

CURRENT THEOLOGY

BULTMANN: REMINISCENCE AND LEGACY

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The assiduous theologian, exegete, or historian of religion spends most of his or her working life surrounded by journals and books. In addition to the variegated containers of the printed word, the chronicle of religious traditions may be summoned by the touch of keys to appear on a screen. The daisywheel enables the scholar to transmit the resultant research with precocious velocity. Teaching, attendance at conferences, and dialogue with colleagues interrupt the cataract of the impersonal and place the scholar in the confines of a more humane tribunal. But in general, the diligent student of religion lives mainly in an environment where the printed word is dominant. Even sabbaticals usually bring the teacher somewhere where there is a richer supply of stored words. Visiting foreign places and peoples of alien traditions is difficult to justify to funding agencies. The scholar's proficiency is judged primarily on how well he or she annexes and absorbs written resources for publication. Literary preservation enables a researcher to write with the same sense of easy familiarity of an event, idea, or person of a thousand years ago as of an event, idea, or person of today. In a sense, as has been pointed out by Walter Ong and others, a certain death of the writer lacks place in consigning thoughts to writing. Thus scholarship in the humanities is permeated by a peculiar dialectic between a metaphorical death and a concomitant intellectual resurrection, a perpetually recurring cycle not untypical of the seasons and life itself. When the subject of research actually dies, the researcher is forced to rely on written data and, if he or she is genuinely energetic, the reminiscences of those who knew the subject of the research.

Having read all the published words (and much of the manuscript material) of Bultmann and virtually every article and book on or about Bultmann, a few years back I traced his footsteps from Wiefelstede, Rastede, Oldenburg, Tübingen, Berlin, Marburg, and Giessen. During this journey I interviewed as many of his acquaintances, friends, relatives, students, and colleagues as possible. This resulted in an extensive series of tapes, notes, endless cups of coffee with German *Kuchen*, as well as friendly walks and conversations, including one day with Frau Heidegger. Obtaining as much oral information as possible was to be supplemented

by subsequent access to the Bultmann *Nachlass*, that is, all the personal notes and correspondence that remain a private preserve during one's active life. The journey and the proposed consultation were necessary because Bultmann's published autobiographical reflections are characterized by unusual restraint and reticence.

Some seven years later, April 1984, I returned to Marburg, fully expecting that by this time the Bultmann *Nachlass* would be organized and accessible. The material, for a variety of reasons, was in the Tübingen library, mainly in unopened boxes and under the supervision of a recently graduated student working four hours a day on this immense amount of accumulated material. His estimate was that another five years would be required before data could be assembled and appropriately organized. I wistfully recalled the 30-year period that had elapsed between the consignment of the *Der zweite Brief an die Korinther* to Erich Dinkler and its publication, a situation sadly reminiscent of the fate of the Qumran scrolls.

I mentioned this situation to my friend and colleague Professor James Charlesworth, then spending a sabbatical year at Tübingen. Out of sheer interest, he had made a trip to Marburg just to see where Bultmann had taught, driven by an amalgam of curiosity and the reverence one accords to a scholar who sustained the German tradition of scholarship during a dark period of human history. Surprisingly enough, his request to see the room where Bultmann had lectured was met with everything from insouciant neescience to the observation that he had taught in another building, not in the building housing the *Evangelische theologische Fakultät*. There was clearly a striking similarity in the perceptual and conceptual environments which I first noted in 1976-77, during which period my two German assistants manifested a complete lack of knowledge of Bultmann's contributions to exegesis and theology. Even the occasional disturbances accompanying Bultmann's contributions were in limbo. To comprehend these anomalies, one must extend the traditional theological outline to include a larger horizon.

THE THEOLOGICAL ATMOSPHERE

This unusual congruence of circumstances led to reflections on and research into the political, social, intellectual, religious, and primarily the theological atmosphere in Germany—more particularly, in Marburg. Apart from personal observation, required reading here are the following:

Marburger Geschichte,¹ the 1982 bestseller *Über die Deutschen*,² *Protestantische Profile*,³ and *Marburger Aufzeichnungen*.⁴

The North American must realize that among the most profound changes in Germany are alterations within the university system and the role the university must play in a recently democratized society. I bypass for the moment the accompanying changes in the gymnasia, in terms of both curriculum content and prevailing discipline. This would be matter for a separate study. The privileged position held by university professors deteriorated during the Nazi regime.⁵ The democratization of the university structure in post-World War II Germany began with the secession of students and faculty from the old University of Berlin (Friedrich Wilhelm), which became the Free University of Berlin. With a sort of utopian vision, the emergence of the right to universal education, and the developing participatory democracy, the choice of professors was determined almost as much by belonging to the right party (preferably SPD) and a commitment to radical ideals as by academic competence. Marburg, in fact (though I saw few signs of this apart from harmless placards and the occasional strike), was called a "Red University." Medical students to whom I talked, totally subsidized by the government and living as well as a student from a very affluent family in North America, bewailed the evils of capitalism and the benefits of a tempered communism.

The absence of serious theological work was evident to me in 1976–77 as well as in 1984, despite minor exceptions. American biblical journals had frequently noted in book reviews an evident and worrisome decline in the level of German scholarship. Even more evident was a sort of

¹ *Marburger Geschichte: Rückblick auf die Stadtgeschichte in Einzelbeiträgen*, ed. Erhart Dettmering and Rudolf Grenz (Marburg: Koch, 1982). Cf. also Ingeborg Schnack, *Marburg: Bild einer alten Stadt* (Kassel: Peters, 1974).

² Gordon A. Craig, *Über die Deutschen* (Frankfurt: Beck, 1983); English original: Gordon A. Craig, *The Germans* (London: Penguin, 1984). This book, while forthright and highly critical of certain aspects of German life, was well received in Germany and is necessary reading for anyone who would understand certain antinomies that pervade the intellectual, social, and spiritual life of Germany today.

³ *Protestantische Profile: Lebensbilder aus fünf Jahrhunderten*, ed. Klaus Scholder and Dieter Kleinmann (Königstein: Athenaum, 1983). Among the eight theologians of the 20th century, Bultmann is not included.

⁴ Dietrich von Oppen, *Marburger Aufzeichnungen: Zur Krise der modernen Welt* (Stuttgart: Radius, 1983). This popular book is fundamentally an analysis of the new crisis facing the modern world. The author, a philosopher, uses Marburg, its history, and his own experiences as both a paradigm and microcosm of the new dispensation in which the modern world lives.

