic, and the Christian, really the prototype of Christian belief? What constitutes him a Christian? Can one distinguish in Clement a Stoic viewpoint rather than a Christian one? Or is Stoicism to be identified with Christianity? Does Clement really represent Christian belief?<sup>109</sup>

Or—a question that is significant in the New Testament itself—what historical thought forms are appropriate to express the meaning of the Church? Or, is every development in primitive Christianity normative?

<sup>105</sup> Bultmann, review of Hans Lietzmann, *Geschichte der alten Kirche*, in ZKG 58 (1939) 260–66.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid. 261.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid. 262.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid. 263.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

It is quite clear that the growth of regulations within the early Church was necessitated by the fact that the Church is also a society within history. But the transition from laws as regulative to laws as constitutive of the Church is a contradiction of the Church's nature.<sup>110</sup> One cannot, for example, follow Lietzmann in noting that the office of bishop was a historical necessity calculated to avoid the pneumatic and Gnostic interpretation of the Church, without asking at the same time about the price that was paid to secure the unity of the Church.<sup>111</sup> The larger question, of course, is: what is authentic Christianity? Here again Bultmann, as in 1925, returns to *Sachkritik* as a presupposition and principle of interpretation.

*Sachkritik* is proximately based on the historicity of the New Testament and ultimately on the capacity of man to understand, to judge, and to decide questions of truth. Not every book of the New Testament contains a perfect or fully representative expression of Christianity. Secondly, understanding and expression of Christianity develop. This means both progress and regress, authentic and inauthentic understanding. That some New Testament books have a more accurate understanding of Christianity, e.g., Paul and John, is a correlative of the first two assertions. Thirdly, radical criticism, controlled by literary, historical, and comparative study, distinguishes the authentic from the inauthentic according to the dominant intentionality of the New Testament. Fourthly, the interpreter must so grasp the meaning that he is capable of expressing that meaning in thought forms appropriate to the present and future. *Sachkritik*, therefore, is not only a presupposition of interpretation but also the positive epistemic acceptance of man's capability for understanding and constituting meaning.

### *Myth*

As we have observed in eschatology, mythical presentation constitutes a problem of understanding for an age that distinguishes myth and history. In a 1919 review Bultmann praises Dibelius' discussion of the gospel tradition's relation to myth, particularly to the Christ-myth.<sup>112</sup> In 1920 Bultmann dedicates a large portion of an article to myth.<sup>113</sup> The Christ-myth unified the understanding of Jesus for the Hellenistic Church, influenced the Synoptics (baptism and transfiguration), and

<sup>110</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (tr. Kendrick Grobel; London: SCM, 1958<sup>2</sup>) 95-100.

<sup>111</sup> Bultmann, review of Lietzmann, *Geschichte* 265.

<sup>112</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, review of Martin Dibelius, *Die Formgeschichte des Evangeliums*, in *TLZ* 44 (1919) 173-74.

<sup>113</sup> Bultmann, "Ethische und mystische Religion im Urchristentum," *Christliche Welt* 34 (1920) 417-21, 435-39, 450-53; *Beginnings* 221-35.

provided the structure for the presentation of Jesus in the fourth Gospel. Myth and cult are the necessary forms for the existence of religious communities. But in certain periods of history it is impossible to revive a past cult or myth, nor can one spontaneously manufacture a new myth. Thus the need for interpretation.

In the 1921 *Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition* Bultmann refers to myth as it is a critical category in the history of religions. Particular myths, as, for example, the myth of the journey to Hades as the descent of a redeeming god coming from the heavenly region to earth, are incidentally mentioned.<sup>114</sup> A 1923 essay describes the mythical background to the Johannine prologue as more intelligible than the supposition of philosophical and speculative influence.<sup>115</sup> By 1923 Bultmann had made the understanding of the Johannine Gospel contingent upon a myth whose features were delineated by Reitzenstein.<sup>116</sup> Features of the primal myth are clear: the son of man pre-exists and descends from heaven; he is exalted; believers share the fate of the exalted one, who is likewise a judge. Whether or not the Gospel of John stands in literary dependence on a particular form of the myth, needs further discussion, and therefore the mythical background is a hypothesis to be judged on whether or not it adequately explains the data. Bultmann indicates that he feels the myth did exist at a time prior to Christianity.<sup>117</sup> But the dating of Gnostic sources after the appearance of Christianity does not exclude the possible influence of a redeemer myth if one recalls how long ideas existed in oral form before being committed to writing.

By 1926 there is agreement in the scholarly world that the meaning of Jesus was expressed in mythical thought forms common to the Oriental world. But, as Bultmann piquantly notes, none of the scholars had come to the idea that "the historical portrait of Jesus must be released from myth, a task that critical study will indeed have occasion to perform."<sup>118</sup> The actual problem of disentangling Jesus from the mythical structure was beginning, particularly in Johannine studies. The fourth Gospel was moved out of the Greek philosophical tradition into the circle of Hellenistic "mysticism." This transition was effected by the works of Reitzenstein, *Hellenistische Mysterienreligionen* (1910), of Wetter, *Phos*

<sup>114</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, review of D. E. Preusschen, ed., *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde des Urchristentums*, in *TLZ* 47 (1922) 194.

<sup>115</sup> Bultmann, "Der religionsgeschichtliche Hintergrund des Prologs zum Johannesevangelium," *Exegetica* 10-35.

<sup>116</sup> The lecture was given in 1923, two years before its publication: Rudolf Bultmann, "Die Bedeutung der neuerschlossenen mandäischen und manichäischen Quellen für das Verständnis des Johannes evangelium," *ZNW* 24 (1925) 100-146.

<sup>117</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, "Urchristliche Religion (1915-1925)," *ARW* 24 (1926) 101.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.* 108. *Geschichtliche* here seems to incline to the *existentiell* meaning and therefore is opposed to *historisch*.

(1915), and of Bousset, *Kyrios Christos* (1913). The influence of Oriental speculation was neither amorphous nor generic, but consisted in the conceptual structure characterized as Gnosticism.

In Gnosticism, revelation provided knowledge of the essence of God, man, world, and fate. This revelation was not a philosophy or a mysticism, but rather a mythology in the original sense of the word, that is, it explained to man the sense and purpose of his life in this world, proposed directions for self-fulfilment, and clothed the description in stories about a god.<sup>119</sup> The Johannine Gospel ignores the cosmological motifs and is not itself mythology. It simply employs "mythical forms of expression."<sup>120</sup> And the author interprets or demythologizes.

Bultmann describes interpretations based on the new understanding of the Johannine Gospel as "the mythical-historical presentation."<sup>121</sup> The primary function of the religious existential myth is not to take the place of science but to explain how man is to understand himself in the world. Therefore there is a certain historical dimension to myth. Common to myth is its portrait of man as lost in his world, as a stranger, as one who cannot secure his existence by conventional or intellectual means.<sup>122</sup> Without a positive revelation, myth is a negative understanding of God, a knowledge of oneself as moved by the question about God but without answer.

In the 1930 article on myth in *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Bultmann developed the idea that the Christian community's apprehension of itself necessitated mythological expression. Eschatological event was perceived "as an event whose provenance was not worldly forces or human activity but rather the amazing activity of God. In this sense early Christian thought is completely dominated by myth."<sup>123</sup> Older and reigning mythological tradition is employed with new meaning. A particular world view is operative, a mythological world view which Bultmann here describes in terms virtually the same as those used in 1941. The whole problematic of myth and its interpretation is established and operative in Bultmann's thought well before the 1941 lecture first given in Frankfurt/Main, April 21, 1941, then repeated the following June in Alpirsbach.<sup>124</sup> What in Bultmann's thought followed was really the final

<sup>119</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, "Das Johannesevangelium in der neuesten Forschung," *Christliche Welt* 41 (1927) 504.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.* 510.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>123</sup> Bultmann, "Mythus und Mythologie im NT," *RGG* 4, 390-94.

