

KERYGMA AND MYTH

A THEOLOGICAL DEBATE

VOLUME II

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RUDOLF BULTMANN—AN ATTEMPT TO UNDERSTAND HIM

THE name of Rudolf Bultmann is inseparably linked with the idea of "understanding". The connection will be obvious to anyone in the future who undertakes to write the history of theology in our day, and it is equally obvious to all who have kept abreast of theological trends during recent decades. Bultmann has impressed this idea, or rather the problems it brings to light, upon our consciences with extraordinary force. And he has offered many answers, and quite logical ones, to the problems it raises. Nor has he left us in doubt as to what he means by "understanding", particularly as regards the New Testament and its practical bearing. Many of us too have joined the fray "for and against" him.¹ I have myself joined in from time to time. It has often disturbed me that as a writer Bultmann is not at all easy to understand, a fact which has endangered the basis of the whole discussion. In this he is like the authors of the New Testament, perhaps even worse! What is really at the back of his mind? It is so easy to find ourselves at sea as we read him in one passage because we have overlooked some hidden dimension, and in another passage because we suspect such a dimension where none exists. Sometimes we are too sure, at other times we are not sure enough. Sometimes we fail to do him justice, at other times we give him more than his due. Sometimes we draw what seem to be obvious inferences, sometimes we neglect to draw them.

I must confess I know of no contemporary theologian who has

¹ An allusion to the Tübingen Memorandum (see above, pp. 39f.), entitled *Für und Wider die Theologie Bultmanns* (R.H.F.).

so much to say about understanding, or one which has so much cause to complain of being misunderstood. More than a few of his disciples and his critics upset me by the cocksureness with which they seem to have understood him. Yet when it comes to agreeing or disagreeing with him over a particular piece of exegesis (or even to thinking we can take him in at a glance, as the authors of the Tübingen Memorandum seem to), we must, it seems to me, reach agreement about something else first. Before we can express our agreement or disagreement with him over the method or results of his exegesis of the New Testament, we must first of all agree about what kind of exegesis is appropriate to it and the texts it contains.

What follows is simply an account rendered of the way I feel I have been able to understand him so far. I shall then try to come to some sort of provisional attitude towards him and his thesis. For good or ill one cannot avoid doing that. My present purpose is, then, not to speak for him, nor even, strictly speaking, against him, but, if I may put it thus, alongside of or around him. In saying this I would like to emphasize that I am concerned with my own attempt to understand him so far. And I must hasten to add that at best that attempt has proved unsatisfactory, not to say fruitless. I have the impression that many, if not the majority, know the answers no better than I do, but only behave as though they did. If anyone is clearer about Bultmann, he is of course, at liberty to help me—and any others who feel about him as I do—by sharing with him his better understanding. But to claim that he is easy to understand is not enough, whether it is his friends or critics who make the claim. Am I not right in thinking that somehow or other the whole discussion about Bultmann has got into a rut? Is it not therefore high time to reconsider his starting point?

I

First, I hope I am not wrong when I say that Bultmann's primary aim is to present the New Testament as the document of a message (kerygma, proclamation, preaching). It is that and that alone. This means that the usual lines of demarcation between

exegesis and systematic theology are entirely abolished. It also means that we understand the message as something meant for ourselves and that in expounding it we become vehicles of the message. We neither understand nor expound the New Testament if our object is to extract general or theoretical propositions about God, the world or man, or even neutral historical data about events which happened long ago, or the record of religious, mystical devotional or even ethical experiences which happened once and can happen again to-day. If the New Testament contains such things they are only by-products, neither essential nor proper to it. Any such approach to the New Testament would be wrong. It would be wrong to hear it, think of it, and speak about it in any of these ways. None of them represents what the New Testament writers meant to say, what they intended, or what in fact they did say. Everything they say is conditioned by the message they delivered. They can only be understood by sharing the life of their message. To understand them means to believe them, and to expound them is to preach their message. Do I understand him rightly, thus far at least?

I will now try and follow him a step further. We can share in the life of the New Testament message, and we are required to do so, because of the message itself, not because of the theories, records of fact or religious experiences it incidentally records. The essential content of the New Testament is a unique event, a truly singular occurrence, with a significance far beyond anything the New Testament writers themselves or their contemporaries ever dreamed of, a significance for men of every age. Further, by the constant repetition of that message all men of every age can become contemporary with it and are meant to do so. The quintessence of the message, its very foundation and power, lies in the word which proceeded once (once for every Now) from God and was spoken in this act which happened once (once for every Now). This act takes place once for every Now of every man. God's word is spoken once for every Now of each one of us. Such is the message of the New Testament. Thus it brings us face to face with God, and challenges us to the decision which faith demands, to the choice between offence and obedience. In the

obedience of faith which the message aims at producing we come to share its life, a sharing which challenges and enables us to understand ourselves by understanding the message. Quite apart from the historical and philological attention it demands, the understanding of the New Testament becomes an "existential" act, whereby its true understanding becomes an event. Am I still following Bultmann?

Not quite, perhaps. I can see that we can only interpret the New Testament aright if we share in the life of its message and in the obedience which responds to it. I can see, too, that this sharing takes the form of interpreting the message and my own faith as one who hears or reads it. But I cannot see why this should involve an act of *self*-understanding on my part. That hardly seems the right way of putting it. The message may bring me face to face with God and with myself as the one who hears it. It may lead to the obedience of faith. But how astonishing then and how incomprehensible I would find *myself*! How little should I be able to say about myself! Indeed, there is nothing I could say. How can I understand and explain my faith, of all things, unless I turn away from myself and look to where the message I believe in calls me to look? How can the understanding of the New Testament be an "existential" act, except in the sense that I am compelled to renounce any understanding and explanation of myself, thus finding it contradicted everything I thought I knew about myself, and finding myself called to account for that with which (or him with whom) I have been brought face to face? How can this come about when in actual fact I am engaged in turning away from myself and looking to where the message calls me to look? Is that what Bultmann really means to say? I should like to know, for it is just this that I cannot be certain about.

Perhaps I have begun to raise questions too soon. Therefore, while we are still concerned primarily with Bultmann's general orientation, let me go on listening. The New Testament records its unique message in a specific historical form. It is equally true that this message bears witness that the Word was made flesh. The message is brought to me at all times through the medium of the New Testament, but it is cradled in the language, termino-

logy, thought-forms and ideological presuppositions of the particular period in which these documents came into being. It is this cradle which is the real problem in any attempt to come to grips with the message. But if it is to become contemporary with men of other ages, the message of these documents must first be understood in its original historical form. Only then can it be translated into other forms, into the language, terminology, etc. of later ages. In particular it must be translated into terms which are intelligible to those who in any particular age are trying to understand and expound it. Only so can it be a relevant message for to-day, for modern man and his contemporaries. Only so can it bring them face to face with God and challenge them to the decision of faith. Only so can it be heard with true faith, or at least as an authentic scandalon: only with contemporary ears. The substance of the message may be the same, but its form must be different to-day from that of yesterday. Its form must be understood and expounded anew to-day. Am I doing justice to Bultmann's intention?

If so, I could agree with all this. In every age all forms of theology—exegesis, dogmatics and preaching—must certainly undertake this kind of translation. It is an important task, and one which must be done rightly to-day as always. I wish, however, I knew how to introduce within the framework of Bultmann's concern, something else which seems to me to be even more important. Who is it, or what is it, in the New Testament which before all else calls for constant new understanding and exposition? Is it the "cradle" of the language, the thought-forms, etc., in which the message is enshrined? Or is it not before all else the message itself? Ought our primary concern in understanding and expounding the New Testament to be how we can convey it to our children, or to myself as a modern man, or to my contemporaries? Or should that be our exclusive concern? Does not what the New Testament says in its particular historical form, or rather, does not he who meets me as I read it, stand out in almost every verse, in gigantic proportions? Does not it—or he—continually cry out for a new enquiry about himself? And is it not true that in our understanding and expounding of these

writings, our first endeavour must be to stop and listen to what the New Testament actually says? Must we not try to come to grips with him who confronts us there, and try to do it just a little better than we have before? Then, indeed, as we seek to grasp the message of the New Testament, we must grapple with the task of translation and somewhere confront contemporary man. The task of translation is a secondary concern, and it can only be done well if both reader and exegete take in hand the primary task first. No doubt I am not understanding Bultmann correctly here. Yet I am quite sure he would agree with me about what I have called the primary task. But there he is, still hammering away with unparalleled persistence, at the various historical forms in which the gospel is enshrined. Apparently he already knows *what* is in the New Testament. Apparently that is why he wants himself and he wants us to concentrate entirely on translating it from one language and one set of terms into others. For we already know what it is we are trying to translate. He seems to imagine that this secondary problem (which is certainly important) can be tackled and solved as it were *in vacuo*. Here Bultmann and his followers seem to agree with several of his critics, like Walter Künneth, to mention only one. They are strangely at ease just where in my opinion we ought, all of us, to be uneasy. For as far as the message itself is concerned we are in fact anything but *beati possidentes*. Some of my readers, no doubt, are itching to interrupt me here and show me just how my incomprehension might give way to understanding. To such let me say at once that I shall not be satisfied if they simply reassure that Bultmann and I are really after the same thing.

II

Permit me now to devote a little space to the historical background of Bultmann's position. No doubt we are right in finding its centre in the kerygma, which is founded and motivated by the act and deed of God. Here Bultmann's theology would seem to combine two important tendencies in the developments of recent decades. According to the Tübingen Memorandum, one of these

tendencies is the return to the Reformation and its theology, the other the liberalism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. There are vestiges of the latter even in Bultmann.