⁵ Craig, *Über die Deutschen*, chap. 8.

schizophrenic atmosphere of tacit dissociation from the past coupled with a perceptible disinterest in the implications of this attitude for the future of German theological and biblical scholarship. There was in the university a perceptible demarcation among generations and an accompanying discrepancy of opinions on what a university, particularly a theological faculty, should be. A candidate for a professorial position was in a favorable position if he or she seemed to possess the social concerns and qualities necessary to shepherd students to congenial but as yet unspecified grazing lands. Rising unemployment did nothing to elevate hopes of the younger generation, and the consequent overcrowding of the universities did still less to raise academic standards or clarify the role, particularly in theological faculties, of the humanities in a clearly unsettled social situation. It is against this cursorily sketched background that the disinterest in and sometimes antipathy to the older generation is to be understood. A new and somewhat ominous style was clearly in the making. Part of this style was a benign neglect of great German scholars of the past and a patrician disregard of exegetical and theological work done in North America.

BEWITCHING RECOLLECTIONS

This polyphonic disposition is tempered by reflective walks in the neighborhood of the theological faculty, which is apprenticed to an illustrious history, the stage on which the present drama takes place. Random flashes from the past illuminate the present. 155 paces from the door of the Evangelische theologische Fakultät is a sign reading:

ST. KILIANS-KAPELLE
 Älteste Marburger Kirche
 Erbaut um 1180
 im 16 Jh. profaniert

Located slightly above and nearly opposite the Cafe Vetter is *Melanch-tonhaus Jnh. Stadtmission*. Some 32 paces beyond is the renowned N. G. Elwert bookstore, in which theological books occupied prominent display some seven years back. None appeared in the windows. Only one of Bultmann's books was available within. One fared a bit better at Otto Ropel's bookstore, where Karl Barth's *Gesamtausgabe offene Briefe 1945-1968* was in the window. Proceeding down the Barfüsserstrasse to the corner of Schneidirsberg, one sees the sign:

Hier
 wohnte
 Dr. Martin Luther 1529 —

a reminder of the unsuccessful Marburg conference. Reminders of the

instigator of the Protestant reformation are but a few minutes from each other. Circling back to the theological faculty, one notes that what was, somewhat pretentiously, I thought, called *Institut für Hermeneutik* is now more appropriately a building for *Religionsgeschichte*.

More somber memories emerge from a walk on the main street, where a plaque commemorates the murder of the Jewish citizens on crystal night: "Zum Gedenken an die am November 1938 frevlerisch zerstörtes Synagoge und an unsere ermordeten jüdischen Mitbürger." The park in which the sign stands is flanked by a *Sparkasse* (originally a savings bank) and a university building for *Rechtswissenschaft*. One wonders if anyone pauses to consider whether the architectural irony was deliberate. And through it all, the prevailing absence of Bultmann. Natorp and Cohen are commemorated by a plaque, as is Michael Vasileric Lomonosov, founder of the University of Moscow bearing his name, who had been a student at Marburg from 1736–39.

Always latent to the perceptive observer, whether in conversation or popular commentary, were shades of the political romanticism that had done so much damage in Germany. This romanticism, Craig observes, suppressed until the 1970s, reappeared in various forms, particularly in the growth of terrorist tactics and violent confrontations associated with the Baader Meinhof gang and the Red Brigade.⁶ This generated muted suggestions that perhaps restrictions on democratic rights and procedures might be a suitable weapon to quell the fear and anxiety arising from random terrorism. Such a solution, however, raised the haunting specters of the Hitler years. This political and social situation directly influenced the universities, which were perceived as vehicles preserving the *status quo* and instruments continuing to supply the bureaucracy with the personnel committed to the preservation of the system or, in some instances, dedicated to minor cosmetic alterations. Theological faculties in particular were promising possibilities as agents of change in the political, social, and moral German grammar. With a certain relentless logic, scholars such as Bultmann, whose writings on politics and social structures were negligible, did not form part of the new consciousness. In fact, he and others like him were consigned to temporary oblivion. Despite the controversies aroused by Bultmann's demythologizing proposals, he could never be characterized as on the left or right. Thus he did not arouse the strong allegiances reserved for reactionary elements associated with the Frankfurt School. His measured attempts to reconcile the *vetera et nova* would not appeal to those expecting instantaneous transformations of consciousness. Before turning to the commemorations

⁶ *Ibid.* 210.

and publication momentarily restoring Bultmann to the vestibule of attention, it is worth while to recall why Marburg, as a historical institution, is not simply a microcosm of global problems but a city that likewise is at a deep level detached from the transient agitations of the moment. It is a place where old and new are joined in an easy alliance.

HISTORICAL STABILITY

Marburg is not just a picturesque German city. Near Amöneburg are Roman ruins dating back to the fourth century B.C. Marburg is the city of St. Elizabeth and Philip the Magnanimous, whose castle at the highest point in the city houses a collection of the items assembled to make Marburg one of the first universities to seriously pursue the study of the history of religions. In 1238 the *Deutsche Orden* took over the Franciscan Hospital in Marburg. The Brothers of the Common Life began with the help of Heinrich Rede in 1477. Philipps-Universität was the first Protestant university in Germany. The Elizabeth Church is the oldest example of Gothic architecture in Germany. Among Marburg's more outstanding professors were Robert Bunsen (1811-99) and Emil von Behring (1854-1917), the discoverer of the origin of contagious diseases, of immunization, and of vaccines for diphtheria and tetanus. Paul Natorp (1854-1924) and Hermann Cohen (1842-1918) were founders of the Marburg School of Neo-Kantianism. The history of the *Gymnasium Philippinum*, from its foundation through being renamed *Adolf-Hitler Schule* in the National Socialist period to the introduction of coeducation in 1969, represents in minuscule form a reproduction of recent German secondary education and its political context. The dedication of the Jewish synagogue by the Provincial Rabbi Dr. Leo Munk in 1897 provided a place of worship for Jews in Marburg, who represented 2.3% of the Marburg population—a percentage twice as high as the national average.⁷ And, of course, from Marburg emanated the strongest condemnation of the Aryan Paragraph.⁸ Nor should it be forgotten that it was in Marburg, in 1933, that Bultmann outlined the theological task facing those who would oppose the aberrations of the Nationalist Socialist Party.⁹ In summary, the city of St. Elizabeth, Philip the Magnanimous, and Philipps-Universität is a microcosm of all modern problems. The city is the

⁷ *Marburger Geschichte* 382.