<sup>124</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, 1: *Die Frage der natürlichen Offenbarung*; 2: *Neues Testament und Mythologie* (BEvT 7; Munich: Lempp, 1941). English of Part 2: *Kerygma and Myth: A Theological Debate* (ed. Hans Werner Bartsch; tr. Reginald H. Fuller; London: SPCK, 1957) 1-44.

stage of his publications, the thematization of hermeneutics, a development introduced in the central 1925 essay.

#### SYSTEMATIC ANALYSIS

While a genetic presentation captures some of the forward motion of Bultmann's mediation of the Christian tradition and thus focuses on intellectual development as process, a systematic analysis attempts to organize the development. Systematically, one may note that Bultmann distinguished elements constitutive of a hermeneutic field, delineated operations appropriate to the field, and radically executed the operations congruent to the elements and the field. The harmonious and symmetrical conjunction of field, elements, and appropriate operations constitutes the theological horizon. Assimilation of this horizon purifies and establishes the intellectual consistence of consciousness. Thus the Christian tradition is available as a moral option, as an alternative to drifting.

The act of interpretation is not simply an additional aspect of man's being. *Verstehen* is identified with *Dasein*.<sup>125</sup> *Auslegung* is a "laying out" or "interpretation of there-being."<sup>126</sup> Interpretation is "*sich ausbilden*," "a building out of understanding."<sup>127</sup> "The process of explicitating there-being's antecedent comprehension of Total meaningfulness (World) Heidegger calls 'interpretation' (*Auslegung*), which, as we have seen, he in turn designates as 'hermeneutic.'"<sup>128</sup> Or, in Heidegger's own words, interpretation is "the working-out and appropriation of an understanding."<sup>129</sup> It is this working-out that makes a person a subject. The theological subject, therefore, is one who has worked out the understanding appropriate to the theological field. Before its specification as theological the field is hermeneutical.

#### *The Hermeneutic Field*

The hermeneutic field is the horizon of understanding in the radical sense, all that is to be understood from a particular perspective. It consists of elements, subject matter, and operations. The elements are the New Testament, the interpreter, the Church, the world. The subject matter is man's search for ultimate meaning, what Bultmann describes as the question about God at the heart of all existence. Proportionate to

<sup>125</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1960) 249.

<sup>126</sup> William Richardson, *Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1967) 47.

<sup>127</sup> Thomas Langan, *The Meaning of Heidegger* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1959) 23.

<sup>128</sup> Richardson, *Heidegger* 67.

<sup>129</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1972) 231-32.

the field and heuristic to the elements and subject matter are four hermeneutical operations: the literary, the historical, the comparative, the theological.

*The New Testament*

The New Testament is a literary document containing writings about the event of Jesus Christ and the transformation of consciousness experienced by those who believed in him. The first activity proportionate to the document and its testimony is a polymorphic literary operation. For the modern interpreter, the first act of literary criticism, the establishment of the text, has been effectively accomplished. So, too, has the outline of the process by which the text came into existence: oral and written tradition, compilation, work of an author, dependence on oral and/or written sources, redaction by an editor, final formation. The Aristotelian canons of literary interpretation are valid and necessary. The interpreter proceeds through a formal analysis of structure, style, and content.<sup>130</sup> Because the whole of a work is understood through its parts and the parts through the whole, the literary operation proceeds as a hermeneutic circle. The work itself is analyzed in terms of grammar, syntax, particular word usage, and the employment of terms and literary forms in the contemporaneous environment. The text demands the study of languages and the use of lexica, monographs, philological analyses, etc., which make possible stylistic criticism, genre criticism, source criticism, form criticism, and redaction criticism. The procedure must take into consideration the actual structure of the text, the origin of the text, the sources of the text, the developments and modifications of the text, and the tradition(s) behind the text. The process advances through the assimilation of data, the advancement of hypotheses and conjectures, to judgments which range from absolute certitude to probability, doubt, opinion, and nescience. The entire operation has been called the literary-historical method, the historical-critical method, scientific exegesis. For purposes of clarity, we employ the term "literary operation" with no intention of prejudicing the suboperations or of naming the subsidiary operations involved in the admittedly complex task of literary criticism. The literary operation attempts to understand by an act proportionate to its object, written texts.

The point of the literary operation here is not merely the development of an enormous amount of specialized but disconnected knowledge, the accumulation of information, but rather a total, unified, integrated, and comprehensive understanding of the New Testament. It should issue in

<sup>130</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, "Das Problem der Hermeneutik," *ZTK* 47 (1950) 47-69.



what Bultmann calls *Gesamtverständnis*, a *Grundanschauung*.<sup>131</sup> The basic understanding must emerge from the data and not from any totally extrinsic source, be it one of authority or of presupposition. The literary operation must include an explanation of the subject matter of the text, what is meant as opposed to what is said, what is intended as opposed to what happened. The literary operation fulfils this function "when it mediates to the reader the relation to the subject matter, so that the one reading the Gospel knows: *tua res agitur*."<sup>132</sup> The literary operation is distinct from the theological operation in that the former deals with transcendent intentionality as a possibility, whereas the theological operation considers the intentionality directed to ultimate transcendence as actual. To the literary operation corresponds all of the exegetical work of Bultmann.

The literary operation is capable of correcting theological misunderstandings. For example, literary criticism establishes that the sources do not provide material for a psychological analysis of Jesus. Literary analysis (and comparison) can show that Jesus did not teach a new idea of God but rather that He was the end of the world. Literary analysis can prevent the assignment of inaccurate meanings to individual pericopes.<sup>133</sup> As such, literary analysis protects piety, preserves the integrity of the Christian tradition, places the understanding of Christianity within works of intelligence, and nourishes the integrity of symbolic consciousness. Literary analysis specifies the subject matter as God's deed in Christ, eschatological occurrence, and possible eschatological existence.

### *The Historical Operation*

The second operation, proportionate to the New Testament, which speaks of events, persons, periods, and beliefs within time and space and is directed to men of other historical provenance, is the historical operation. Though not separate from the literary operation, the historical operation is distinct from it, as studies in poetry and drama clearly indicate. While analysis of the historical operation suffers from the obscurity of its canons and from the disagreements of historians about cognitional procedure as such, there is agreement that a thing cannot be

<sup>131</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, review of Hirsch, *Auslegung des Johannes-Evangelium*, in *EvT* 4 (1937) 121.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.* 133.

<sup>133</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, "Die Frage nach der Echtheit von Mt 16, 17-19," *TBI* 20 (1941) 265-79; *Exegetica* 255-77.