For the moment I will not contest what the Tübingen scholars say about Bultmann's liberalism. Historically, of course, it came first. Perhaps, however, since we are concerned with the idea of kerygma, it would be more illuminating and indeed more concrete if for liberalism we substituted form-criticism. Form-criticism began about thirty years ago to replace the history of religions school, which, with all that went before it, was then supreme in the field of New Testament studies. Form-criticism made use of principles in which some of us at any rate thought we could detect something more than a mere continuation of liberal exegesis. It looked like the beginning of a new appreciation for the objective character of the New Testament documents.

In that extraordinary springtime in the early nineteen twenties, it was not Bultmann's allegiance to Wrede, Bousset, Jülicher or Harnack, still less to their liberal predecessors, nor was it, as the Tübingen theologians assert, his training as a historian or philologist, but rather his status as one of the pioneers of form-criticism, that led him for the time being to throw in his lot with us—although most of us came from quite different intellectual and spiritual backgrounds—in the venture called *Zwischen den Zeiten*. All of us found in the kerygma (which, as Bultmann has himself so frequently emphasized since, is directed against the history of religions school) a common terminology for our enterprise. We thought we understood him and we believed he understood us. We were all trying to hear and reproduce better the real message of the New Testament. Even at that early date Bultmann was already talking about understanding. Did that mean he was already stressing the need to translate the message from one language into another? None of us, with the possible exception of Gogarten, were interested in that during those early days. If Bultmann was stressing it then, we never noticed it. It did not seem necessary to follow from the lead we had been given by the form critics—and it was as a form critic that we understood Bultmann. After all, there were other form critics, like Martin

Dibelius and Karl Ludwig Schmidt, who showed nothing of that particular "understanding". I still cannot see how it was a form critic that Bultmann came to set such store by translation as his primary concern, as he has done since. As for the other side of Bultmann's heritage, the return to the Reformation and its theology, I find this even more difficult. I suppose what the Tübingen scholars are referring to is the return to Luther and his doctrine of justification, etc. They mentioned not only Karl Holl (was he of particular importance to Bultmann?) but my own name too. I may therefore remark in passing that this new interest in the Reformation was not the original source, but a further consequence of my work. At that time I was only remotely interested in Luther himself. But it may have been quite different with Bultmann, and we should not forget how close he stood to Gogarten in this connection. Perhaps we should call him in all essentials a Lutheran, though, of course, a Lutheran *sui generis*, and on a higher plane! But that is a matter to which I shall return. As a form critic he was able, and as a thinker stimulated by the Reformation and particularly by Luther (though no doubt indirectly, rather than directly) he was bound, to give his support to the "theology of the Word" as it was called in those days, and to put the kerygma at the centre of his theology.

I can follow him thus far. But in the light of *this* heritage I find it even more difficult to see how he came to give "understanding" and "expounding" the predominant sense of "translating". On p. 5 of the Tübingen Memorandum we find an indication of the context in which Bultmann is to be viewed:

For more than two centuries theology has been preoccupied with the Enlightenment, the new understanding of man and the world based on reason and revelation which had penetrated the whole of Western civilization.

This was in fact the situation. The great and, in fact, the sole theme of theology, the message of the Bible, was relegated to the background or completely neglected during those centuries. Theology was engaged in a discussion with a court of appeal which was quite foreign to that message. Its authority rested in the fact that

it seemed to be establishing or to have established itself in the eyes of that court. But was this not obviously a departure from the Reformation and its theology? The Reformation never discussed matters with that kind of authority. In what way then is Bultmann returning to the Reformation, if his work represents part of the well-known reaction against its theology? Or, to put it another way, if Bultmann believes he is rooted in the Reformation and especially in Luther, how can he regard the problem of translation as the great theme? For that was the theme of the anti-Reformation, or at least the un-Reformation, during those two hundred years. I would like to know where Bultmann stands, but this problem baffles me, I am afraid.

III

Let me now try to describe what seems to me to be the outcome of Bultmann's understanding of the New Testament thus far. There is no doubt that he wishes to pass on the New Testament kerygma as he has heard it. What does that kerygma contain?

Basically, it is concerned with two factors which govern all human existence. First, it exposes the "old" determination of that existence. Secondly, it exhibits a new determination, and summons man to accept it. These two factors, and the transition from the one determination to the other which takes place when faith occurs, must be united by yet another factor. This is the saving act of God as experienced and known to faith and completed in the transition just mentioned. This succession, not in time but in fact, is a constant theme of Bultmann's, and is integral to our understanding of him. First, as hearers of the message, we experience ourselves as we were and are, and as we ought to be and shall be. Next, through faith in the message, we experience ourselves in transition from the one state to the other. Finally, we experience ourselves in the process of this transition as objects of God's saving act, or concretely in our being in Christ.

Here, however, I am already at a standstill. I cannot say I recognize in this translation the basic pattern of the New Testament message. It reminds one, of course, of the young Melanch-

thon's formula in 1521 (was it the same as the young Luther's?): *Hoc est Christum cognoscere, beneficia eius cognoscere*. Many people have been fond of quoting that slogan, first Spalding, then Bretschneider, then Ritschl and all his followers, and now Bultmann. All right, we're listening! There is nothing to be said against it. It is sometimes a very useful slogan, for instance against abstract objectivism. But we must not fall into the opposite danger of abstract subjectivism by elevating it into a kind of systematic principle. I suspect this is just what Bultmann has done and, I must say, it surprises me. For I cannot see how this sequence of events corresponds to the message of the New Testament. It may be we often think nowadays in that sequence. But does the New Testament begin with man's subjective experiences, with man as the recipient of its message? Are the New Testament's affirmations about God's saving act and about man's being in Christ primarily statements about man's subjective experience? Is not this reversing the New Testament? If so, the consequences will be far reaching. It may sometimes be justified to turn things the other way round, but only on occasion, and never as a fundamental principle of hermeneutics. The contours of New Testament thought are often different from and even the reverse of what modern man is used to. That is a hard fact, but if we are to translate the New Testament we ought not to conceal it from him.

But first let us hear what Bultmann has to say about these two determining factors of human existence. First, how does the New Testament address man? The answer is, as a sinner, as one who belongs to this world, who lives in the flesh. Man lives from his immediate environment, from the sphere of visible, tangible, measurable reality. He puts all of this in God's place, God, who is the sum of invisible, intangible, immeasurable reality, beyond man's control. By thus asserting his own autonomy, man incurs the judgement which falls upon this world. He is condemned to inauthentic existence and becomes a prey to fear and anxiety, at loggerheads with his fellows and subject to death (i.e. the past). He knows already, if only in outline—and existentialism can fill in the blanks—that there is such a thing as inauthentic, fallen

being. The New Testament, however, focuses, corrects and radicalizes this knowledge of man before faith. It tells him not only that he is inauthentic and fallen, but that he is powerless to extricate himself from his plight. Every attempt to lift himself by his own strength merely involves him more deeply in his inauthentic state.

There is certainly much we can recognize here. There is something here of the Reformation doctrine of sin, something of Paul and John, something of the Synoptics. But do these contrasts between visible and invisible, tangible and intangible reality play the part Bultmann assigns to them in the message of the Bible? Does the Bible identify God with invisible, intangible reality? Does disobedience to God, i.e. sin, consist in preferring the sphere opposed to him? Surely, from the standpoint of the Biblical God, both spheres are very much in this world and, therefore, very much in the flesh? When the gospel speaks of pride, faintheartedness, falsehood, is that no more than a radicalizing of what man before faith, oscillating as he does between the two spheres, is able to know about himself and is capable of experiencing? Or are the statements of God's Word to man about himself as the "old man", about his sin, about his *servum arbitrium*, about the judgement he stands in something entirely new compared with man's self-accusations and laments?

Of course, the sequence Bultmann has chosen cannot tell us that. I can quite understand it. But I do not understand why Bultmann should have chosen that sequence and thus made it impossible for himself to show that sin is a wrong human decision, so that he is driven into a description of its consequences which are remarkably reminiscent of Platonism. I grant my difficulty with Bultmann here is the same as I feel with traditional orthodoxy as a whole. For in describing sin abstractly, apart from what God has done to remove it, he is, by and large, following the line of orthodoxy. He also follows it in using terms derived solely from natural law. And I quite see it would be asking too much of him to break with orthodoxy over this rather than anything else.

And what is it that the New Testament challenges man to accept? Faith, confidence in the unseen, unknown intangible

reality. The surrender of all worldly or personal security. A life of having as if we had not (I Cor. 7. 29f.). To turn aside from our present to God's future, from fear and anxiety to freedom, to freedom for others, to love of God and our neighbour. In a word, he is called to accept the eschatological existence of the new creature, the authentic and truly natural form of human existence. Of course, man has always been aware of this, though only in a provisional and sketchy fashion. All the message does is to bring it to light and promise it to man as his proper destiny, and hold it before him as the end of his existence.