⁸ *Die Marburger Theologen und der Arierparagraph in der Kirche*, ed. Heinz Liebing (Marburg: Elwert, 1977).

⁹ Rudolf Bultmann, "The Task of Theology in the Present Situation," in *Existence and Faith* (New York: Meridian, 1960) 158-65. Apart from the instinctive reactions of Karl Barth, who was able to return to Switzerland, I have searched in vain for so outspoken a criticism of the Nazi regime by a university professor at this time.

background of Bultmann's life and work. Historically and temporally, Marburg represents the problematic of Bultmann's major theological concern. What is the meaning of human existence? How is this existence made significant by the study of an ancient book which speaks to the human person at times in a very strange language? How does one understand the ancient word and make an eschatological event effectively present in a world whose antinomies are so visibly active and resident in Marburg? It is not without poignant significance that Bultmann always expressed a desire and hope to return to the flat lands of Northern Germany, where he grew up and spent his youth—a place that exhibits neither the tensions nor the history of Marburg. And yet, at the same time, some almost mysterious force held him in Marburg, where he is now forever buried and where the 100th anniversary of his birth was recently remembered. It was not only an act of memory but likewise a laconic attempt to return him and his work to contemporary intellectual and spiritual discourse.

COMMEMORATIONS, LITERARY REMAINS, THREE PUBLICATIONS

Anticipating Marburg, an international meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in August 1984 dedicated a special section to reflections on Bultmann. In Marburg, on October 28, 1984, a day was given to the question, what is the legacy of Bultmann and what therefore is the current task of theology? Bishop Lohse saw the legacy as the intimate relationship between the scientific search for truth and the preaching of the Church. Eberhard Jüngel noted that Bultmann's bequest was exegesis, exegesis, exegesis. The study of the New Testament is the perpetual task of both theology and Church. Lohse noted that even recently Cardinal Ratzinger had drawn a pejorative conclusion about Bultmann's theology, judging it to be related to Marxism. This question was addressed by a Catholic theologian from Saarbrücken, Hasenhüttl, who said that Bultmann transmitted to us the nagging question of how belief in God is possible today. Bultmann, said Walter Schmithals, had never doubted that theology was based on Jesus as the historical revelation of God. And this revelation meets us in the preached word. Demythologization was not like the removal of a garment but rather a principle of interpretation. In their own way, Bultmann's exegetical and theological contributions (though this was not directly mentioned) are attempts to create at least within a Christian community what I would call an acceptable public philosophy. But before turning to this point, we must direct our attention briefly to the literary remains (*Nachlass*) and to three publications issued during the year recalling the 100th anniversary of Bultmann's birth.

As mentioned earlier, the Bultmann *Nachlass* remains in a room off to

the left of the main entrance to the University of Tübingen's library. As of June 1984, most of the material remained unpacked. One had access to the material still in boxes roughly described according to contents. When the current slow procedure of organization will be finished could not be estimated by the young man in charge. The stipendium for the work was being provided, I was told, "by an outside source" and was to terminate in December 1984. The condition of the *Nachlass*, which may not promise overwhelming surprises, certainly did not invite research; in recompense, three books emerged to commemorate the anniversary. To these and their meaning I should like to pay more detailed attention.

Das verkündigte Wort

We have had an earlier series of sermons published in 1956, largely at the insistence of Bultmann's wife, to whom the book is dedicated, and who had mentioned to her husband that he had never dedicated a book to her.¹⁰ Consistent with his theory of eschatological occurrence eventuating in and through the preached word, Bultmann felt that sermons are essentially designed for particular occasions; they are meant to facilitate and clarify the dimensions of a specific situation. Thus the preached word is a sacramental encounter influencing the decision-making process in specified, transient, and pressing exigencies. There is, therefore, a momentary character about the sermon, however permanent its effects on the spiritual life of the hearer; hence Bultmann's reluctance to have his sermons published. With a certain inborn humility, Bultmann did not express the feeling that his sermons would be necessary vehicles for later students to interpret his entire theological enterprise. The first published sermons cover a period from June 7, 1936, to July 25, 1950; the second, a period from 1906 to 1941. We therefore have representative sermons covering virtually half a century.

The sermons of Bultmann constitute the formal element of his exegesis and theology in much the same fashion that the practice of oncology with victims of leukemia makes up the formal dimension of this medicinal speciality. The theoretical, speculative, and research dimensions of both exegesis and oncology constitute what Bultmann called the existential dimension of the science. As the practice of oncology with patients, so the preached word would constitute the *existentiell* dimension of the total undertaking. In the case of Bultmann, the relationship between research and preaching is inseparable, because the past eschatological event becomes present in the Church through the preached word, which has a

¹⁰ Rudolf Bultmann, *Marburger Predigten* (Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck] 1956); English translation: *This World and Beyond* (New York: Scribner's, 1960).

sacramental efficacy.

As might be expected, the structure of Bultmann's sermons is virtually invariable: a scriptural text, an elaboration of the problematic involved in the text, a series of questions, and then an exposition and application of the text to a modern audience. The structure is vaguely reminiscent of the *Summa theologiae*, in which Aquinas first gives serious objections to the thesis he is defending and then proceeds to explain the thesis before answering objections. Though not so jejune and systematic, the similarity of structure is apparent.

Literary devices such as the rhetorical question, repetitions of key phrases or motifs, and quotations from poets are artistically threaded into the total fabric. Bultmann is fond of retardation as well as sudden thought reversals.¹¹ A sense of realism permeates the sermons. This is the result, no doubt, of the writer's grasp of the individual's struggles with life, as well as a clear indication that the writer is acquainted with grief. He knows well the conflict between what we intend and what we accomplish, between what we hope for and what we accomplish, between pragmatic reality and conceived ideals. These are the thoughts of a man who lives in *This World and Beyond*.

His recurring theological themes are fully continuous with the spirit of the Reformation. While innovative, he is profoundly conservative. He seeks to repossess his heritage and then to transmit it. Thus the sermons are explorations of the inner theatre of human existence, where a spiritual life is enacted. Augustine's quotation "Thou hast made our hearts for thee, and they will not rest until they rest in thee" accounts for the restlessness that all have experienced and which Bultmann seeks to analyze within a religious tradition. Faith, hope, love, joy, and life itself, particularly authentic existence, are gifts.¹² Being in the world and yet not of the world means not only that we exist in tension, that life is a battle, but likewise that by our decisions we strive for inner freedom. This means—though Bultmann never says it—that the Augustinian sentence implies the intellect too is restless until it rests in God. The tension of existence is not dissipated by removal from the world but precisely by committing ourselves to transforming the world while simultaneously maintaining a certain distance from it. There are clear shades here of the Ignatian principle of attachment and detachment. One cannot be truly detached unless one is first attached.¹³ Yet none of

¹¹ Rudolf Bultmann, *Das verkündigte Wort* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1984) 47.