<sup>134</sup> For pertinent observations on the larger problem, cf. Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972) 197-234.

understood today outside of its development in a particular time and space sequence.<sup>134</sup> The historical operation is the effort to understand via the temporal and spatial sequence. For Bultmann, the historical operation is that activity which, utilizing objectifying thought for reconstructive purposes, adds to this dimension the intersubjective relation of the interpreter to the history as a field of human decision and therefore a possibility for understanding human existence today. Thus history is opposed to the study of nature, which one studies with the hope of finding comprehensible immanent laws.<sup>135</sup> Nor is history conceived according to fixed laws which imprison man so that the essence of man is to escape to a heavenly world.<sup>136</sup> Much less is history the Stoic realm of God's rule where all is mysteriously brought to a destined end by an incomprehensible providence. The subject matter of history is the decisions of men and their consequences apprehended as possibilities for the interpreter's existence. The historical operation has for its object understandings and possibilities for human existence. Thus the historical operation moves to disclose the full potentialities of man.<sup>137</sup> Seen in this light, all historical study is both idealistic and pragmatic.

### *The Comparative Operation*

The third operation is that of comparison. One looks for similarities, contrasts, developments, regression, progression. The material for comparison is, first of all, the New Testament literature, the primitive Christian literature, the Old Testament, and its accompanying interpretations, all other literature of the same period and place, and the oral antecedents to the corpus. The secondary material of comparison is all the interpretation of the above data throughout history. The literary and historical operations disclose and furnish the data.

What is meant by comparison appears in *Die Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition*, where the material for comparison is the Synoptic tradition and material similar to this in the Palestinian and Hellenic environment.<sup>138</sup> Bultmann's detailed comparisons in the field of Johannine study are likewise typical of the comparative procedure.<sup>139</sup> Comparison always involves the principle of *Sachkritik* as a presupposition, that is, the critique of the understanding of the subject matter by the formers of the tradition, the compilers, the writers, the editors. *Sachkritik*, in addition to its foundation within human reason, is demanded by

<sup>135</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *History and Eschatology* (Edinburg: University Press, 1957) 5.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.* 6.

<sup>137</sup> Bultmann, "The Problem of a Theological Exegesis of the New Testament," *Beginnings* 242.

<sup>138</sup> Bultmann, *Synoptic Tradition*.

<sup>139</sup> For individual articles cf. *Exegetica* bibliography for 1923, 1925, 1927, 1928, and 1930. These individual comparisons culminate in the great 1941 commentary.

the perspective of distance, where a later generation is capable of grasping what occurred over and beyond the conscious intentions of the tradition.

Comparison begins with small and manageable affinities, contrasts, and developments. It presumes extensive literary and historical activity. It is, therefore, the product of maturity. This appears clearly in Bultmann's *Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, where a genetic presentation develops from long and comprehensive literary and historical activity. Here he distinguishes the message of Jesus, the kerygma of the earliest Church, the kerygma of the Hellenistic Church apart from Paul, the theology of Paul, the theology of John. It is the act of comparison which allows the above differentiations.

The literary, historical, and comparative operations lead to the operation which unifies the total process: the theological operation.

### *The Theological Operation*

The theological operation is that activity which seeks to understand, conceptualize, and articulate man's existence in Christian faith. It is the operation which seeks an appropriate conceptuality and expression for intentionalities directed to ultimate transcendence. The theological operation is demanded by the fact that the New Testament announces an eschatological deed of God in Christ which is meant to place man in a new situation, to present him with a hitherto impossible *existentielles Daseinsverständnis*, to enable man to be transformed with a new intentionality directed to ultimate transcendence.<sup>140</sup>

The theological operation is not a postulate of random choice but is specified by the theological activity found within the New Testament itself. So the New Testament is normative not only in content but also in procedure. It is the model of all later theology that would call itself Christian. If, then, in the work of Bultmann there is an emphasis on John and Paul, this is not, as some critics have maintained, to limit the canon to two authors, but rather to affirm that theological activity as such reaches a peak in these two writers, who assume unto themselves the prior theological enterprises of the New Testament. In them one finds the meaning of Christianity distilled, in crystallized form.

Human existence is the methodical starting point of theology,<sup>141</sup> *Dasein* as determined by revelation,<sup>142</sup> "das gläubige Dasein."<sup>143</sup> The peren-

<sup>140</sup> Bultmann, "Der Begriff der Offenbarung im Neuen Testament," *Glauben und Verstehen* 3 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1960) 1-34.

<sup>141</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, "Die Geschichtlichkeit des Daseins und der Glaube: Antwort an Gerhardt Kuhlmann," *ZTK* 11 (1930) 339-40.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.* 339.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.* 340.

nial theological task is not only the articulation of concepts appropriate to the New Testament's understanding of human existence, but also the more critical task of distinguishing conceptualities which have insinuated themselves into Christianity but are properly alien to it.<sup>144</sup> When these decisions have been made, the interpreter is prepared for translation suited to each new generation.

The theological dimension is further determined in the New Testament. Both Old and New Testament accord primacy to hearing rather than to seeing as a cognitional paradigm.<sup>145</sup> Theological activity must preserve the intention of this distinction, which is to relate theology to internal appropriation and affirmation capable of putting a permanent demand on man. Theology, therefore, cannot be so formulated as to be a systematized whole understood from a distance. The model of hearing places faith and subsequent theological articulation in the internal world, the world of intersubjectivity,<sup>146</sup> the world in which *Verstehen* is identified with *Sein*, rather than in the world typified by the empirical sciences. It is in this world of interior experience that "the moment," "now," "decision," and "authenticity" have their meaning. One cannot distance himself from these concepts without distorting the reality they stand for. The word is addressed to the hearer in a moment, a unit of psychological, not chronological or mechanical, time. The psychological moment may never be arrested. The psychological moment does not form a continuum of any kind; therefore obedience to the word is not a habit or a permanent possession but rather depends for its existence on affirmations made in discrete moments. Theological understanding must develop conceptuality, which preserves the integrity of the internal world, transmits the demand of the word in the moment, and stimulates the potential believer to a critical appropriation of his existence.

The emphasis on hearing and stress on the penetration of the word to the interior of man make theology a science quite different from any science that, consciously or unconsciously, gives priority to understanding accommodated to the visual paradigm, as, for example, is the case in Greek philosophy.<sup>147</sup> Valid as this method is, it cannot be appropriate to express the realities of the New Testament. The visual model demands the dichotomy of subject and object; one can then create empirical or speculative systems. The act of understanding takes place at a distance,

<sup>144</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, review of Werner Jaeger, *Die geistige Gegenwart der Antike*, in *TLZ* 55 (1930) 170.

<sup>145</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, review of M. Pohlenz, *Der hellenistische Mensch*, in *TLZ* 75 (1950) 600.

<sup>146</sup> Bultmann, "Humanismus und Christentum," *GV* 2, 139-41.

<sup>147</sup> Bultmann, "Untersuchungen zum Johannesevangelium," *ZNW* 29 (1930) 172; *Exegetica* 177.

in objectivity, in the confrontation of exterior worlds, even though here, too, the act of understanding may be described as an internal process, as more than seeing, etc. Such acts of understanding are internally objectifiable and always involve psychic distance and a certain mastery over the subject matter manifested by intellectual grasp.<sup>148</sup>

The New Testament perception is that historical reality is not constituted by timeless principles or forms but precisely by the events of life which make concrete demands on man's willing.<sup>149</sup> The New Testament also affirms the social character of knowledge, which transcends all merely visual models and owes its certainty to basic and internal orientations in human living which are prior to the act of seeing, radically different from seeing, and indeed transcend the capacity of sight. So the significance of human existence ultimately resides in the quality of one's willing. Theological categories such as the moment, now, decision, authenticity, and hearing arise not only from the New Testament but also from the temporality and historicity of human existence.<sup>150</sup> Such theological categories do not allow the believer to evade his historicity and its accompanying responsibility by transferring these constitutive realities to programs, organizations,<sup>151</sup> institutions, or speculative systematic thought structures—processes which may be sociologically enlightening but lead to the loss of self. If theological categories are to be faithful to the reality of the New Testament, they must place man in his responsibility to God and to self here and now.<sup>152</sup>

What Bultmann here attempts is an understanding of the New Testament in an age characterized by the emergence and development of historical consciousness. What he in fact does is trace the emergence of historical consciousness back to roots in the New and Old Testaments, so that his theology is really not a modern existentialist development but the evolution of a movement that first started in Scripture. Thus, while there is assuredly a Heideggerian influence, it is the Old and New Testament concept of historicity that is ultimately decisive for Bultmann. How much of Heidegger's thought is rooted in a classical Christian tradition is a subject deserving study elsewhere.