No one would want to deny that much of this is well said and accurate enough. In Calvin's language, we can catch the echoes of the *vita christiana* in the *vivificatio* which follows the *mortificatio* in the *meditatio vitae futurae*. And there are echoes of Paul too. Of course, the same problems that vexed us before are still here, and indeed more acutely. And there is something oppressively formal, legalistic and cold in this part of his translation. Can we really subsume under the rubric of "detachment from the world" all that the New Testament has to say about life in faith as the life of the new man? Can we for the purposes of translation ignore the fact that life in faith, eschatological existence, as presented in the New Testament, is a life of gratitude and response to the grace of God? There is something seriously lacking here. Can we ignore the fact that the New Testament always connects this new existence with a Lord who stands over against us, who is there before we are, warning and comforting us? I can understand why Bultmann wants to leave all this out. He obviously wants to describe the *beneficia Christi*, Christian existence considered in itself. Only then will he tell us how it has come into being. Only then will he tell us that it is founded in Christ, in God's saving act.

But that is just the point. How can we expound the New Testament if we relegate God's saving act which is the foundation of Christian existence to a secondary position? How can we do it if we understand God's saving act only as a reflection in the mirror of Christian existence? I cannot see why such a translation is necessary, or where it gets us. It seems to be purchased at too

great a price, by narrowing down to the New Testament message and failing to do it justice. I know I should understand why he attaches so much value to his chosen sequence, but I am afraid I cannot.

This is, in fact, the crucial point about Bultmann's translation of the New Testament, which shows us more than anything else how he understands and expounds it. The kerygma is historical in the rarefied sense in which Bultmann uses that word, for it demands and evokes hearing and obedience. It proclaims the history of man's transition from the old life to the new, from himself to himself, from inauthentic to authentic existence, from his past to his future. It proclaims the Christ event, the event in which that transition occurs. The Christ event? The Christ event? Where does Bultmann think we should place the emphasis? Or is it wrong to ask that question at all? Yet when can one hardly refrain from asking it when the New Testament attaches such importance to it.

Bultmann tells us that the transition is the Christ event. Clearly that is where he would put the emphasis, not perhaps absolutely or exclusively, but certainly to a considerable extent. Nor does he do so merely because of the historical accident that the kerygma which proclaims that transition comes from the New Testament, which unmistakably connects that transition with the name of Jesus of Nazareth and his appearing, with his life and death as testified by the first bearers of the kerygma. This point is important to Bultmann because that transition claims to be history, with a beginning and ending in time, a history distinguished from other histories by a particular historical name, distinguished from them as something that happened once and for all. The New Testament kerygma makes this claim because it proclaims Jesus Christ and the saving act of God which he announced, the act of God which originated in this man and was done for us to whom the proclamation is addressed. Are there any other reasons why Bultmann insists that this transition is the Christ event, any other reason than that it has about it certain indispensable marks of genuine historicity? I look about me, but for the moment I see no other reason.

Should we then stress that it is the Christ *event*? While it began in the life and death of the man Jesus and derives its name and title from him, is it actually located not in him, but only in the kerygma about him and in those who accept this kerygma and obey it through faith? Or is the kerygma linked rather with history? Is that what gives it such historicity as it possesses? Or is the content of the kerygma not the man Jesus, but the transition, and the obedience of faith which that transition demands?

Kerygma of the Christ event? That I could understand. But it is hardly what Bultmann means. Christ event in and through the kerygma? That is what he seems to mean. And I cannot understand that as a reproduction or translation of the New Testament kerygma. That *Christ* is the kerygma is what the New Testament appears to say, not that Christ is the *kerygma*. Bultmann seems to be trying to reverse the New Testament. Or perhaps I have overlooked something, or suppressed or distorted something, and maybe that is why I feel so much at a loss in trying to understand this part of his argument. Yet perhaps there may be something in my way of putting it after all.

In traditional terms we might say that Bultmann is obviously insisting on the unity of Christology and soteriology, and the kerygma as the proclamation of this unity. Thus far I have no difficulty in following him. But as I see it, that unity is an articulated one in which Christology is prior to soteriology without being separated from it, and in which soteriology, while it is part and parcel of Christology, is nevertheless secondary to it and derivative from it.

The kerygma contains one story, the *Christ event* and the Christ *event*. Its locus, the locus of the saving transition from the old life to the new, is the life and death of the man Jesus of Nazareth. It is in him that we find the content, the substance, the backbone, the *locus communis*, in a word, the principle of the Christian message. Is this a sound reproduction of the New Testament message? Is it a good translation when Jesus Christ is thus relegated to the margin? Is it right to leave the cause of the transition so obscure and mysterious as Bultmann does? Can a fair and square translation of the New Testament dethrone Christology

and merge it into soteriology? When this happens, Christology ends up by being the name and title of soteriology, its only importance being to ensure the "historical" character of the soteriology.

There is something else that puzzles me, something which seems to be connected with what we have just said. The whole doctrine of the Christ event must surely be intended to show how the transition, which is beyond man's capacity, has become a possibility and a reality. That being so, what is the position if this doctrine is not so much a doctrine of Christ but a doctrine of the happening of the transition, which only had its beginning in Christ, which only derives its name and title from him? What if Christology has no function of its own, but is absorbed into soteriology? What I mean is, supposing Jesus Christ becomes an obscure, marginal figure, without any independent significance of his own, what then? What if he becomes "significant" only as he enters into the kerygma and finds obedience among its hearers? What if the point of kerygma is the summons of faith it addresses to its hearers and the demand that summons imposes upon them?

Is the kerygma, thus conceived, a *gospel*—a kerygma in which nothing is said of that in which or of him in whom its recipients are to believe? What is it but a new *law*? I must press these questions because this is where I particularly fail to understand Bultmann. How far does this kerygma 'really speak, as the kerygma is intended to speak, of an act of God? How far does it speak rather of an act of man (strictly speaking), of the transition which man achieves by his own obedience—though he is supposed not to be capable of it? What meaning must we attach to the statement that the Christ event took place "for us", *pro nobis*? What I want to know is, whether Bultmann means any more by this than that the content of the kerygma concerns us, that it is significant for us, that we should accept it as the law of our decision and realize it in our act of faith, in the *imitatio Christi*? Is that all it is? That is what I am asking.

Let us try and follow Bultmann in detail at this crucial point. There are, he maintains, two elements in the Christ event, which have to be differentiated, yet held together. One is the

cross, the historical event of Jesus' crucifixion, so described because of the beginning, name and title of the event. But, he hastens to add, the cross must be understood in its significance "for us". It is the word of the cross, in which man's transition from inauthentic to authentic existence takes place. For the death of Jesus Christ means that it sets man on the way to a radical, mortal judgement on his inauthentic being. It calls him to tread this way as the path to grace and salvation. We may also add that the kerygma has this import because the death of Jesus Christ, understood not only as a historical event but as the act of God, has been taken up into the kerygma so as to participate in its meaning. As the recipient of the kerygma responds with the obedience of faith it demands, the death of Jesus Christ acquires particular significance for him. This significance becomes concrete as the believer appropriates the cross of Christ and undergoes crucifixion with Jesus Christ. Thus he sets out on the road that leads to mortal judgement, to grace and life. This event is an act of God, *the* act of God. For the origin and purpose of both—the crucifixion of Jesus Christ as a historical event and man's faith in its significance—occur in the sphere of the invisible and intangible and are, therefore, identical with God. This event is God's act of salvation because it puts man on the road and opens the gateway to grace and life, i.e. to salvation. It is the eschatological event of redemption which takes place in man's eschatological existence and shapes and determines that existence.

I understand, but once again there is only one thing I understand. I can see that the New Testament message presents the cross of Jesus Christ not only as a historical event but also as an event which in its uniqueness and concreteness in time is significant in every age. Bultmann likes to speak of its "cosmic" significance, and rightly so. But I do not see why it only acquires this significance by being taken up into the kerygma and evoking the obedience of faith. On the contrary, it seems to me that the New Testament describes the cross of Christ as an event with an inherent significance of its own. It is just because it has this inherent significance that it can become significant in the kerygma and for the faith of its recipients. I am disturbed by the way Bult-

mann reverses the sequence of events. I can see further that the New Testament message speaks of the passion and death of Jesus as being completed in the life of the believers, e.g. in the injunction to take up the cross and follow him, or in Bultmann's favourite text, Col. 1. 24. But I do not see that faith, in the New Testament sense, faith in which the believer comes to realize the significance of the cross of Christ for himself, is exhausted in this completion. Rather, it seems to me, the New Testament regards this completion as the result of faith. For the New Testament asserts that in faith the believer attaches himself to something which is wholly and entirely outside himself, something without him and in spite of him, something which took place for him on God's initiative in the death of Jesus Christ. I am also disturbed by the way in which Bultmann's doctrine of the cross looks suspiciously like Catholic passion mysticism. Finally, I can see, of course, that the New Testament proclaims the death of Jesus Christ in such a way as to include faith in its significance as God's incomprehensible—and we might even say paradoxical—act of salvation. But I fail to see how Bultmann can suppress the fact that the New Testament describes the death of Jesus Christ as something which, for all its incomprehensibility, is still comprehensible, and which for all its hazardous character is meaningful. I think I can see light falling from both sides here: it was not just anybody who was crucified, it was God the Lord who humbled himself and became a servant and man; he was the servant exalted by God to be the Lord, vindicated as the witness and prophet of the kingdom of God.