¹² *Ibid.* 180; delivered in 1921, a year before Heidegger came to Marburg.

¹³ These words are those of the well-known Jesuit John Courtney Murray, used in retreats he gave.

this removes the mystery of the hidden God, whose inscrutable providence is at work even in the horrors of war.¹⁴ "Der Krieg ist auch ein Ausleger der Schrift."¹⁵

Even Bultmann's relation to what was once termed "historicity," i.e., the historical truth of the Gospels in a rather literal sense, is clarified by a sermon on John 16:16-23 entitled "The Blessing of Reminiscence" (*Erinnerung*), in which Bultmann asserts that historical truth is found here more than elsewhere precisely because the distance and recollection found in the fourth Gospel enable both writer and reader to discern the true meaning of events which might have been obscured by proximity and involvement.¹⁶ To my knowledge, a statement like this is not found elsewhere in the Bultmannian writings. There is even a very direct statement about "inner and outer truth" which one could not see in the midst of the events.

Paradoxically enough, the words *Werk und Wirkung*, title of a centenary book, occur in a sermon in the context where the "I" or "the essence" of the individual is not known fully through *Werk und Wirkung*.¹⁷

Werk und Wirkung

Nevertheless, this is the title of a series of 29 essays published by Bernd Jaspert as part of the Bultmann commemoration. The essays are assembled under five divisions: theology and life history, philosophy and hermeneutic, exegesis and the existential interpretation, ecumenism, and church practice.

One would not expect, and indeed does not find, a unity that permeates the sermons. The Foreword quite correctly suggests that the book is not a coherent symphony but an opportunity for each participant to play a melody with his own instrument. The metaphor is somewhat misleading, since we do not have here either the tonality of Mozart or the atonality of Berg. Mainly the essays remind one of Kreutzer exercises. The result is that the book will appeal only to Bultmann specialists, and even they will find little or nothing new. As expected, the quality of the essays is very uneven. Let them stand as an attempted tribute to Bultmann and perhaps a stimulus to drive those unacquainted with his work to the original writer.

¹⁴ Bultmann, *Das verkündigte Wort* 115, a sermon given on Sept. 20, 1914.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 126.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 56-64.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 174. I here call attention to brief recollections about the person of Bultmann published by my friend Hildegard Urner-Astholz, "Erinnerung an Rudolf Bultmann," *Spiegelungen* (Munich: Francke, 1984) 206-9.

On the other hand, it is unfair to dismiss these essays too cursorily. Combining the essays with my earlier observations about Marburg, I think it safe to assert that Bultmann, though he never stated it, was attempting to establish a philosophy that would be accepted by the limited public to whom he had access. In a land as ideologically divided as Germany has been during the last half-century, this, even for politicians, would be an imposing task. But I think that a unifying rubric to Bultmann's efforts would be the effort to establish a coherent public philosophy among his immediate constituents and the wider public reached by his writings. Let me explain before turning to the third book and Bultmann's effort to unify symbolic consciousness. And, we should recall, philosophies that become public are started by individuals and small groups, Marxism being the most outstanding example.

By our birth into a particular society we inherit a world that has been made intelligible by a system of symbols embedded in a series of paradigmatic myths. This is common property, even amid a tolerable number of dissenters, and may be called a "public philosophy,"¹⁸ In general, this collective wisdom is conservative by nature. Whether we look at the injunctions of the Prophets, Wisdom literature, the maxims of Confucius, literal interpretations of sacred scriptures, or the teachings of elders in oral communities, there is the recurring theme that society begins to lose its way when it abandons the conservative path and chooses liberalism in any of its disguises. All forms of liberalism, be they political, social, economic, or religious, are ultimately based on accommodation—accommodating old truths to new realities. The power of liberalism resides in its emphasis on the retention of the "old truths."

Within each religious tradition one finds a conservative and a liberal constituency which are theoretically quite similar to the conservative and liberal attitudes found in the political world. The conservative message presents itself as a return to the values that made a society great, a return to foundational values. It preaches the avoidance of indulgence, permissiveness, and the socialized state, the promotion of law and order. In a developed nation it is an appealing form of archaism in which we look for days of a steady dollar (or mark or yen), tolerable inflation, industry on the part of all, and, lowest on the list of priorities, a low rate of unemployment. There is a quiet assumption that those who really want to work can. Social welfare, economic policy, and relations to other nations are all governed by the mythology of severity, discipline,

¹⁸ Robert B. Reich, "Toward a New Public Philosophy," *Atlantic*, May 1985, 68–79. This article itself identifies "public" with American, a not uncommon presupposition among American authors.

hard work, and, above all, national strength, which is usually equivalent to weaponry. All of these, of course, are reinforced by slogans carrying overt moral overtones.

The liberal philosophy offers little of substance to counter the conservative viewpoint. Its metaphor is usually that of the wise and beneficent parent who will somehow provide fairly for the socially and economically disenfranchised without taking anything from the wealthy. It would maintain international peace by conciliation, charity, and understanding—all familiar virtues that are of questionable value on the international level.

Both the conservative and the liberal mythologies, most noticeably present in highly developed countries, are not without appeal. Basically, the conservative myth is based on Machiavelli and the attempt to revive the so-called glories of antiquity “if only men vigorous and gifted enough can be mobilized for the purpose.”¹⁹ The liberal mythology is ultimately grounded on imaginary religious ideals—perhaps sufficient and necessary to influence individuals in small groups—which contradict statecraft, which is concerned with the limits of human possibility.²⁰

This brings up two fundamental questions. What has changed to render both the conservative and the liberal mythologies, with all of their symbolisms, unacceptable as public philosophies? Can another source, e.g., the history of religions or particular theologies, contribute any conceptual categories that will perhaps make a public philosophy both realistic and perhaps even compelling?