In any case, the Old Testament presents God as bestowing meaning on history. Later Judaism develops an eschatological and apocalyptic view of history. Paul is disinterested in world history but sees history

<sup>148</sup> Bultmann, "Wissenschaft und Existenz," *GV* 3, 108.

<sup>149</sup> The most extensive treatment of knowing is found in Bultmann's 1933 article "gignōskō" in *TWNT*.

<sup>150</sup> Bultmann, "Die Krisis des Glauben," *GV* 2, 8-9.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.* 14.

<sup>152</sup> Bultmann, "Die Bedeutung der alttestamentlich-jüdischen Tradition für das christliche Abendland," *GV* 2, 242.

abounding in the theater of the individual, whose decisions gain or forfeit real existence.<sup>153</sup> This is opposed to Gnosticism, which urges the flight from history, and to any forms of asceticism which are attempts to flee the moods of history. So Paul's thought contrasts with the allure of Greek philosophy, which maintains that "man cannot really be touched by encounters, but encounters can only be for him occasion and material for unfolding and shaping his timeless nature."<sup>154</sup> As Auerbach has shown, "it is through the influence of Christian understanding of man that the realistic view of life enters into high literature. Now too for the first time the everyday life of man is seen as the field of serious problematic and tragic happenings."<sup>155</sup> But man's historicity, his capacity to realize himself, to find life "is not a self-evident natural quality. . .but a possibility which must be grasped and realized. The man who lives without self-knowledge and without consciousness of his responsibility is a historical being in a much lower degree, one who is at the mercy of historical conditions, handing himself over to relativity. Genuine historicity means to live in responsibility, and history is a call to historicity."<sup>156</sup> The New Testament addresses man with the paradoxical but healing word that in the history of a particular man, Jesus Christ, eschatological occurrence has taken place and thus provides every man with the actual possibility of the fulness of authentic life and of self-fulfilment accompanied by self-transcendence. Theology expresses this quiet expectancy in the requisite existential categories.

Still, despite the recent phenomenon of historical consciousness, the thought mode that has come to dominate the West and become part of the social fabric is the objectifying mode typical of the empirical sciences. Its implementation in the world of technology and the construction of the city is a testimony to its creative powers. Here one carefully distinguishes subject from object. The subject objectifies phenomena and gives them technical names. This technical apparatus enables the subject to understand objects in themselves and in their verifiable interrelations. The subject pursues an accepted methodology and seeks coherent control over all the data. Given the same conditions in an experiment, the same results should occur no matter who the investigator.<sup>157</sup> Technological implementation follows and becomes the property of anyone able to develop or follow specified procedures.

<sup>153</sup> Bultmann, *History and Eschatology* 43-47.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.* 94.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.* 105.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.* 136.

<sup>157</sup> We here prescind from Bultmann's observations in the 1955 article "Wissenschaft und Existenz," *GV* 3, 109, namely, that it is increasingly evident that in the study of the microworld of the atom the observing subject enters into the study of the object and, in fact, determines the outcome.

Can theology utilize this type of objectifying thought? Does this type of thought, so successful, if at times ominous, in the construction of a habitable universe, do justice to the nature of history? If not, are we then left to the whim of subjectivity and the caprice of relativity?

Bultmann acknowledges the scope and power of objectifying thought and, indeed, is a gifted practitioner of this approach in most of his literary, historical, and comparative operations. But there is another mode of understanding predicated quite simply on those realities in life which evade the objectifying procedures characteristic of modern Western thought. This other mode is the *existentiell* appropriation of reality. The ultimate grounding of this appropriation is in the ontic unity of being and understanding. For instance, one cannot begin to understand oneself without the prior act of self-acceptance, which is a mode of understanding. Nor does one really understand the simple realities of fatherhood or friendship or love by disinterested observation. In fact, the methods of objectifying thought, if applied in these instances, will distort. "A young man who might wish to get to know his prospective bride through the information provided by a detective bureau will not come to know her at all in her personal inner life, because this life is not available to objectifying scrutiny but is accessible only in existential encounter."<sup>158</sup> A watch given to me by my father is a watch like any other watch and may be analyzed, classified, and judged by objective criteria. As a present, as this watch, it is unique, irreplaceable, and receives its value and meaning not from itself but from the giver and the receiver. This meaning is present only in *existentiell* encounter.<sup>159</sup>

This *existentiell* mode of understanding, however it be named, is given in and with existence. It is this primordial understanding, and not simply the later development of intellect, that constitutes human existence as intentional. This is a primordial orientation to the world of meaning, an *existentiell* knowledge of self as *Sein-Können*, an orientation that is instantaneously present with one's insertion into the world. This intentionality is subsequently specified by how man understands himself, how he interprets the highest possibility of his being,<sup>160</sup> in what constitutes for him the meaning of life. This residual intentionality is the remote context of all theology. It may be "naive or critically conscious, dogmatically rigid or unstable and variable. . . trivial or serious."<sup>161</sup> Consciously or unconsciously, all human existence is intentionally active or, in Bultmann's words, moved by the question about God

<sup>158</sup> Ibid. 116.

<sup>159</sup> In "Zur Geschichte der Paulus-Forschung," *TRu*, N.F. 1 (1929), Bultmann speaks of an "existentielles Denken" (36-37), a completely different type of thinking (36).

<sup>160</sup> Bultmann, "Der Begriff der Offenbarung im Neuen Testament," *GV* 3, 19.

<sup>161</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, "Anknüpfung und Widerspruch," *TZ* 2 (1946) 406; *GV* 3, 119.

which is ultimately the question about self.<sup>162</sup> The basic intentionality of human existence is coterminous with particular self-understandings but always transcends them. The theological operation interprets and expresses the basic intentionality of human existence as this intentionality is specified by revelation. This theology interprets and formulates the Christian intentionalities directed to ultimate meaning and transcendence, their consequent polymorphic differentiations in consciousness, and the effects of such differentiations.

Concretely, the theological operation centers on the eschatological event of Jesus Christ and the possibilities this event offers for self-understanding. This eschatological occurrence is available to man in the present by the preached word, which is part of eschatological occurrence. The primary medium of the word is that of time, as opposed to the secondary medium of the word as printed, which is that of space. Theology, therefore, must preserve the temporal and aural dimensions of eschatological occurrence and not replace them by transtemporal and spatial categories more congenial to the act of seeing the alphabeticized word in its spatial but secondary medium.