So I think I can see in the New Testament message of Christ crucified the subject who has already suffered the judgement of death which brings salvation to all men, who has already effected their transition from the old existence to the new, their translation into eschatological existence; who has not only inaugurated, but completed this process. Although much of this remains obscure and is not susceptible to proof, I can, I think, see certain contours and colours. I can see a person and his work. I can, I think hear a word which is self-explanatory, where all Bultmann can see is darkness and silence, where all he can see is that the

cross is God's saving act. Bultmann's doctrine of the cross comes perilously near the devil's temptation of Jesus to throw himself down from the pinnacle of the temple to prove his divine Sonship and demonstrate the supreme paradox of his faith, and it disturbs me. Bultmann once wrote: "The saving efficacy of the cross is not derived from the fact that it is the cross of Christ: it is the cross of Christ because it has this saving efficacy."¹ I should like to hear an authentic interpretation of this notorious passage from Bultmann himself. I should find it difficult to expound it in any sense consistent with the New Testament message. It may well be that my questions about Bultmann's doctrine of the cross (and indeed about his doctrine of the Christ event as a whole) are due to my failure to understand this passage.

According to Bultmann, the second element in the kerygma and, therefore, in the Christ event, is the resurrection. But by this he means the revelation of the saving significance of the cross. It is called the resurrection because of its beginning and its name. What took place in this resurrection? Bultmann says it was the emergence of the faith which realizes, understands and affirms the significance of Jesus Christ "for us"—the beginning of the "Easter faith" which consists in the believer's participation in the cross of Christ in a struggling freedom from sin, anxiety and human discord. Further, it is this decision, the decision of Easter faith, which produces the kerygma itself, with the cross of Christ as God's saving act forming its central affirmation. It is the Easter faith also which is the origin of the Church and the sacraments(!).

It is obvious that for Bultmann the crucifixion, while a unique event in the past, occurs and is intended to occur with the same uniqueness in every way now. The whole process is part of what he calls the eschatological event of redemption. The process as such depends on the resurrection of Jesus into the Easter faith and the kerygma. Bultmann's contention is that our understanding of the Christ event as the act of God must include this further aspect—dare we call it the noetic aspect? Yet apparently even here, nothing can be said about its being an act of God on its own right quite apart from its happening in the kerygma and in faith.

¹ *Kerygma and Myth*, Vol. I, p. 41.

Nothing can be said about it as the foundation and content both of faith and of the kerygma. And, therefore, nothing can be said about the risen Christ as such. He is not allowed any life of his own after he rose from the dead. Nothing can be said about Jesus' own interpretation of his earthly life and death, nothing about his intercourse with his disciples before they came to believe in him or were charged with the kerygma and gathered to form the Church.

Bultmann does, indeed, insist that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the act of God. But apparently this does not mean that men beheld the glory of God in the Word made flesh and put to death in the flesh, or that they beheld him raised from the dead in space and time as the outcome of his previous earthly life. They apparently beheld his glory only in the kerygma, only when he was preached and believed in. It was not Jesus himself who taught them to see the meaning of his crucifixion, nor had the crucifixion any intrinsic significance of its own arising from the person and work of him who was crucified. That "on the third day he rose again" does not appear to be the basic fact of Christianity, but only an explanation of the kerygma and of faith, and one which could be dispensed with if necessary. The real life of Jesus Christ is confined to the kerygma and to faith. This is what I cannot understand, and I must confess it astonishes me. I can only hear distant echoes of the New Testament. I can find no justification for such a translation of its message. Or am I wrong? Does everything indeed depend on the priority of the personal resurrection of Jesus Christ over every other resurrection there may be in the kerygma, in faith, in the Church or in the sacraments? Can we give the same priority to our own resurrection in him? Or is it all due to my own failure to understand Bultmann? He seems to think that in the kerygma Jesus Christ is on his way to rising in us. And that is just why I cannot understand him.

Here then it would seem is the act of God which is presupposed in the dialectic of human existence, or rather in man's transition from the old existence to the new. In its ontic aspect it is crucifixion; noetically it is the Easter event. This is the Christology contained in Bultmann's soteriology and deducible from it. True,

he emphasizes that this act is history, and indeed the history of Christ, and this is something which neither his critics nor his disciples should overlook. Undoubtedly, his intention is to give adequate expression not only to Pauline doctrine, but to the New Testament as a whole. Yet people like Jaspers and that Jasperian theologian, Fritz Buri, think that for this very reason he is just as bad as the rest of us.

This being Bultmann's intention, we can hardly write him off as a liberal, whether of the older or the newer kind. If only he carried out his intention so clearly that it was beyond all doubt! If only he spoke of the cross and resurrection of Jesus in terms compatible with his emphasis on their inter-relation and on the Christ event as a whole! Bultmann has been widely criticized for not doing so, and, it would seem, with a good deal of justice. I am sorry to have to say this.

IV

I thought it best to concentrate to begin with on the positive aspect of Bultmann's work, his presentation of the New Testament message. I have not yet mentioned the word by which his work has become so widely known and discussed, not only among German theologians, but all over the world. I refer, of course, to the demythologizing of the New Testament. This is, of course, no nickname given to it by a third party. It was invented by Bultmann himself; and not only is it a barbarism, but it is unnecessarily provoking. And it was Bultmann who bandied the term about so much, e.g. in his primary essay, "The New Testament and Mythology",¹ which is of crucial importance for the whole subject. If the wicked (Christian) world fails to understand him, much of the blame is due to his invention of this word, so uninspiring and negative. But we must not be put off by the word itself, for that would not do him justice. It is not itself the real clue, or at any rate not the only clue to his position. I, for one, would regard the demythologizing of the New Testament of secondary importance compared with the positive results of his

¹ *Kerygma and Myth*, Vol. I, pp. 1-44.

exegesis, and the positive principles by which he reaches them. It is, in fact, the positive side which disturbs me even more if anything, than the negative side, or demythologizing proper. But since Bultmann himself has introduced the term and evidently sets such store by it, I shall have to give it due attention and follow him along this path too.

Once again I shall begin with his positive account of the New Testament message, at first in purely general terms, and simply point out Bultmann's omission of certain elements which are characteristic of it in its original form. He has no use for those elements at all, and he tells us so quite plainly. He suggests—and in his original essay with almost frantic insistence—that the primary task of exegesis and translation as he sees it is to circumvent these elements and eliminate them. Let me hasten, however, to correct this impression. He expressly contrasts himself with the older liberals on this point. His aim is not, except in a few border-line cases, to suppress or circumvent these elements. Rather, they must be translated out of the language, imagery and terminology of the New Testament into our own, into those of contemporary man. For, says Bultmann, it is just these elements which require translation. We can hardly complain that he actually omits them except in a few marginal instances. They are certainly there, though in a new guise. What has been allowed to disappear, what is missing, he claims, is the forms in which the New Testament expresses those elements, not their essential meaning. This, then, is the crucial question about Bultmann's work, taken as a whole. Is the essential meaning of these elements and the function they fulfil still recognizable in spite of the different form in which they are expressed? And if so, to what extent? Or, to put it in Bultmann's own terms, does the removal of the New Testament forms of expression enable us to recognize more clearly the intention of the elements in question? More than this, is it the case that their intention can only be recognized when they have been transformed and the New Testament forms of expression replaced by another? Can I, therefore, claim that the questions I raised under section III were posed correctly, at least in a formal sense, from Bultmann's

point of view? In that section I was in fact concerned with the problem of recognizing in Bultmann's presentation the New Testament message itself. Since this presentation was at least partly—and Bultmann sometimes gives the impression that it is absolutely—determined by his transformation of them, it is reasonable to suppose that it is just the transformation of them which makes it difficult, if not impossible for me at least to recognize the original message. That is what I was trying to explain there.

What kind of elements does Bultmann find room for in his restatement? He divides them into two groups, though how he does so I find difficult to understand. First, we have those elements in the language of the New Testament which directly or indirectly reflect the distinctive world view of late Judaism and Hellenistic gnosticism. There is the three-storied universe, the intervention of supernatural powers, and their influence in human existence. There is Satan and the demons, sin and death on the one hand, and God, angels and miracles on the other. There is imminent end of all things in a cosmic catastrophe, the resurrection of the dead, and divine sentence of salvation or damnation directly pronounced upon them. Secondly, there is everything that corresponds to that world view in the New Testament portrayal of salvation. This includes the idea that the end is ushered in with the mission of the pre-existent Son of God, his birth of a virgin, his bodily resurrection from the dead as the first stage in the dethronement of Satan, sin, death, and the demons; his exaltation as king and Lord and his reign in heaven; his visible return to consummate his saving work—an event which Paul himself expected to experience; the Church, baptism and the Lord's Supper as means of uniting believers to their Lord, the indwelling spirit as the pledge of their final status as sons of God.

Does this mean that a viable translation of the New Testament depends on the proper treatment of these respective elements? That in some cases they should be eliminated, and in others transformed? Here I must pause for a moment to ask Bultmann why he has raised these elements to central importance in his

exegesis. As we can see from what he has written elsewhere, and particularly in what his disciples have written, there is a tendency to describe these elements a little crudely, a little ironically, even to caricature them. Does he do it in the interest of the spirit, content and scope of what the New Testament says? If so, he should pay more attention to the context in which these elements occur, and the value attached to them in their context. That would give him elbow room to consider them, more patience and inclination for doing so. He would look at them with less irritation (pardon me for saying so), less detachment, less temptation to lump them all together as a series of curiosities. He would be less inclined to exalt them into a problem for their own sake, still less to make them the main problem of his exegesis.