Both conservatism and liberalism are movements within nations and states of highly institutionalized forms, advanced technologies, and entities beset with sophisticated economic, social, and foreign problems. There has been no such phenomenon as a global conservatism or a global liberalism. For these reasons, conservatism particularly has tended to divide into social and economic groups and in foreign affairs allied itself with those promoting the interests of the involved nation. Social welfare, for example, is given to a “they,” who, mainly by innuendo, prefer this status to gainful employment. Economically, the emphasis is on free enterprise, with the hope that we can live within our means, avoid inflation, and tolerate unemployment as a necessary outcome of the first two priorities. In foreign policy, for example, conservatism suggests a “hard line” with the Soviets, with our economic competitors (first Germany, then Japan, soon the entire Pacific rim). Liberalism, as Reich

¹⁹ Isaiah Berlin, *Against the Current: Essays in the History of Ideas* (New York: Viking, 1978) 44.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 46.

notes, ultimately offered nothing more than a vague call to charity, tolerance, conciliation, and a hope that problems would go away.²¹

First of all, the new reality is that there are very poor, poor, reasonably well-off, and affluent nations, and we are all fully aware of this fact. Second, nations are not only aware of the disparities but likewise of the fact that old strategies are palpably ineffectual in a very volatile world. Third, the transition from poor to affluent is in many cases possible within a relatively short period of time. Fourth, this transition, as the automotive and steel industries have dramatically indicated, has dramatic effects not only on the very poor countries but also on the affluent nations where labor-intensive industries have become noncompetitive. And if history teaches one lesson, it is that sudden economic imbalances invite forceful solutions.

In this complicated world of language, symbol, and art, the mediators of religious tradition, can the historian of religion and the theologian utilize his or her experience to contribute something to the formation of a public philosophy that is larger and founded on deeper foundations than those now operative? Here it is necessary to recall that both art and religion are frames of perception largely dependent on the creative imagination. Symbols are constructed in a particular situation and society but usually, particularly in the case of the biblical symbols with which Bultmann worked, transcend their parochial origins.²² Or we note particular events that are elevated to the status of universals. On the larger canvas that is human history, religion and art emerge from new ways of seeing the world; each creates a new economy. Their common hope is to bring something new into existence, to move from what was and what is to what can or might be. In each there is a shamanistic dimension, whatever the origins might be. At this point the alliance between art and religion is intimate, their prophetic utterances similar. Each is motivated by the world we should like to have, the world we should like to construct. Each in its own way seeks release from thralldom to freedom, with all the precarious responsibilities there involved. So the Crow Indians, and indeed most of the Amerindians loyal to their traditions, were convinced that "success in life results from having a vision."²³

The contours of a vision are shaped primarily by the creative imagination, the only force powerful enough to counterbalance the stereotyped

²¹ Reich, "Toward a New Public Philosophy" 72.

²² T. R. Martland, *Religion As Art: An Interpretation* (Albany: State University of New York, 1981) 61.

²³ Ralph Ross, *Symbols and Civilization* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1962) 207.

registers of the conservative and liberal ideologies. Religions, whatever their diversity, on the esoteric level, i.e., whenever they go beyond the ABC necessary to learn their elementary symbolism, ideally seek a transformation of consciousness in which "the limit is the conceivable and not the actual."²⁴ There is no reason why a Japanese of Shinto or Buddhist background cannot discuss with a German of Christian cultural background ways of transcending their social, economic, and foreign-policy differences in the light of a common transcendent good for which each strives. Nor is there any reason why foreign-policy considerations cannot be human-policy considerations and have as their theatre what might be as well as what is.

So, too, professed faith, what we say we believe, and acted faith, what our actions show we believe in, should be brought into a more realistic alliance, one open to critical investigation. It does not take great archeological skills to uncover in all human hearts a resident longing for paradise, a search for what Eliade has called the absolute. Here is found the nucleus of true religion and its artistic mediators. The platitudes of political science are mainly bleak and all too often suggest capsizing the boat and drowning the crew, a theory reminiscent of the biblical flood narratives. The latter, however, were at least aware of their mythological status.

Assuredly the social, economic, and nationalistic interests of individuals and states will not disappear in a short time. But it is not romanticism to suggest that the latent power of religious symbols can, in fact, be artistically invoked at least to cast light upon what divides the world socially, economically, and nationalistically and to illuminate the false pretensions lurking behind the conservative postures of nations and the inefficacious foundations of a rudderless liberal philosophy. Each of these states of mind has a vested interest and an evident patrician attitude toward those on whom the one would seek to impose discipline, the other, benevolent condescension. In place of these attitudes one might propose the creative attitudes of faith, hope, and love and the artistic symbols to which these virtues give rise. Both the virtues and their symbols have a duplex function: they illuminate and remind. They cast light on what might be and in so doing remind us to seek "Eternal beauty wandering on her way."²⁵ Only this kind of creative search or something very similar to it is capable of generating a philosophy that can be called public in the sense that it is capable of being shared by all nations and peoples. At

²⁴ Northrop Frye, *The Great Code* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982) 232.

²⁵ W. B. Yeats, "The Rose," in *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats* (New York: Macmillan, 1979) 31.

no point in his extensive writings does Bultmann explicitly speak of public philosophy. But reading the essays on his work and its consequences reveals a much more global perspective inherent in Bultmann's writings—a perspective that even he himself did not consciously perceive.

A word of caution is necessary. We can distinguish between a professed belief and a practiced belief, the individual who pretends to be a spiritual Brahman but exhibits simply an inflated ego. One may further distinguish faith and belief. "Faith is the knowledge born of religious love."²⁶ It is this faith "that will liberate human reasonableness from its ideological prisons. It is not the promises of men but religious hope that can enable men to resist the vast pressures of social decay."²⁷ Behind varying beliefs lurks the deeper unity of faith. Beliefs are generated by diversity of culture, diverse experiences. When we speak, therefore, of the possibility of religion informing a public philosophy, we are speaking of the knowledge born of religious love, not the ideological phenomena that pass for religion in the popular or political mind. This distinction is crucial, because the popular mind and its elected representatives tend to identify religious faith with culturally determined beliefs.

One further caution. In the formation of a public and universal philosophy, one that can be both compelling and persuasive, the sentiments fostered by genuine religious faith should play a role, if only exemplary. But recall that exemplary is causal. That religious sentiments should inform society was expressed by Bertrand Russell, surely not one to praise what he saw as religion. He did, however, claim that a necessary condition of human survival is the kindly feeling towards others which religion in general advocated. This "kindly feeling" is close to Lonergan's definition of faith. And, of course, the kind of religion referred to by Russell was what Allport has called intrinsic religion, one devoid of the pathogenic strains we see all too frequently.²⁸ Both for mental health and currently for survival, what we require are "the poetic and prophetic metaphors of religion. . . ."²⁹ This is certainly clear in Bultmann's sermons, subliminally present in the recently published essays, and rising to thematic articulation in Bultmann's later work on hermeneutics. The grounding of theology as a scientific discipline can therefore be seen in a larger perspective than that of an attempt to legitimate theology as a respectable university discipline.