Christian belief is one manner of actuating and specifying the intentionality of human existence. It is always a belief *in*. Christian belief is a particularized vertical dimension in human existence. The vertical dimension is the eschatological aspect, in which it is possible for man "to yield up every claim of one's own and submit obediently to the will of God."<sup>163</sup> Christ as the end of history, that is, history as the horizontal and sole measure of man's life, manifests the transtemporal dimension of time and thus brings out the paradoxical nature of time. Eschatological time is the quality of meaning achieved through eschatological existence in discrete, historical, horizontal time. Such meaning is available only in the psychological present. The horizontal dimension of human existence is measured by quantitative time. This simple quantitative time has no intrinsic meaning except whatever significance one may arbitrarily assign to history. Quantitative time achieves meaning by the possibilities it affords for the realization of eschatological existence.

The theological operation interprets the intentionality of faith directed to ultimate meaning and transcendence, the consequent polymorphic differentiations in consciousness, and the effects of these differentiations. The intentionality is directed to ultimate meaning, because the old eon, the eon of sin, is ended. Man is freed from sin; he is free from

<sup>162</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, "Jesus Christ und die Mythologie," *Glauben und Verstehen* 4 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1965) 168.

<sup>163</sup> Rudolf Bultmann and Karl Kundsinn, *Form Criticism* (tr. F. C. Grant; New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1962) 74.



his own past and free now for the future. Ultimate meaning is that which gives meaning to all other proximate sources of meaning; in this case it is the gift of God in Christ. Meanings not founded on God's revelation in Jesus are proximate and ambiguous. If they become, as they do, the attempt of man to secure his existence, to live out of his own strength,<sup>164</sup> they become sin — the substitution of proximate for ultimate meaning, the exchange of the vertical for the horizontal dimension, the commutation of transcendence for immanence, the forgetfulness of creatureliness.<sup>165</sup>

When we affirm that the theological operation interprets or articulates the intentionality of faith directed to transcendence, we do not mean by transcendence the realm of the spirit as opposed to the material, nor the timeless as contrasted to the temporal, nor the real as opposed to the merely apparent. We mean "by the transcendence of God His perpetual futurity, His absolute freedom, which places Him beyond man's powers of capture, beyond being bound or obligated in any fashion, beyond any claim of man on God, and also beyond every rational attempt to conceptualize His activity."<sup>166</sup> Transcendence here is the quality of God who meets man as a power and force completely different from all other powers and forces, particularly the powers and forces of man, and the quality of man's assimilation of a force and power that goes beyond natural capacities. So does faith achieve self-transcendence.

By further defining the theological operation as the attempt to understand consequent polymorphic differentiations in consciousness and their effects, we are specifying the circularity of the theological operation as well as the broader hermeneutical circle constituted by all four operations. Thus the literary, historical, and comparative operations begin with the effects following a Christian differentiation of consciousness. One returns by understanding intentionalities, differentiations in consciousness, and finally their effects. But what is intended is not always congruent with what is effected. The theological operation distinguishes between the two.

For example, the eschatological consciousness of Christianity is first manifested by an expected coming of the Son of Man amid apocalyptic signs found as well in traditional Jewish apocalyptic. The simple passage of time and the absence of the cosmic signs beget another interpretation in Paul, who shows Christ as the end of the old eon and man as a

<sup>164</sup> Bultmann, "Der Mensch zwischen den Zeiten nach dem Neuen Testament," *GV* 3, 42.

<sup>165</sup> Bultmann, "Paulus," *RGG* 4, 1035.

<sup>166</sup> Bultmann, "Die Bedeutung der alttestamentlich-jüdischen Tradition für das christliche Abendland," *GV* 2, 244.

new creation. This new creation (2 Cor 5:17) is defined by being "in Christ." Some of the cosmic imagery is retained by Paul; but the period of *Unheil* is definitively ended.<sup>167</sup> Johannine literature further refines the Pauline interpretation by interpreting eschatology as the decisive vertical dimension to the present. The cosmic imagery is totally eliminated. Eschatological occurrence has taken place with the coming of the revealer and occurs as present judgment of the world.<sup>168</sup> Since the believer lives in this judged world, which will not end as formerly anticipated, the mode of his existence is not expectation or waiting but the "as if not" of 1 Cor 7:29-31. Both Pauline and Johannine literature indicate that there were deviant interpretations in Gnostic libertinism as well as in asceticism. The theological interpreter judges the latter two as deviations, and interpretations prior to Paul as stages to a later meaning. Such judgments follow the three major operations and the theological operation, which proceeds from effects, to differentiations, to intentionalities, and back again. Therefore that explanation of Christianity will be adequate which is coherent with the four operations, which explains all polymorphic effects of differentiated consciousness, the differentiations of consciousness, and the intentionalities. The unity of explanation derives ultimately from its object, the revelation of God, but proximately from the interpreting subject and his own synthesis of symbolic consciousness. This brings us to the second element in the hermeneutic field, the interpreter.

### *The Interpreter*

As an element in the hermeneutic field, the interpreter himself is the subject of interpretation; for the biblical texts demand self-interpretation and self-appropriation. The word places the interpreter in the position of deciding; only through decision can the word become event for him. "Exegesis must be expressly moved by the question of self-interpretation if it is not to fall victim to subjectivism."<sup>169</sup> This requisite self-interpretation is the context of all historical interpretation.<sup>170</sup> Historical texts which present possibilities for understanding human existence become intelligible only insofar as the texts are understood in that principal intentionality. Seen in any other light, the accumulation of

<sup>167</sup> Bultmann, "Der Mensch zwischen den Zeiten nach dem Neuen Testament," *GV* 3, 41.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.* 43. Cf. also Rudolf Bultmann, *Das Evangelium des Johannes* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1941).

<sup>169</sup> Bultmann, "Das Problem einer theologischen Exegese des Neuen Testaments," *Zwischen den Zeiten* 344-45.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.* 353-54.

information from the past is pointless.<sup>171</sup> The interpreter interprets by being interpreted. One need not point out here the substantiation of this principle, so consistently emphasized by Bultmann, by hermeneutical studies of the past two decades.

Since every interpreter already has some sort of self-interpretation, it is first this preunderstanding that must be articulated. "It seems to me that the presupposition of every exegesis is that the interpreter call his own grasp of existence into question."<sup>172</sup> This understanding of existence, usually formed by tradition, training, and developed interests, operates as a presupposition in all interpretation and must be critically analyzed, consciously exposed, and be *actu signato* present in the four principal operations.

The preunderstanding is whatever relationship the interpreting subject has to the subject matter of the texts. As in language learning, if a new word stands for nothing within my experience, nothing within my preunderstanding, then the word will mean nothing.<sup>173</sup> Meaning becomes possible when something new finds a point of contact in the learner's consciousness. The point of contact may even be prior misunderstanding. Bultmann holds that a preunderstanding of life and death, good and bad, authentic and inauthentic existence — matters with which the New Testament is concerned — is present in every interpreter,<sup>174</sup> though not perhaps under these rubrics. Tradition confers identity on the individual by providing some type of self-understanding as well as a particular *Weltbild* which enables the interpreter to organize his life and deal with the world. Tradition constructs the syntax of the species in a particular period and place, even though, to use Allport's phrase, every individual is an idiom unto himself. It is this generic and specific intelligibility that constitutes the relation of the interpreter to the subject matter of the New Testament.

The particularized preunderstanding and interest in the subject matter may be further specified as historical, psychological, aesthetic, or, in

<sup>171</sup> Bultmann, "Die Bedeutung der dialektischen Theologie für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft," *GV* 1, 123.