Why this procedure? Where does he find his common denominator? Is it the core of the New Testament message as he conceives it? Or is it some kind of historical analysis which makes him feel free, or rather compelled to turn such a detached interest to the structural idiosyncrasies of the New Testament statements? For it is clearly historical analysis which provides him with the clue to the common features in these various elements. What is not clear to me is what kind of transformation this is if Bultmann, as he seems to have done, had taken just one of the possible results of historical analysis and elevated it into the problem of all problems for New Testament exegesis, and made it into the sole criterion for its solution. Hence, even if we were merely concerned with Bultmann's *modus operandi*, I feel I can hardly go along with him thus far with a good conscience.

Assuming that he is right first in lumping all these elements together and then treating them separately, what does he actually do to them? Let me repeat that he does not deny, eliminate or expunge them from the kerygma, except those elements which are untranslatable, such as the three-storied universe, Satan and the demons, the angels, the virgin birth, the empty tomb and the ascension. He *interprets* them. Let us examine the way he presents them. Some of the important elements are certainly there. There is sin, death; God, his revelation in Christ and in Christ alone;

the Holy Spirit, the divine sonship of the believers, the Church and even the sacraments and the eschatological hope, the last being the dominant principle. All these are there, each in its proper place and each duly translated and "interpreted". He does it with an earnestness which puts many a more orthodox expositor to shame. No wonder many liberals think Bultmann is too orthodox to be one of themselves. He has on more than one occasion disowned the name of liberal; he is not eliminating these indigestible elements but interpreting them! This may not be quite fair to some of the earlier liberals like Biedermann. And did not Schleiermacher, who was also suspected of being too orthodox, aim chiefly to interpret and to confine himself to that? But who reads Schleiermacher nowadays, let alone Biedermann? It is good to remind ourselves that there is nothing new under the sun—only the names have changed, that's all. But enough of that!

V

But why do these particular elements in the New Testament need interpretation? That is the first and foremost question here. And supposing they do, how far should we go? Bultmann's answer is that they need it—and here is his cardinal principle of criticism—because they are couched in the thought and language of the world of those days. They are mythological expressions of the truths they seek to convey. Myth and mythological language, according to Bultmann, are to be found wherever the divine is described in terms of this world, the other side in terms of this side, the non-objective as objective. In this form myth speaks of the power or powers which man allegedly experiences as the ground and limit of his world and of his own activity and sufferings. In this form myth is an expression of man's self-understanding. Thus the New Testament message, Bultmann thinks, in the historical forms in which it is enshrined in the texts, is a mythological expression of a distinctive human self-understanding. That is why the New Testament demands interpretation and its records require translation. This implies, on the negative side, that they must be demythologized, i.e. removed from their present form and

placed in another. Such a procedure is possible since the mythological form was at best only a temporary necessity. There is nothing specifically Christian about it, and it can easily be detached from the message itself, which is the specifically Christian self-understanding. This operation is necessary since the mythological form obscures the real meaning of the New Testament message. Why? Because the mythological view of the world and of man is as obsolete as the age which produced it. Another view of the world and man, the modern one, is irresistibly forcing itself upon us, and we cannot avoid presupposing it in our thinking. It would be senseless and impossible for the Christian preacher to expect modern man to swallow the ancient world view, or to accept those features in the New Testament's presentation of the redemptive event which conform to that world view and which he can only regard as obsolete. Such a *sacrificium intellectus* would be as impossible as it would be downright dishonest. It would reduce faith to a human achievement, which, as Wilhelm Herrmann pointed out, would be immoral. It would in no way confront man with the real stumbling-block, or challenge him to a genuine decision between faith and belief. We must, therefore, stop expecting it of him. The task of exegesis, shared as it is by the dogmatic theologian and the preacher, is thus in the first place a negative one. It is to show from the texts themselves that the New Testament message is couched in imagery derived from late Judaism and Gnosticism. This imagery must then be removed on the ground that it is irrelevant for the understanding of the message, so as to make room for an exposition of the message itself. The demythologizing of the texts is the *sine qua non* for their understanding. This process, thinks Bultmann, is all the more justified since there are in the New Testament not only obvious contradictions between the various images, but also a process of interpretation which itself tends towards demythologizing. We can see that as we compare Paul, and especially John, with the Synoptic gospels. Bultmann claims that this is just what he has provided by his presentation in its positive aspect: he has met the need which the New Testament itself requires.

As I listen I am amazed; I should like to follow but I cannot. Is it possible to understand any text, be it ancient or modern, if we approach it with preconceived notions about the extent and the limit to which it can be understood? Is it not preferable to come to it with an open mind, and patiently follow what it has to say? Can we understand it if we think we have some criterion to enable us to know in advance what parts of the text are intelligible, and thus differentiate the outward imagery from the actual substance? Are we to suppose that the text can only be made intelligible and gain a hearing if it is first translated? Surely, if we want to understand any given text, the provisional clue to its understanding must be sought from the text itself, and moreover from its spirit, content and aim. Surely we should be condemning our text to silence in advance if we approached it with such a criterion, alien alike to its spirit, content and aim. How can we decide even before we have read the text what it actually says, and what is only temporary imagery? And what happens if we use this alien criterion as an infallible instrument rather than as a provisional clue? Is not Bultmann's very concept of myth, the infallible criterion which dominates his hermeneutics, quite alien to the New Testament? Whether or not it is the contemporary fashion, as Bultmann claims it is, the question is how can it be used to decide what belongs to the substance of the New Testament and what is merely outward imagery?

Bultmann says the exegete must be honest and sincere. To whom does he owe this obligation primarily? To what is he responsible, the presuppositions of his own thought and of the contemporary world, and to a principle of understanding determined by that thought, or to the actual text he is trying to understand, and to the criterion to be derived from its spirit, content and aim? I do not mean to suggest that this canon should be applied rigidly; it is only a flexible rule for further research.

From another point of view it may be asked whether it is right to stigmatize everything mythological as though it were *ipso facto* absolutely useless for modern man. Why should not the divine be described in terms of human life, the other-worldly in terms of this world, the non-objective as objective? And is not this too

formal a definition of myth to cover all the different kinds we know in history, the Indian, Babylonian, Egyptian and Teutonic mythologies? Or the myths of the modern world, the myth of the twentieth century, the Marxist myth, the myth of the Christian west, etc.? Has myth always been the representation of some general relationship and correspondence within the realm of nature or history, decked out as a superhuman tale of the gods? The controversy over the meaning of myth is not without its importance. For if Bultmann used a definition which covered the content rather than the form, he could still find plenty of mythological imagery and terminology incidentally accepted and used in the New Testament. As for the actual content of the New Testament message, however, he could hardly describe it as mythological in form, proceed to dismantle it from top to bottom and replace it by some other form, supposedly more intelligible and relevant to modern man. However much the New Testament writers borrowed their imagery and language from the surrounding world, it could hardly have occurred to them to produce their message as the proclamation of general cosmic truths disguised as a tale about the gods and their doings. After all, that was just the kind of thing they were attacking. Perhaps demythologizing the New Testament would have made more sense if Bultmann had not chosen this curiously formal definition of myth and made it the criterion with which to distinguish between the form and substance of the New Testament. I wonder what voice from heaven it was that led him to choose this crude definition of myth to describe the dubious elements of the New Testament. He would have done better to reserve his fire for the supernaturalism of the Bible, as it used to be called, if indeed he had to attack anything at all.

Since, however, he has chosen that definition all I can do is to put to him the real theological question on which everything devolves. Is the demythologized kerygma allowed to say anything about God's having condescended to become this-worldly, objective and—horror of horrors!—datable? Apparently it is not allowed to say that the New Testament God is the kind of God who is capable of such condescension. Nor can it admit that

it originated in the concrete fact that the disciples saw with their own eyes, heard with their ears, touched with their hands, in space and time, not only the dereliction of the Word made flesh hanging on the cross, but also the glory of the same Word made flesh risen from the dead. Nor apparently can it say that the disciples' faith was born, not by a kind of parthenogenesis, but through a revelation, the revelation of one who had been crucified on Golgotha, a revelation occurring not in some invisible, supra-historical, celestial sphere, but in their own visible, historical, earthly sphere, a revelation as human, worldly, this-worldly and objective as the cross itself? Apparently the demythologized kerygma must remain silent about what causes faith. It has a cause, it is not just a paradox, but it is not "susceptible of proof". Apparently the kerygma must suppress or even deny the fact that the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the total Christ event, is the event of our redemption, that it possessed an intrinsic significance of its own, and that only because it has that primary significance has it a derived significance here and now. Yet this event is the ground of our faith and of the kerygma, and faith and kerygma are only secondary to it and derivative from it. Apparently the kerygma must suppress or even deny the fact that the Christ event has founded a community which throughout its history has had a Lord distinct from itself, a Lord whom it follows in discipleship. All this would, it seems, have to go by the board if we demythologized the New Testament à la Bultmann. What is the purpose of the alleged mythological elements if not to demonstrate that we are not left alone in this human, worldly, this-worldly, objective existence of ours, that our faith does not depend on some unknown distant deity, some supra-cosmic transcendent, non-objective reality? On the contrary, are they not meant to show that he who was crucified and rose again at a particular time and place is our divine Lord and human brother whom we are privileged to know as one who is both near and far, as one who lives and reigns over us even before we come to believe in him and even in our unbelief, as the one in whom God *first* loved us. How else can all this be expressed except in the way Bultmann calls mythological? It is just this truth—or am I

mistaken?—that Bultmann has left out in his demythologizing. What service is it to modern man, ourselves included, to suppress the cardinal truth of the kerygma like this? I am most embarrassed: much as I am loath to charge Bultmann with heresy, I cannot deny that his demythologized New Testament looks suspiciously like docetism. Perhaps this has something to do with his inability to make anything of the Old Testament. It is too historical, too down to earth for him! Schleiermacher had just the same difficulty with it. And perhaps it also has something to do with his difficulties over the synoptic Jesus, with his ministry of word and deed and his course from Jordan to Gethsemane. I cannot as yet see how this all fits together, but I must confess that if interpreting the New Testament means demythologizing it, and if demythologizing means what Bultmann with his definition of myth means by it, it seems to have singularly little to do with the gospel of the New Testament.