²⁶ Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1972) 115.

²⁷ *Ibid.* 117.

²⁸ Cf. Gordon W. Allport, *The Person in Psychology* (Boston: Beacon, 1968) 141-54.

²⁹ *Ibid.* 142.

*Theologische Enzyklopädie*³⁰

The name "encyclopedia" now generally signifies everything from *The New Columbia Encyclopedia* to the *Britannica*, with overtones of salespeople coming to the family doors pushing smaller encyclopedias deemed indispensable to the intellectual, if not moral, welfare of every child. Virtually every discipline now has a series of encyclopedias. In North America the theological encyclopedia, in the sense of an introductory course justifying the scientific character of theology, has not found a place as an independent course. The theological encyclopedia had its origin remotely in Hyperius (to whom I shall briefly return) and in the establishment in Halle and Berlin in 1694 of faculties of specialized scholarship. In its theological usage, encyclopedia denotes primarily an organized, systematic approach to theology as a science and connotes a division of the field into specific disciplines. Thus the term "encyclopedia," reflecting its etymology, and its usage as far back as Aristotle, basically intends to comprehend all of the disciplines which pertain to whatever is considered a complete education. Practically speaking, the theological encyclopedia during Bultmann's era was the methodological reflection on the nature of theology and its justification as a scientific discipline.

The intermediary step which led to this concept of the theological encyclopedia was taken by Andreas Gerhard Hyperius (1511–1564), a somewhat migrant scholar who in 1541 came to Marburg, where in 1542 he became a professor of theology. He is perhaps best known as attempting to steer a middle theological course between Calvinism and Lutheranism. His failure to establish a church order in the German province of Hessen was more than compensated for by his success in vindicating theology as a university discipline. In 1556 he published his *De recte reformando theologiae studio*, in which he did the groundwork for the division of theology into the four disciplines of Bible, systematic theology, church history, and practical theology. In this work he established the intimate connection between scientific theology and the Church. His influence, therefore, is decisive for the encyclopedia movement in Germany, which basically meant a division of subject matter into disciplines and a constant preoccupation with justifying the scientific status of theology in the university. From this point forward, theology lived in an uneasy covenant between its earlier status as a study to advance one's spiritual welfare and its new position as scholarly knowledge. This tension can be clearly seen in 1764 in Halle and, of course, has never

³⁰ Rudolf Bultmann, *Theologische Enzyklopädie*, ed. Eberhard Jüngel and Klaus Müller (Tübingen: Mohr, 1984).

been fully resolved.³¹ In fact, the dilemma has assumed more intractable proportions with the emergence of the history of religions, comparative religion, and the field of religious studies. Moreover, the entire problematic has been intensified by the general awareness of an actual multiplicity of religions and theologies throughout the world. This is more than just the problem of pluralism.

We are not now discussing attempted solutions to the difficulties that pluralism engenders. Attempts to articulate conceptual categories adequate to make experienced pluralism intelligible are appearing on the theological horizon.³² Before one could entertain hopes of developing a theology of world religions, confessional theologies had (and still have) the task of establishing themselves as serious intellectual disciplines. Concomitant to this work was the subsidiary task of constructing a megastructure in which theology could stand as a reputable discipline and simultaneously be related to the Church, to sociological realities of church order, to the preached word, and to a larger community. The entire procedure involved the exorcising of many domestic ghosts. Conceptual expression had not only the difficulty of catching up to the new realities of the late 20th century, but likewise of seeking to transform internal consciousness which sustains itself by adherence to old certainties. Bultmann's theological encyclopedia is an incipient stage of this long journey.³³

The encyclopedia, which I had earlier seen in written form, includes five chapters and three appendices. The first two appendices are really tables of contents and seem to indicate topics of lectures given between 1926 to 1930. The third is a reflection on truth and certainty in theology, a theme that is considered under a different rubric in chapter three.

Basically, the first half of the book determines the task of a theological encyclopedia historically (in idealism, positivism and Schleiermacher, liberalism and orthodoxy). In the following three chapters Bultmann examines theology as a knowledge or science of God, the concept of revelation, and finally the act of faith. All of this leads to the final question, "What is theology as a science?" Summarily, theology is the conceptual articulation of human existence as determined by a God revealing Himself through Scripture. Sin, peace, revelation, and belief

³¹ Edward Farley, *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983) 49.

³² *Ibid.*, passim.

³³ Cf. Frithjof Schuon, *The Transcendent Unity of Religions* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1975); Huston Smith, *Forgotten Truth* (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1977); Wilfrid C. Smith, *Towards a World Theology* (Philadelphia: Washington, 1981); P. Joseph Cahill, *Mended Speech* (New York: Crossroad, 1982).

are the themes of a theology which proceeds under the impulse of faith and the activity of the Spirit. Thus does Bultmann preserve the notion of theology as a supernatural wisdom which nonetheless must withstand rational scrutiny. Spirit and intellect must work together in an antipodal relationship.

This book will, of course, be of interest particularly to Bultmannian scholars. It will be of historical interest to historians of theology who can follow the intricate procedure by which primarily German theologians seek to make theology an intellectually reputable discipline. Bultmann does escape basing theology exclusively in Schleiermacher's realm of *Erlebnis* and *Gefühle*. One must recall that Bultmann consistently perceived reason in the symbolic fashion of Plato's charioteer restraining the impulses of the two horses, passion and wilfulness. The intellect, however, was informed by faith. This conviction distinguishes Bultmann from many of his contemporaries, who would place theology under the guidance of romanticism or the rule of the nonrational. Though there is no clear-cut influence of the Neo-Kantians, Natorp and Cohen, on Bultmann, Bultmann does clearly manifest a continuity of the Neo-Kantian distinction between religious knowledge and reason (*Geist*). Reason (*Geist*) produces the kinds of knowledge objectified in science, morality, art, and any metaphysics. But the religious experience is not within the realm of worldly knowledge. This inheritance from Wilhelm Herrmann is palpably present in Bultmann, who in other works clearly maintains the momentary and internal nature of the religious experience and hence its incommunicability. This, however, is but one strand in Bultmann which is modified by his insistence on historicity, understanding, and hermeneutics.³⁴ I would think, therefore, that the particular significance of this book is to disclose the temper of the times during which it was written, and remedy the disequilibrium between theology, as hitherto defined, and scientific disciplines. That this tension was not fully resolved to Bultmann's own satisfaction in this book can be seen from the fact that he himself never brought the book to the final stage of publication. Imperfect though it is, the book raises a number of questions I should like to address.