<sup>172</sup> Bultmann, review of E. Lohmeyer, *Vom Begriff der religiösen Gemeinschaft*, in *TBl* 6 (1927) 73. Cf. also review of W. Schauf, *Sarx: Der Begriff 'Fleisch' beim Apostel Paulus unter besonderer Berücksichtigung seiner Erlösungslehre*, in *TLZ* 52 (1927) 34. In a review of H. Windisch, *Der Sinn der Bergpredigt*, in *Deutsche Literaturzeitung*, N.F. 21 (1929) 992, Bultmann notes that he does not require one to bring a preunderstanding to the text: "I do not demand that the preunderstanding brought to the text be uncontrollably efficacious, but that it be critically clarified" (992).

<sup>173</sup> Bultmann, "Das Problem der Hermeneutik," *GV* 2, 218; *History and Eschatology* 113-14.

<sup>174</sup> Bultmann, review of Windisch, *Der Sinn der Bergpredigt*, in *Deutsche Literaturzeitung* 50 (1929) 992.

the cases of religious literature, "the interest may be the knowledge of man. . . . In this case the interpreter, reflecting on history, reflects at the same time on his own possibilities and endeavors to gain self-knowledge. . . . This questioning is only possible if the interpreter himself is moved by the question about his own existence."<sup>175</sup> Quite clearly, the fundamental relation to the subject matter depends on the interests, talents, sensitivity, and spiritual capacity of the individual interpreter. Bultmann does not suppose that every interpreter born and trained in the same tradition will approach the text with the same questions, even though experience—which may be tested by his book reviews particularly—indicates that most interpreters do not vary much in their approach to the New Testament and its theology. Hence the large number of commentaries and introductions with only peripheral differences and virtually the same questions. But Bultmann does maintain that in proportion to the vitality of the questioning relationship, a vitality which includes preoccupation with the meaning of existence, the subsequent interpretation of texts will provide new insights. New understandings of old texts come from the urgency, individuality, and pertinence of new questions. This vitality is properly a quality of all four operations and determines the new understanding of texts which always remain the same.<sup>176</sup>

Bultmann's book reviews, particularly from 1925–50, manifest his growing certainty not only about the existence of a preunderstanding but also about the need for its articulation if interpretation is to be fruitful. This certainty of Bultmann is gradually accepted by the larger scholarly world, until somewhere in the 1950's (he published "Das Problem der Hermeneutik" in 1950 and "Ist voraussetzungslose Exegese möglich?" in 1957) this certainty becomes the capital of the academic world under the rubric of hermeneutics. But already in 1925 Bultmann had asked the question, recently emerging in the form of a full-fledged discipline, what really occurs and should occur when one interprets a text? This question, notably in its application to theological interpretation, represents a new differentiation of symbolic consciousness, a new stage of meaning, a transition to the interior intentional world of the interpreting subject, and thus expands the hermeneutical field.<sup>177</sup> There is, moreover, no doubt that this new stage of meaning, with its stress on

<sup>175</sup> Bultmann, *History and Eschatology* 115.

<sup>176</sup> Bultmann, review of Hirsch, *Auslegung*, in *EvT* 4 (1937) 133.

<sup>177</sup> For a summary of hermeneutic(s), cf. James M. Robinson and John B. Cobb, Jr., eds., *The New Hermeneutic* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), particularly Robinson's excellent introductory essay (1–77). Useful, too, is Hans-Georg Gadamer and Gottfried Boehm, eds., *Seminar: Philosophische Hermeneutik* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1976). The bibliography, despite its omission of Bultmann and Joachim Wach, is useful.

subjectivity, has particular significance for the third element in the hermeneutic field, the Church.

### *The Church*

The New Testament developed within a community that soon identified itself as a church. The Church, both initially and subsequently, is part of eschatological occurrence. Eschatological occurrence is the unique revealing action of the omnipotent, holy, and eternal one<sup>178</sup> which takes place through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, who meets man in the current kerygma of the Church as scandal and who judges man's finitude, who gives an understanding of self, world, and God through the grace of faith. More simply, eschatological occurrence is the action of God on man through the word preached in the Church and received in faith. The Church is the community of the justified.<sup>179</sup> It is faith which justifies, a faith which is not a generalized disposition or an a priori attitude or a permanent dimension of man's existence. Faith is "the reception of the message of revelation in Jesus Christ."<sup>180</sup> Though faith is never "a work," it is always "a deed."<sup>181</sup> Justifying faith, the completion of eschatological occurrence, takes place in and through the Church.

The object of faith is the revelation of God in Jesus Christ which meets man as preached word in the Church. It is this preached word and not historical reconstruction or the act of memory which re-presents the historical fact of Jesus in the form of direct address.<sup>182</sup> Because the preached word is eschatological, qualitatively different from events of profane history, it can meet man perennially in the Church's preached word. Simultaneously within the act of faith in the decisive act of God in Christ is the act of faith in the Church as the bearer of the kerygma.<sup>183</sup> The kerygma is proclaimed by the authority of the Church. This fact differentiates the object of theology from the objects of science.<sup>184</sup>

<sup>178</sup> Bultmann, "Offenbarung und Heilsgeschehen," *GV* 2, 79-104.

<sup>179</sup> Bultmann, "Karl Barth's *Römerbrief* in zweiter Auflage," *Christliche Welt* 36 (1922) 359; *Beginnings* 111.

<sup>180</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, "Die evangelisch-theologische Wissenschaft in der Gegenwart," *Abendblatt der Frankfurter Zeitung*, Sept. 27, 1926, col. 3.

<sup>181</sup> Bultmann, "Glaube und Freiheit," *GV* 2, 156-58.

<sup>182</sup> Bultmann, "Die Bedeutung des geschichtlichen Jesus für die Theologie des Paulus," *GV* 1, 208-9.

<sup>183</sup> Gotthold Hasenbüttl, *Der Glaubensvollzug* (Essen: Ludgerus-Verlag, 1963) 88.

<sup>184</sup> This idea is developed in an unpublished essay, "Theologie als Wissenschaft," made available to me through the kindness of Mrs. Antje Lemke and transcribed by my assistants, Arnold Meyer and Helmut Heiser (cf. Addendum at end of my article). To them, as well as to Miss Ellen Kubitzka, University of Heidelberg, who have traced down and reproduced articles difficult to obtain, I am deeply indebted.

The great danger for the Church is its tendency to regard itself as a phenomenon of this world. This temptation ultimately derives from the paradox that historical event is at one and the same time eschatological event. The Church is essentially an eschatological entity and only subsequently a sociological phenomenon. The Christian tradition itself succumbs to the temptation. To take but one instance: regulative functions of laws and offices soon are assumed to be constitutive of the Church. At that point the Church ceases to be the eschatological congregation ruled by the spirit, the eschatological congregation constituted by the word of proclamation.<sup>185</sup> To arrive at this judgment, one employs the four major operations and the presupposition which Bultmann calls *Sachkritik*. It is particularly the historical operation that indicates "theological statements are by nature the explication of believing comprehension (and) it also follows that *the statements may be only relatively appropriate, some more so, others less so.*"<sup>186</sup> Since the New Testament is a series of hermeneutical reactions to one and the same saving event,<sup>187</sup> it follows that some segments of the New Testament are more appropriate to the realities they seek to express than are other parts. The transition from laws as regulative to laws as constitutive of the Church is an accommodation of the Church to entities of the world at the expense of the Church's eschatological charter.