VI

Now for our second question on the positive side of Bultmann's hermeneutics, a more interesting question than the first. Granted that these problematic elements in the New Testament do exist, how far are they capable of being interpreted? How can they be transformed and what will they look like when they have been? Bultmann's answer is that the only honest exegesis, dogmatics and preaching is the *existentialist* interpretation. By this he means one which exposes the specifically Christian self-understanding enshrined in the mythological form. Existentialist interpretation understands and explains the New Testament affirmations as existential statements.¹ Why this interpretation in particular? For two reasons says Bultmann, two reasons which come pretty much to the same thing. Both the New Testament message itself and the mythological imagery in which it is conveyed are attempts on man's part to understand himself. The message, let us

¹ Anyone who engages in a discussion with Bultmann or his pupils should beware of confusing "existentialist" and "existential". Failure to do so is the unforgivable sin—other misunderstandings may be forgiven, this one never!

recall, deals with the transition from fallenness to authenticity, from unbelief to faith, and man's self-understanding in that transition. But the same is true of myth, for myth deals with man's experience of the powers which determine the world he lives in, his own actions, and his consequent self-understanding.

I do not know if I am correct in combining these two things together. There is a structural affinity between the New Testament on the one hand and myth on the other. Both are attempts on man's part to give an account of his own existence. It is, therefore, only natural for Christians living in a mythical age to use the mythical imagery and terminology of their contemporaries. The conclusion is inescapable: both myth and the message itself cry out for anthropological, or more precisely existential interpretation. The imagery and terminology must be interpreted in an existentialist sense, i.e. as man's attempt to explain his own existence.

This has two great advantages. First, the real meaning and intention of the New Testament are at last brought to light. Secondly, this is done in such a way that modern man, whose thought is no longer mythological but anthropological, can understand it. Christian proclamation, whether in exegesis, dogmatics or preaching, then offers no inauthentic stumbling-block. There is no need for any *sacrificium intellectus*, no need to pretend to believe anything which we cannot honestly accept. We are at once confronted with a genuine choice between faith and unbelief.

All this is so illuminating and so dazzling that we can well appreciate its appeal to so many present-day theologians. It is almost like the light which, according to the "mythological" account in Acts, illuminated and temporarily blinded Saul on the road to Damascus.

What a coincidence of academic and practical interests! What an answer to the questions of young theological students thoroughly disillusioned by National Socialism, the débacle of 1945, the prisoner-of-war camps and other bitter experiences, disillusioned by all conventional language, particularly that of Christianity. These young people want something to believe and

to preach, but it must be honest, sincere and straightforward. Demythologizing makes theology so simple. It allows it to concentrate on essentials. It enables us to get rid of some of the awkward elements in the New Testament canon, e.g. in the Book of Acts. That was something that badly needed doing, and it opens up the way to a deeper appreciation of the other parts of the New Testament, especially the Pauline Epistles and the Johannine literature. It brings us much closer to Luther's original intentions. At last theologians can be true to their faith, and in a new and exciting way: yet they can still keep both feet firmly in the real world of to-day. What an exciting prospect!

Unless you can appreciate how attractive this all is, and feel it in your very bones, unless you can see how everything tips the scales in favour of Bultmann and his existentialism, you are not qualified to dispute with him. Rhetorical denunciations of his negative tendencies, his elimination of this or that article in the Bible or creed will get you nowhere. Bultmann's positive appeal is too strong for that. The sullen looks with which Bultmann and his entourage meet such denunciations, insisting like Shylock on their pound of flesh, are proof enough. In any case, they make me think.

Yet their sullen looks make me uncomfortable. For it is just the positive side of Bultmann's hermeneutics which to my mind rest upon a questionable assumption. Take a look at the history of theological development. Have such admirable solutions or coincidences ever been discovered or has there ever been a time when everything was so simple, and theologians were able to concentrate on their job, when everyone has been so sure of being on the winning side and so entitled to glower at others?

As far as I can see, this has really happened when their initial assumption has been that they have received a new revelation of the spirit, content and scope of the New Testament. But it has often happened when they have discovered some new *philosophical* key and put it to use. Then, and generally only then, have they come up with such theological illuminations.

It is no secret that something of this kind has happened in Bultmann's case. His particular philosophy is the existentialism of

Martin Heidegger in his earlier days. Whether he uses it as a handmaid or as a queen is a nice question, as it always is in such cases. Heidegger provides him with a certain prior understanding with which to approach the New Testament texts (and not them alone). Prior understanding—that is what he calls it. In the first place this denotes a particular interpretation of the general concept of understanding. All understanding is concerned, in one way or another, with man's understanding of himself, his self-understanding. Secondly, it is a particular way of understanding man's self-understanding, a self-understanding caught in the polarity between inauthenticity and authenticity, between a situation he can control and one he cannot, between past and future. Thus the primary concern of the New Testament is with anthropology, an anthropology structured in this particular way. This is the prior understanding required of the exegete, and with this he must approach the New Testament. It is obvious how this works out in Bultmann's understanding of man's old, sinful existence and his new eschatological existence in faith. It is equally obvious how it controls his doctrine of the Christ event. For the essence of that event, as we have seen, is the transition from one state of human existence to the other. It can take no form outside of this restricted anthropological sense. There is one thing, and only one thing which he does not get from Heidegger, and that is his description of the transition as an act of God. This is the point where he is speaking independently as a theologian. With this single exception, the whole of his positive presentation of the New Testament message is encased in the strait jacket of this prior understanding. Of course, this means that we can only discuss things with Bultmann if we share his prior understanding, i.e. Heidegger's existentialism, and are prepared to learn its unusual and somewhat difficult language. If we don't understand it we shall always be met with Bultmann's cool and distant reply. "I do not understand."

This is just what I do not understand. I do not see why I have to don this particular strait jacket in order to understand the New Testament. All honour to Heidegger, even to the younger Heidegger in his anthropological strait jacket! But

neither Heidegger to-day nor Bultmann thinks that the Heidegger of 1927 has *the* philosophy, or that it dropped from heaven, as people used to think Aristotelianism had, or as Hegel used to boast of his own system. There is, therefore, only one reason why Heidegger's philosophy should be canonized like this, and this is because it is the philosophy *par excellence* of our day and age. This is what Bultmann seems to mean. And who would deny that it is certainly a highly important expression of the spirit prevailing in the first half of our century? We all speak or think existentially to a greater or lesser degree nowadays. But this is not the only expression of the spirit of our age; there are others, and quite different ones at that. In his later writings Heidegger himself seems to have passed beyond the phase—the anthropological strait jacket, which has had such a strong influence on Bultmann. In the U.S.A. they have not for the most part got as far as existentialism, while in Russia they think they have outgrown it long ago—it is so thoroughly bourgeois! I wonder, seriously, whether there are so many "modern men" in the rest of the world, even among the educated classes, who feel that existentialism is just the very thing, particularly Heidegger's version of it. If so, is there any reason why theology should be particularly beholden to it? Does this philosophy rest on such broad and firm foundations, both materially and historically, that we are obliged to adopt it, if only because it is fashionable, for the sake of the modern man? Must we become existentialists on principle, and existentialists of this particular brand? Is it the indispensable prerequisite for the understanding of the New Testament, of all things? After all, it may always have to be modified in the light of the latest research. It is the force of this claim that I cannot understand.

The first reason for this is that I cannot even admit that myth can be interpreted entirely and exclusively, in a totalitarian fashion, so to speak, as the expression of particular self-understanding of man. No one would deny that it is in part such a self-understanding. But there have always been an immense variety of myths, not only in the past, but even in our own day, so that we can hardly believe that myth is only an expression of man's self-

understanding, and nothing more. Was not Christian Wolf of Halle nearer the mark long ago when he propounded for the benefit of all "lovers of the truth" what we might call the myth of the eighteenth century, the rational beliefs about God, the world and the soul of man, and all things in general? What kind of myth is it that recognizes the existence only of the human subject, and so requires an exclusively existentialist and anthropological interpretation?

But the theological question is even more serious. What will happen to the New Testament message if we clamp it thoroughly, exclusively and in a totalitarian fashion in this vice, asking only about man's self-understanding which it enshrines and with a certain preconceived understanding of it at that? After all, it is the message of Jesus Christ; it asserts an event between God and man, and it is just as certainly couched in the form of a *human* testimony. Are we not, therefore, bound to distort it if we confine it to an existentialist interpretation—especially since we have already demythologized it—and deprive it of its most important and obvious element? Is not this bound to happen if we allow this element to stand merely as a memorial to the name of Jesus Christ and of the act of God which took place in him? Whereas, of course, it is the *Christ* event which is determinative of all else, controlling and dominating it. Will we not distort and diminish the message if we remove the Christ event, interpret and transform it into something which is at best only a secondary element in the message, something which is true and important only in its relation to the Christ event? We can love Bultmann and give him full credit for breaking away from existentialism at this one place—much to the annoyance of Fritz Buri! Yet even Bultmann himself is not sure whether the retention of an act of God is compatible with demythologizing, and I do not think he has answered his question satisfactorily. In spite of this notable inconsistency, he has certainly made it difficult, if not impossible, for us to recognize the New Testament message in this new existentialist garb. We can recognize it in the hymns and meditations of Gerhard Teerstegen, or in Biedermann's dogmatics. We might even, with a modicum of goodwill, recognize it in the

Roman Mass. I don't know how many of our contemporaries have been helped by Bultmann and his disciples to know the real joy of believing. I shall not ask, but just hope for the best. Speaking for myself, I must say I find it hard to imagine how Bultmann could inspire me to study theology, to preach, or even to believe. And I think this has something to do with the extreme arbitrariness of this interpretation. That is where, judged by the text it professes to explain, it falls short.