Axial Mythology

During the period of German theological ascendancy, one of the axial myths operative in Christian theological thinking was the normative nature of Christian theology. This is true as much in Marburg as elsewhere, even though Marburg was among the first great centers for

³⁴ Cahill, *Mended Speech* 101-47.

the study of the history of religions, not in its limited biblical meaning (*Religionsgeschichtliche Schule*) but in its generic sense (*Religionswissenschaft*). An axial myth is a series of convictions and assumptions generated and propagated by stories supporting the suppositions, habits, and life style of a particular community. More properly, we should speak of axial mythological consciousness and reserve the term "axial myths" for the narratives generating and sustaining the consciousness. Myth here has no overtones of truth or falsity. It is simply narratives of one kind or another that ground the beliefs of a community and enable the individual, particularly at the exoteric level, to orient himself or herself to the particular community, to share the presuppositions and common meaning that give shape, contour, and stability to the society. One of the active functions of axial myths, whether this be in Iran or in Germany, is not only to give positive identity to a group but likewise to ward off threats to this identity. Thus the axial structure, a complex topic to which we can here devote only fleeting attention, acts centrifugally and centripetally—terms I have taken from Northrop Frye. Centrifugally, axial mythologies, either consciously or unconsciously, ward off and drive out elements either threatening to or uncongenial to its axial structure. This can be best seen in totalitarian states. Centripetally, axial mythologies, by the principle of inclusion, absorb concepts, values, ideals, and structures that seem congruent with the original and constitutive axial mythologies. Theological examples of this abound in every religion. The principles of exclusion and inclusion shape both the communal and individual consciousness.

The time period covered by Bultmann's theological encyclopedia as well as the audience for which the lectures were destined was permeated by the atmosphere that Christianity, in one way or another, possessed all religious truth. Even though all seminary training included considerations of the fact that God willed that *all* men and women be saved, missionary efforts at propagating the gospel were the vehicle by which this efficacious will was to be achieved. Ricci's visit to Nan-ch'angin in 1595, to Nanking in 1597, to Peking in 1601, and de Nobili's work in India, beginning in 1610, were brief and early flashes across the religious sky—efforts at accommodation to the realistically pluralistic world which have only recently begun to have a permanent effect. The basic question they and their immediate followers raised (now surfacing in serious fashion) was whether or not different styles manifested in varying religious conventions, genres, habits, and linguistic modes of expression could conceal similar religious substances. In his own way, Bultmann raised the same question but confined it to the Bible and "modern man." Could Christianity, by contact with supposedly alien religions, be subject

to creative transformations? Could divergent axial mythologies be modified by deferential encounter? Could the assumed hegemony of one culturally postulated form of claimed transcendence create a common universe of discourse with another form? These questions posed by de Nobili and Ricci were logical extensions of the Bultmannian problematic.

These reflections are not wanderings from our theme, which is Bultmann and theological expression. What we see operative in Bultmann's theological encyclopedia is an attempt to put theology on a sound intellectual basis while preserving its rational dimension. Later writings, particularly on mythology, hermeneutics, and the fact that a presuppositionless exegesis is impossible, move Bultmann's concern to the realm of internal spiritual consciousness. Despite his limited knowledge of other religions, these transformations of intellectual consciousness not only are a beginning point for a radical change in the individual's personal spiritual perspective but potentially contain the seeds for a more open view to possible revelation through other religions with which Bultmann had so little personal contact. Unfortunately, Bultmann's productive career was virtually finished by the time that the history of religions began to be introduced in virtually all reputable universities, and by the time that the recuperative period from World War II allowed less inimical relations to develop between East and West. His work, therefore, was seminal in what appears to be something of a second axial period.

Relationships and the Unity of Symbolic Consciousness

Before turning to what I consider a second axial period, it is worth while mentioning two significant thrusts in Bultmann's career, both well exemplified by the above-mentioned posthumously published works. The first is his concern with the unity of symbolic consciousness. That is to say that his exegesis, theology, and systematic procedures were guided by what Whitehead has called a "large generality of understanding."³⁵ Spiritual life within a particular religious tradition should cohere with everyday experience, with the evolution of culture, and particularly with the intellectual and social universe continually evolving under the influence of the empirical sciences and the applied technology emerging therefrom. The expression of religious beliefs should be evolutionary and congruent with the changing forms of moral, intellectual, spiritual, and social consciousness of a world in process. In more simple terms, theology should not be sheltered from the rational and scientific procedures that have recently characterized modern Western life. Bultmann was, therefore, prepared to "recast, generalize, and adapt, so as to absorb into one

³⁵ Alfred North Whitehead, *Modes of Thought* (New York: Capricorn, 1938) 5.

system all sources of experience."³⁶ This attempt, currently manifest in the sermons but no less present in Bultmann's earlier published essays, is the background against which isolated concepts such as demythologizing, hermeneutics, existentialist interpretation, *Historie* vs. *Geschichte*, and form criticism are to be understood.

Secondly, Bultmann conceived the individual as constituted by an intricate series of relationships. He or she is determined by a relationship to a particular time and place, to a series of wishes, desires, and aspirations, to individual and yet universal drives, to certain basic hopes, and to a particular community. Thus the world is a community derived from the interrelations of its component individuals and societies. Each community is necessary for the existence of each individual.³⁷ The individual is like a question. Scripture and the tradition surrounding it pose the challenge of whether or not the individual is willing to understand himself or herself in a particular fashion. This places the individual in the position of encounter with self, neighbor, and community. This encounter, conditioned by the simple fact that the individual is temporal and in the world, is permeated by the individual's negative knowledge of omnipotence, holiness, and transcendence. The preached sacramental word presents a potential possibility for a way of response to the human condition. Response, of course, is not possible unless the message is expressed in intelligible terms. With a positive response we enter the world of faith and the world of eschatological occurrence. Whatever relationships the individual chooses to actualize define the person. Here, of course, the influence of Heideggerian categories is evident.³⁸ Authentic human existence occurs when the individual enters by faith the spiritual universe opened by revelation and accepted by a faith that continually bears rational scrutiny. Read carefully, the *Theologische Enzyklopädie* and *Das verkündigte Wort* are brief expositions of how one exegete and theologian joined the two worlds of rational thought and faith, leaving open for a following generation how this epigenetic differentiation of consciousness could be further developed in experienced pluralism.