It is important to note that the judgment that some theological statements are more appropriate than others is not simply an inheritance of Luther's critical attitude toward the Epistle of James and the Revelation of John. Rather, the judgment follows necessarily from historical consciousness and the application of the four critical operations. These operations, accompanying and generating new stages of meaning, disclose the historicity of early Christian literature. Eschatological occurrence is expressed with varying degrees of clarity and adequacy. One can, as in the instance of the Church's self-understanding, distinguish stages of meaning. So can one separate the message of Jesus, the work of editors and Evangelists, the sources they employed, the audiences to whom the tradition was directed, the intentions of writers and revisers, the literary vehicles of the contemporary world — all that we have spoken of in the genetic analysis. Such discrimination leads to judgments in terms of congruency to the realities, to the subject matter. One may either ignore, juggle, harmonize, or finally attempt to explain what at first appears to be recalcitrant data. Only explanation will purify the intellectual consistency of consciousness.

<sup>185</sup> Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* 2, 100.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.* 238.

<sup>187</sup> James M. Robinson, in an article I do not have here, called the New Testament "hermeneutical books."

It is further possible that believing comprehension may be bound by some prefaith understanding of God, the world, and man and confuse this prefaith understanding with the realities of revelation. So, for instance, a writer may speak of God's dealing with men in juristic terms. Or a writer may describe God's relation to the world in mythological or cosmological terms which are inappropriate, or even contradictory if interpreted literally, to faith's grasp of God's transcendence. Further, one may express God's transcendence in the terminology of mysticism or of idealistic thinking. Or a writer may intend to stress the reality of the Church by constituting it as a sociological and empirical phenomenon. One can here preserve the intention of the expressions without being bound by the prefaith expression. Perhaps the most striking instance of problematic interpretation, though not mentioned by Bultmann, is the biological explanation of original sin developed from a primary and secondary mythical symbolism by the tertiary symbolism of speculative thought.<sup>188</sup> The point of theological interpretation is to reach the intentionalities operative in the expressions. The epistemic principle justifying this procedure Bultmann calls *Sachkritik*.

Though the term concretizes what seems to be the dynamism of the act of understanding, it is perhaps more useful in its capacity to pinpoint the exact location of disagreements, both on the part of believers and of professional interpreters. While Bultmann makes eminently clear that he accepts *Sachkritik*, be it understood as the native capacity of the mind to judge, discriminate, and decide on realities as opposed to their expression, or as an explicit epistemic principle, it should not be thought that he alone, or in his following of Luther, employs *Sachkritik*. All interpreters utilize what is meant by *Sachkritik*; for they all claim to uncover meaning through words, to reach reality by the understanding of language. Bultmann simply makes explicit and conscious what is inevitably operative in all interpretation. This enables him to pursue the intentionalities at work and to develop their consequences. So he can define the Church as the eschatological community of the faithful constituted by the preached word. Likewise, he can commit to theology the determination of what is true and false teaching within this Church. Hence theology, in the context of the three preceding operations, can explain what the Church is, while at the same time maintaining that the Church does not live from theology but rather from the object of theology, which is the revelation of God. Therefore theology, against permanent temptation to simplify, describes the Church as the eschatological and otherworldly entity in which the word of God is preached and heard—a delicate equipoise of thought in tension ultimately rooted in the paradox of the Word made flesh.

<sup>188</sup> The terms are originally Jaspers' and are later utilized by Ricoeur.

*The World*

The fourth and final element in the hermeneutic field is the world. For the New Testament, the world is not the articulated and intelligible cosmos into which man inserts himself by understanding and in which he is at home through the construction of the city based on the law of the gods.<sup>189</sup> Nor is the world a totality ruled by a providence which sees God as father and creator and whose relationship to the world parallels that of the law of cosmic harmony proportioned to the perceptive faculties of man.<sup>190</sup> As the world is conceived of in neither Greek nor Stoic terms, so the world is not the imprisoning force of the Gnostics.

The world is considered as God's creation, as subsequently the stage of history in which God acts and is therefore present. But accepting God as creator is to accept his transcendence over the world. The world is a creature, originally made from nothing and bearing the impress of its nothingness. Negatively, the world is all that is not God. And all that is not God, apart from the world of nature, is the creation of man. Hence world is "the totality which man has constructed and which then embraces the individual man, gives motivation to his activities, becomes the measure of his judgments and the security of his sense of being alive."<sup>191</sup> World, as a moral entity, may be identified with the three realms of culture. So world comes to be an anthropological concept.<sup>192</sup> In fact, it is man himself.

This world of human striving, concern, preoccupation, and care is the world of sin. Not sinful, of course, in itself, but rather insofar as it solicits man to devote all his energies to it, to rely on it for his identity, to hope in it as an ultimate assurance. Radically, sin is the desire to live by one's own power, to totally dispose of one's life, to find one's security in the works and preoccupations of man. This is the boasting of which Paul spoke: the world of flesh, the existence in bondage,<sup>193</sup> life in darkness, falsehood and death—unfortunately chosen because of its deceptive promises. This is the false understanding of human existence. "The desire to control one's own existence, the claim of self-sufficiency, the wishing to be like God,"<sup>194</sup> this is the primal sin, forgetting that man is created by God.<sup>195</sup>

<sup>189</sup> Bultmann, "Das Verständnis von Welt und Mensch im Neuen Testament und im Griechentum," *GV* 2, 59.

<sup>190</sup> Bultmann, "Der Mensch und seine Welt nach dem Urteil der Bibel," *GV* 3, 151–52.

<sup>191</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, "Urchristentum und Staat," *Universitätsbund Marburg: Mitteilungen* 19 (1928) 3.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.* Cf. also "Das Verständnis von Welt und Mensch im Neuen Testament und im Griechentum," *GV* 2, 71.

<sup>193</sup> Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* 2, 16.

<sup>194</sup> Bultmann, "Römer 7 und die Anthropologie des Paulus," *Exegetica* 208.

<sup>195</sup> Bultmann, "Paulus," *RGG* 4, 1035.



Eschatological occurrence offers all that the world promises falsely. A new factual self-understanding contradicts the curse under which human existence seems to stand, if one attends to the theme of so much ancient literature which laments the fact that man seems to have lost something that belonged to him.<sup>196</sup> In becoming a new creature, man recovers what seems to have been lost, is freed from the world and, above all, from himself.

At the same time, man remains of the world and a sinner. He is not taken out of the world, nor does he receive special powers which immunize him from the world's allure. And faith does not serve as protective coating. Man is simply told that the old eon has ended, and so has the power of this world as the vehicle for self-understanding. Faith is here seen as *eine Tat*, particularly in the Christian's dialectical relation to the world. The relation is not, as too frequently described, a relation of tension between expectation and fulfilment, but one in which the eschatological event paradoxically has its fulfilment in the present moment and in the quiet, simple, and persistent encounters with neighbor, self, and God—the usually modest theater of authentic human existence. So the eschatological event which took place in the history of a concrete man must repeat itself ever anew—the paradox of an eschatological event which is simultaneously a historical event, the paradox of life as veiled though revealed, the anomaly of sin and grace.

To describe the Christian's relation to the world, Bultman not only employs the "as if not" of 1 Cor 7:29; he also describes the Christian's posture in terms of distance: "The posture of holding oneself far from the world belongs to the essence of Christianity"<sup>197</sup>—distance from the things of the world,<sup>198</sup> "a Christian distance,"<sup>199</sup> a distance which is absolutely necessary for man's freedom.<sup>200</sup> Thus do all things come together as the world pursues its autonomous existence and at the same time is understood as the place of God's revelation in Jesus Christ.