VII

And now, before I proceed to sum it all up, I would like to step back for a moment and see what I can make of the phenomenon of Rudolf Bultmann as a whole. What am I to think of him? During the past ten years I have often been uncertain just where he belongs in the history of theological development. That even I, an old neighbour of his, should find it so difficult, is a clear indication of the stature of the man and his work. And it would certainly have been good for others who have found it so easy to pigeonhole him, if they had been aware of this difficulty. Where does Bultmann really stand? Let me tell you of some of the attempts I have made to answer this question over the years.

1. To a great extent, Bultmann has only himself to blame if he gives the impression of being concerned mainly to do battle for a more modern world view against the ancient or mythological view, particularly against its survival in the Church, its theology and preaching. He looks like a rationalist with the austere Marburg passion for sincerity! A new David Friedrich Strauss! A bedfellow of the Berne School, with its enthusiasm for the one truth necessary to salvation, the delay in the parousia! Away with superstition! We are children of the enlightenment. We use electric light and the radio. How can we believe in the New Testament world of spirits and miracles? These things simply aren't compatible!—such is the somewhat chilly note which Bultmann often strikes. Buri has taken great pleasure in interpreting Bultmann in this light, objecting only to his failure to carry his cleansing of the temple to its logical conclusion. But, of

course, the other side has interpreted him in the same way too, and with some excuse considering the first part of his famous lecture. The reader should take another look at what he says there in the name of modern man. There is so much that he cannot "understand", so much that he must dismiss as obsolete. Bultmann can hardly be surprised that many people were so shocked that they refused to read any further. And why did he coin the word demythologizing, which, as we have seen, only covers the negative side of his enterprise?

Yet there is certainly a misunderstanding here. Demythologizing in the narrower sense of the word has a great significance for Bultmann, but only a subsidiary one. It is only intended to make room for his existentialist interpretation, which he has so much at heart. He takes the modern world view and modern thought as his criterion—as a good Marburg man Bultmann is more interested in methods than results—just because it is modern, because it is our own, and, therefore, an indispensable ingredient in our self-understanding. The older rationalists, following Strauss, *believed* in a modern world view. I suppose the Berne school does too. Bultmann does not. He knows it is only relative. It has only a *de facto*, not a *de jure* authority. At any rate, that is how I think we should understand him. Of course, I wish we had said so in so many words. Then we should have known where we stood.

2. Or should we treat Bultmann as an apologist—of Schleiermacher's stature, of course, though with an individuality of his own? Is he simply concerned with the authenticity of the Christian proclamation in our day and age? Is it his sole aim—Schleiermacher wanted nothing more—to make Biblical exegesis, theology in general, and preaching in particular, relevant and interesting for its cultured despisers?¹ It has been observed in more than one quarter that Bultmann's original lecture shows an unmistakable pastoral concern for modern man with his electricity and atomic physics. For, of course, he cannot understand the gospel unless it is demythologized and given an existentialist interpretation, let alone recognize it as a viable faith, or

¹ An allusion to the subtitle of Schleiermacher's addresses *On Religion* (Trans. by John Oman, 1893). (R.H.F.)

even genuinely reject it. Remove or sublimate the myth, speak to him in Heideggerian terms, and all will be well. Bultmann and his disciples are annoyed if we call him an apologist. But there must be some truth in that description, otherwise he would not be so bent on communicating the gospel to modern man. And I really do not see why "apologist" should be a term of abuse. Surely theologians have always been apologists in some sense; they could hardly help it. It is clear, however, that this is only one side of his work, and hardly the most important side for him. At best it is a by-product, though a notable by-product, to be sure.

3. Or is he simply a historian, a unique historian in his own way, but one who stands in the great tradition of the nineteenth century? Is he a scholar divesting himself of all his prejudices and presuppositions and studying the New Testament as part of the civilization, culture and religion of late antiquity, concluding that the synoptic version of the kerygma is only one version of it, and that the genuine form is to be found in the Pauline Epistles interpreted in a Johannine sense? Has he simply, as an unprejudiced exegete, discovered that the New Testament is the proclamation of a particular human self-understanding, and that a demythologized, existentialist interpretation of it is relevant even from a purely historical and scientific point of view? His *Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition*¹ and his recent book on *Primitive Christianity*² suggest that we should be right in interpreting him simply as an academic scholar. Indeed, these works, together with his commentary on John and his *Theology of the New Testament*³ include so much research and so much material important and interesting in their own right that we can largely ignore his existentialism (which not every historian can swallow) and if need be, the particular purpose of his demythologizing? I think it is at least possible. So, too, unfortunately, is something

¹ Third ed., 1957. Eng. Trans. in preparation (R.H.F.).

² *Primitive Christianity in its Contemporary Setting*. Thames and Hudson, 1956. Trans. by R. H. Fuller (R.H.F.).

³ *Das Johannesevangelium*, 1941 (Eng. Trans. in preparation); *Theology of the New Testament*, Vol. I, 1952, Vol. II, 1955. Trans. by Kendrick Grobel, S.C.M. Press.

else. It is easy to be put off by his lofty arrogance as a historian. (Much of this he has inherited from his great predecessors from 1890 to 1910.)

We should have to shut our eyes to a great deal if we were to stop short here. There is a good deal of intellectual, if not spiritual pathos in his writings, the onesidedness of which has rather a sectarian attraction, and is certainly strongly religious. And this has nothing to do with pure history. It does not simply ask "what actually happened". His idea of the kerygma, the very fact that he can identify the tasks of exegesis, systematic theology and preaching, should be enough to warn us here. I should like to see a pure historian say this as emphatically as Bultmann says it. In his historical and philological criticism of the Gospel of John, Bultmann comes near to the conclusion that the authentic text, with its alien accretions peeled off, tends to demythologize an earlier tradition. Hence the only rightful exegesis is to carry on the good work. Indeed, the Gospel of John is a powerful vindication of Bultmann's own hermeneutics and theology. We can but admire this, whether it be some accidental, pre-established harmony, or the skill of a very determined *systematic* historian. And, in any case, it is most illuminating. Thus even the interpretation of Bultmann as an academic scholar, though it comes nearer the mark, is only a partial solution, and not permanently satisfying.

4. Or, to take exactly the opposite position, does the secret of theology lie in the discovery of a new philosophy and his enthusiasm over the discovery? As we have already suggested, such a discovery is always a great moment in the history of theological development. Is this the greatness of Bultmann's hour? If so, the day of his conversion was when he first met Heidegger. Tired of positivism, idealism and romanticism, all that our fathers stood for, he must have found in existentialism the key, at any rate for our time, to every kind of ontology, anthropology, cosmology, soteriology and eschatology, even those of the New Testament itself. So he proceeds to translate it into the language of this philosophy, demythologizing being only a by-product. However this may be, it would mean that Bult-

mann's work would be only a new form, just one form of something which is always going on in theology, *semper, ubique, et ab omnibus*, with varying degrees of verve and emphasis. If this is how many people have understood Bultmann, the fault is largely his own. Must we confine ourselves to the strait jacket of a terminology and a language which is far from universally accepted or recognized? Must we, as it were, learn Chinese before Bultmann can help us to get to the real Paul and the real John? Such an impression is not altogether unjustified. This need not, of course, condemn him out of hand for this. Augustine used the language of Neoplatonism, Thomas Aquinas that of Aristotelianism, F. C. Baur and Biedermann were Hegelians, just as Bultmann is now a disciple of Heidegger. The impetus and energy with which he propounds his philosophy are undoubtedly reminiscent of those great exemplars. There is an element of philosophy in all theological language. But Bultmann attaches such an exclusive importance to his use of existentialism, and indeed it is the very hall-mark of his theology which is what makes it such a problem. On the other hand in all fairness we should not overlook his protest that he uses existentialism only as a tool, and only because it seems the most viable philosophy for our age. But can philosophy be used merely as a tool? Does it not become much more? A tool which turns out to be the key to open all, or nearly all, the locks is a very remarkable one indeed.

Nevertheless, it would be quite wrong to say that Bultmann is a philosopher and not—in his own way—a theologian. It was Buri, not Bultmann, who said that one particular type of existentialism was the only true theology.

5. Let me boldly suggest that the nearest solution will be that Bultmann is simply a Lutheran—*sui generis*, of course! I feel we have been given a right to press this suggestion by the group of Bavarian theologians who published *Ein Wort Lutherischer Theologie*.¹ My friend Georg Merz, in particular, exhibits Bultmann's affinities with Luther, in spite of his own reservation towards his work.