A New Axial Period

More can be said. I started by noting the seeming absence of Bultmann from the German theological scene. Part of this is intelligible from social conditions that currently prevail in Germany and have a strong influence

³⁶ Alfred North Whitehead, *Religion in the Making* (Cambridge: University Press, 1927) 134.

³⁷ *Ibid.* 48.

³⁸ Maurice Boutin, *Relationalität als Verstehensprinzip bei Rudolf Bultmann* (Munich: Kaiser, 1974).

on the entire educational system. The German educational, social, and political system is adjusting to new realities and therefore in search of a new style. This is paralleled by experiences of all other nations where old certainties are fragile indeed. The apparent absence of Bultmann from the larger social horizon is comprehensible because Bultmann scholars tend to write on particular exegetical or theological topics. But perhaps most significant is the fact that a confluence of political and social upheavals indicates that we are now in what many have described as a new axial period. Jaspers described the original axial period as lasting from 800 to 200 B.C., occurring in the Eastern Mediterranean, China, and India, constituted by the prophets Elijah, Isaiah, and Jeremiah in Palestine, by Homer, Parmenides, Plato, the tragedians, Thucydides, and Archimedes in Greece, by Mo-Ti, Tschuang-Tse, Lie-Tse, Confucius, and Lao-Tse in China, by the authors of the Upanishads and Buddha in India.³⁹ This observation, now a relative commonplace, includes the fact that our religious, aesthetic, political, artistic, social, mathematical, and empirical modes of perception were formulated during this period and have permeated civilizations up to the present moment.⁴⁰

Ewert Cousins has proposed the idea that we are currently living in a new axial period and points out three figures characterizing this second axial period.⁴¹ It would take us too far afield to explore this hypothesis in detail, though I do believe the idea is quite correct. And it is far too early to specify who shall play constitutive roles in a new axial period. A major characteristic of this second axial period is what Cousins calls global consciousness. This is reminiscent of the phrase used by Whitehead in 1926.⁴² By citing Cousins, I am not invoking a new insight but one that has appeared in many writings and been disguised by varying terminology, such as "the global village," "cosmopolis," "the communications explosion," "global consciousness," "ecumenism," etc. Perhaps the most comprehensive and useful category is to describe the new era as one dominated by historical consciousness. Whitehead also noted in this same year that "the decay of Christianity and Buddhism, as determinative influences in modern thought, is partly due to the fact that each religion has unduly sheltered itself from the other. The self-sufficient pedantry of learning and the confidence of ignorant zealots have combined to shut up each religion in its own forms of thought."⁴³ What

³⁹ Karl Jaspers, *Vom Ursprung und Ziel der Geschichte* (Munich: Piper, 1959) 14-15.

⁴⁰ Whitehead, *Modes of Thought* 89-116.

⁴¹ Ewert H. Cousins, *Process Thought on the Eve of the 21st Century* (Hampden: Wyndham Hall, 1985) 12-25.

⁴² Whitehead, *Religion in the Making* 29-30.

⁴³ *Ibid.* 131.

Whitehead is basically asserting is that neither Christianity nor Buddhism was actively moving from its classic culture to cultures in which historical consciousness was determinative. The same might indeed have been said of other religions, and indeed of the differing forms of Christianity. In describing the modern mind (1932), Carl Becker said: "What is peculiar to the modern mind is the disposition and the determination to regard ideas and concepts, the truth of things as well as the things themselves, as changing entities, the character and significance of which at any given time can be fully grasped only by regarding them as points in an endless process of differentiation, of unfolding, of waste and repair."⁴⁴ Becker further noted that the significance of this intellectual shift had not yet been grasped.

Shortly before Becker and at about the same time as Whitehead, Bultmann in a 1925 book review stated: "We are on to something new."⁴⁵ This referred to something he was to develop thematically later on: the serious historical study of the New Testament and the evolution of an appropriate concept of history. Before publishing his book *Jesus* in 1926, he had already lamented the students' basic disinterest in the serious study of history and its documents. Clearly from 1923–26 the concept of history as process was developing. From this period forward, Bultmann simply articulated the infrastructure of his theology. It would take us too far afield to develop Bultmann's progressive thematization of historical consciousness in the construction of the Bible and in the choices a person must make in achieving authentic existence.

What all these writers, somewhat in advance of their time, were noticing is now clear. A new climate of thought was emerging. Later it might be called a new axial period. For our purposes in the limited context of Bultmann's contributions, I may make certain concluding observations. Above all, Bultmann exercised a historical operation. The texts had histories. The readers had histories. The interaction between the text and reader was modulated by continually changing historical perspectives. History could be foundationally a sequence of events from which one would deliberately choose significant events, ones that gave and could mediate meaning. Here the interpreter played a constitutive, if not decisive, role. Distance could even enhance meaning, as is graphically illustrated in his sermon "Der Segen der Erinnerung."⁴⁶ So could Bultmann, to the chagrin of many, casually dismiss attempts to write a

⁴⁴ Carl L. Becker, *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers* (New Haven: Yale University, 1932) 19.

⁴⁵ Rudolf Bultmann, "Was ist Theologie?" *Die christliche Welt* 46/47 (1925) 1061–62.

⁴⁶ Bultmann, *Das verkündigte Wort* 56.

biography of Jesus according to common historical canons. Even in the limited Christian context of Europe, the individual constituted himself or herself by the decisions he or she would make in the face of alternate choices. The observation is still valid, though the field of possible choices has vastly expanded. Textual comparison permeating all of Bultmann's exegesis, though again within a relatively limited tradition, was a step in the direction of the larger comparison among diverse religious traditions. Bultmann's literary criticism, though not so highly developed, was a necessary preliminary to the understanding of other religions based on both oral and written traditions. In all his interpretative operations he perceived the nature, motion, and force of process. It would be left to another generation to explain and expand a theology amidst the theologies of world religions. While his attention was explicitly focused on preserving and developing the unity of symbolic consciousness within the alternatives available during the first half of this century in a particular time and place, the task facing theology today is still to develop a new form compelling enough to induce a unity of symbolic consciousness among individuals and the world community.

Whatever history decides, the study of Bultmann in the context of the theological, social, and political atmosphere of Marburg may suggest that he has played a significant role in what may well be a second axial period. Such is the theme latent in the commemorations and recent publications.