### Conclusion

The apparent vulnerability of the New Testament tradition is its historicity, which seems to locate its actors and deeds in a remote past, and its unpretentiousness, which appears to ignore or condemn the aspirations of the world while confining its own efforts to the more

<sup>196</sup> Bultmann, "Adam, wo bist du?" *GV* 2, 107.

<sup>197</sup> Bultmann, "Urchristentum und Staat," *Universitätsbund Marburg: Mitteilungen* 19 (1928) 2.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.* 4..

<sup>199</sup> Bultmann, review of Hirsch, *Auslegung*, in *EvT* 4 (1937) 140. Bultmann also refers to distance in science and aesthetics; cf. *GV* 2, 88–89.

<sup>200</sup> Bultmann, "Der Gedanke der Freiheit nach antiken und christlichen Verständnis," *GV* 4, 44.

jejune task of man's internal renovation. Historicity is turned to advantage by the liberating presence of the *eschaton* in time. Unpretentiousness reveals itself rather as the quality of thoughts, actions, and decisions which, through faith, renders a secure sense of self and dissipates all forms of pretentiousness. So it is the world that is ultimately vulnerable by its historicity and pretentiousness. At the same time, the world appears for what it is: the possible location for authentic existence. Competitive claims are balanced and proportioned and judged by the paradox of the Word become flesh. Thus the man of faith continues to create the world as best he can, while at the same time finding himself in an intentionality and meaning directed to ultimate transcendence and mediated through the Christian tradition. The modest but necessary role of the theologian is to make the Christian tradition fruitful for present and future by purifying the intellectual consistency of consciousness. So the tradition appears as a viable option and a moral landmark. One effective model of such work appears in the writings of Rudolf Bultmann and his outline of the hermeneutical field, his grasp of the elements constituting that field, and his understanding and execution of operations proportionate to the field and its elements.

#### ADDENDUM: AN UNPUBLISHED ARTICLE

In footnote 184 I referred briefly to an unpublished article of Bultmann, "Theologie als Wissenschaft." The editor of this journal has graciously, and I think wisely, suggested that I summarize its contents and relate it to what I have attempted in my article. I shall try to comply and to leave open for future discussion some of the more trenchant possibilities suggested by Bultmann's essay.

First, some general remarks about the essay. It is carefully handwritten on the equivalent of thirty-nine half pages and comes to thirty-one pages of double-space typscript. The original pages are the reverse sides of envelopes, bills, letters, etc., about six by eight inches—a typically careful use of material goods augmented by scarcities during the war years. The latest dated item is from July 18, 1945. A reference to Alpirsbach, as well as two notably repetitious sections, indicate the possibility of its being a lecture and in Alpirsbach. I cannot, at the moment, assign a more definite time or place. The purpose of the article is to discuss in what sense theology is a science.

It is important to note Bultmann's lifelong concern with the natural sciences, particularly with their methodology. One can find hints of this interest in the 1955 essay "Wissenschaft und Existenz," an essay submitted to the *Festschrift* celebrating Albert Schweitzer's eightieth birthday (*GV* 3, 107-21). The contribution contains some parallels to the unpublished essay. Rather more confirmation of his concern for science

and its methodology is provided by the fact that several of his weekly *Stammtisch* companions at the café *Zur Sonne*, in the Marburg *Marktplatz*, were empirical scientists. Nor is it pointless to recall the general excellence of German science before World War I.

The text proceeds through three points: (1) the concept of science, (2) theology as a science, and (3), as a recapitulatory conclusion, the scientific character (*Wissenschaftlichkeit*) of theology.

Science is broadly ruled by a particular concept unifying all individual sciences. This idea in science is that man has the capacity to develop systematically a field or a discipline to which human existence provides access ("zu dem der Mensch durch sein Dasein den Zugang hat"). Methodology is determined by the object of study. This means that man finds himself over and against and distinct from the object—in a situation analogous to that of seeing. The distance is constituted by the posture of intellectual objectifying perception. Conclusions of science are explanatory (*begründend*), not descriptive. The objectivity of science is found in its concern for pure knowledge, knowledge for the sake of knowledge, and its precision from any form of utility. The only presupposition of science is a prescientific relation to the object. Scientific knowledge is hypothetical, therefore relative and capable of revision. Science's interest in pure knowledge indicates that it belongs to the essence of human *Dasein* to ask questions about truth, i.e., it pertains to the essence of man to understand himself in his world.

God is the object of theology, but God cannot be the object of theoretical investigation, because He comprehends all being and there is no viewpoint outside of this. Theoretical knowledge may attain to an idea of God. But proper knowledge, proportionate to God known through revelation, comes only in *existentiell* encounter. More exactly, then, the object of theology as a science is faith and the contents of faith. Concretely, the object is eschatological occurrence. Unlike empirical science, the object of faith cannot be apprehended through objectifying postures, though objectifying procedures must be used to articulate the self-understanding of faith and thus to render faith intelligible as a possibility. Like science, theology does have a prescientific relation to its object. Like empirical science, theology proceeds systematically in accord with the demands of its object. Scientific work, parallel to that of the empirical sciences, is required both to understand and to interpret eschatological occurrence. This scientific work Bultmann specifies in the following brief paragraph which outlines the task of the interpreter who is to translate the text into modern conceptuality.

That is already not only a philological-historical task, but also a theological one. Or better: the theological task is simultaneously a philological-historical work. The reason for this is that the philological-historical interpretation of

every historical document (a fact that positivism can miss) presumes a relation (*Verhalten*) of the interpreter to the subject matter at issue. As only a mathematician can explain a document of the old mathematics, as only a musician, or at least a person of musical interests, can clarify a document in musical history, as only a philosopher can adequately explain Plato, so only a scholar moved by the question of belief can explain the NT (p. 25).

This paragraph contains the four operations of which I wrote and likewise involves the hermeneutical field and implicitly the elements explained in my systematic presentation. Thus my article may be described as an attempt to show how Bultmann concretely executes the scientific task which he theoretically explained in "Theologie als Wissenschaft."

The concluding section of Bultmann's second point deals with the interrelationships of the traditional theological disciplines: Old Testament, Church history, practical theology. Systematic theology he has explained as the translating movement from the kerygma – interpreted by New Testament research – to understanding in the present time. Bultmann here uses a brief illustrative drawing in which an arrow (pointing upwards to kerygma) indicates the task of New Testament theology as the understanding of the kerygma, and in which an arrow pointing downward from the kerygma to Christian understanding indicates the work of systematic theology. The process is really circular, as I have described it within the hermeneutic field. Total coherence is the controlling factor.

In conclusion, Bultmann notes that the disciplines of theology are scientific: (1) they are objectifying procedures; (2) they are objective in the sense that they seek only an understanding of the object and are proportioned to that object; (3) they are rooted in a prescientific relation to the subject matter; (4) they are open to revision and are therefore relative.

Thus does Bultmann conceive theology to be a science. His total work is the attempt to execute the scientific enterprise and at the same time preserve the integrity of the religious encounter. This, we have seen, is the systematic outline of a particular hermeneutic field and the understanding, execution, and development of operations proportionate to the field and to the elements. Most importantly, theology exists in the internal and intentional world of epigenetically differentiated consciousness. Of Bultmann's system we may note that its coherence, symmetry, integrity, asceticism, and intellectual respectability recommend it as one of the very few complete and open theological systems attempted in modern times. Thus the term "post-Bultmannian" has been singularly unproductive as either a descriptive or explanatory category, because it misses precisely the scientific character of Bultmann's theology and substitutes nothing in its place.