Now, of course, the heritage of Lutheranism is a highly com-

¹ See above, p. 9.

plex one. I have already pointed out the parallel between Bultmann and the original version of Melanchthon's *Loci communes*. In the first meeting of a seminar I held on Melanchthon this was spontaneously discovered by the students, who could hardly suppress their glee. The earliest work of Protestant dogmatics is apparently already moving consciously and exclusively within the anthropological triangle of law, sin and grace, law being interpreted as natural law. The Pauline epistles are already being treated as the canon within the canon. While such mysteries as the Trinity and the Incarnation may be subjects for prayer and adoration they are not included in the *loci communes*, for they are not capable of further theological explication. The *historia* of the New Testament is apparently only *historia*. All this looks like a cold demythologizing of the New Testament. And the young Melanchthon was a faithful disciple of the young Luther. I have long been waiting for a treatise on the distinctive place and function of Christology in the young Luther. How did he relate Christology to the soteriology with which he was so pre-occupied? I know that both Luther and Melanchthon came to see the question in quite a different light in their later years in the course of their controversy with the *Schwärmer* over the Real Presence. Still, Luther's main preoccupation continued to be the application of salvation to man (law and gospel, etc.), and justification by faith. There are places in the final version of his commentary on Galatians where Christology almost merges into soteriology, passages which Bultmann might well cite in support of his own existentialist methods. He could easily appeal for support in his strong distinction between "flesh" and "glory" to Luther's theology of the cross. His ethics, with their strong individualism, would fit in quite easily with the Lutheran doctrine of the two realms. It is not surprising, for instance, that he is not too far from the Lutheran bishops on political issues, especially on the practical decisions which Germany faces to-day. What kind of doctrine of Church and state would Bultmann offer? I ask all this not to cast aspersions on him. I have too high a regard for Luther and Lutheranism for that. All I want is to understand Bultmann as best I can. After all, he learnt his theology from

Wilhelm Herrmann, and he is fond of quoting him. In justice to Bultmann, we must remember all he could have learnt and probably did learn from Herrmann long before he ever heard of Heidegger. I am referring to his constant simplification of the Christian message, his emphasis on its ethical and anthropological aspects. I am also thinking of his reverence and respect for the autonomy of the secular world and its science, his abhorrence of conservatism, which goes on clinging to outworn shibboleths and is really a quest for righteousness by works. And it was surely Herrmann who maintained the genuine Lutheran tradition, albeit a narrow one. It is just these elements in his theology which have influenced Bultmann so much. And, as everyone knows, there were two other theologians who stood behind Herrmann, Tholuck, the theologian of the heart, and Ritschl, dry-as-dust. Were not they also good Lutherans? Then, of course, there is Kierkegaard the Danish philosopher and father of existentialism. He, too, was a Lutheran. Bultmann's work is inconceivable apart from his Lutheran background. Of course, this is not the whole story. But those who throw stones at Bultmann should be careful lest they accidentally hit Luther, who is also hovering somewhere in the background.

VIII

To return to the subject, my attempts to understand Bultmann converge on one point: What do we mean specifically when we talk of understanding the New Testament? And what do we mean by understanding? I am deliberately placing these questions in that order. Both are pressed upon us by Bultmann.

First, with regard to the New Testament, can there be any genuine understanding of its text if we presuppose as our norm a fixed canon of possibility, truth and importance—the prior understanding, as Bultmann calls it? Surely, to understand the New Testament kerygma means to understand in faith the Word of God to which it bears witness. And this Word of God can only confront and illuminate man as truth and reality if it is seen to run counter to his whole natural capacity to understand; yet it enables him for this very reason to make it his own. If I do not

believe, how shall I be able to understand by my own reason and strength? What do we mean by capacity for understanding if it depends on the illumination of the Holy Spirit? Of course, this understanding which is subservient to revelation will turn out to be a very limited affair, often inadequate and often baffled. But we have no right to provide our own answers for what lies beyond its scope. We have no right to try and barricade ourselves behind the limits of our understanding in order to protect ourselves from the Word of God. Of course, everyone approaches the New Testament with some kind of preconceptions, as he does any other document. We all have our prior notions of possibility, truth and importance. We all know what we think is our capacity to understand. And, of course, as we seek to understand the New Testament, our first reaction is bound to be one of self-defence against its strangeness. We shall want to cling to our prior understandings and preconceptions. More than that, we shall always be trying to confine this strangeness within the strait jacket of our prior understandings and preconceptions. We shall always be trying to incorporate and domesticate its strange elements. But have we any right to elevate all this into a methodological principle? To defy that strangeness with a "thus far and no further"? What business has the modern world view here, however tenaciously we cling to it and imagine we are morally obliged to uphold it? And what business has existentialism and anthropological interpretation here, however much we ourselves may be convinced by them and accept them as binding for ourselves? What is the relevance here of idealism or positivism, to which our fathers were so attached? Or—as may occur and has in fact occurred to some—Marxism or some kind of nationalism? Do these elements of the world make us competent to quibble with the Spirit and the Word of God? How can we listen to the New Testament if we are always thrusting some *conditio sine qua non* between ourselves and the text? To do so is to invite all kinds of wrong exegesis, if nothing worse. Surely it would be better to cultivate as flexible and open-minded approach as we can, instead of donning the existentialist strait jacket? Better by far to wait and see if we can understand it first. Let the New

Testament serve as the catalyst of our capacity to understand. Do not make our capacity to understand the catalyst of the New Testament! Accept the New Testament's understanding of ourselves before we take our own self-understanding too seriously and try to force it on the text. If we adopted this procedure, we should find our understanding of the text enhanced. Of course, it would mean we should have to swallow a good deal of what Bultmann would call mythology!

Any attempt to understand the New Testament is fraught with two dangers. Either we shall omit and distort the text, or, in Bultmann's sense of the word, we shall mythologize it. Of the two, surely the former danger is the greater, and must be avoided at all costs. It was the young Melancthon who gave positive expression to all these questions:

Unus est ut simplicissimus, ita certissimus doctor: Divinus Spiritus qui sese et proxime et simplicissime in sacris literis expressit, in quas ubi animus tuus veluti transformatus fuerit, tum demum absolute, simpliciter, exacte . . . comprehendes.¹

And it was Luther who said in his *Table Talk*:²

Sacrae literae volunt habere humilem lectorem qui reverenter habet et tremit sermones Dei, (lectorem) qui semper dicit: Doce me, doce me, doce me! Superbis resistit spiritus!

There can be no more effective way of communicating the New Testament message to modern man (ourselves included) than to point towards this possibility of understanding. Would this be expecting too much? Would it be putting on pressure? Would it produce insincerity? I think not. Rather it would be leading men to the truth.

This brings us to the concept of understanding as such. Biblical hermeneutics is not so much a specific application of a general hermeneutics, but the pattern and measure of all others. It is impossible to understand another person or a text, e.g. a mythological one, if we do not allow it to question us with the

¹ *Loci communes*, ed. Kolde, 1921, p. 105.

² As quoted by Ellwein from the *Bavarian Anthology*, p. 32.

utmost frankness. It would, perhaps, be going too far to speak of being unreservedly open to the text, for that is rarely possible, either with the Word of God or with the word of man. But if our aim is to understand it, we must surely try to approach it as open-mindedly as possible. That is a matter of principle. It is impossible to understand any other person unless we are ready to let him tell us something we did not know before, something we could not find out for ourselves, something we have hitherto been prejudiced against, perhaps with much justification. We shall never understand him if we are sure we know beforehand the limits of our understanding. We shall never understand him if we lay down these limits before we have given him a chance to speak for himself. These limitations, it is true, are found in all personal relationships. They are signs of real narrow-mindedness. Thus it is certain that even if we manage to be completely open-minded, it will take us a long time to reach a perfect understanding. No doubt from time to time we shall be jolted out of our narrow-mindedness and widen our sights for a moment. But it is quite another thing to regard as our sacred duty and an iron law to confine ourselves within our narrow-mindedness and refuse to budge an inch. I do not see how I can understand another man or a text unless I am ready to show a certain amount of flexibility. Otherwise my understanding will not only be incomplete, but not even genuine and I shall, therefore, not be able to understand at all. If I close my mind to the text on principle and refuse to make the effort necessary to understand it, no one else will understand me either. I shall only get annoyed and perplexed, concluding that I am speaking Chinese, while the other man wants to talk Japanese, and is angry because I won't. To understand another I shall have to overcome this unsympathetic attitude, and cease to maintain it as a matter of principle. Such sympathy, or its absence, can never be taken for granted, whether towards others or towards a text. It can never be guaranteed or contrived artificially by our own reason or strength, any more than we can contrive it in our relation to God. For genuine understanding between man and man, however incomplete, the discipline of the Holy Spirit will undoubtedly be necessary. For it is only through the Holy

Spirit that the Old and New Testaments can be appreciated as a testimony to the Word of God. Not even myths or persons like Goethe for instance can be understood without this initial sympathy, that is, without something of the discipline of the Holy Spirit. The erection of this doctrine of the prior understanding as the norm, which lies at the root of Bultmann's hermeneutics, would seem to be the death of all right and genuine understanding. For it appears to compete with the Holy Spirit and unduly to restrict his operation. We are surely justified in approaching this doctrine with scepticism—and the use to which Bultmann puts it. For it rules out all genuine communication.

Thirty years ago, when we launched the new movement in theology, our aim—or at least mine—was to reverse the current understanding of the New (and the Old) Testament; and understanding in general, man's knowledge, as we saw it, depended on his being known by the object of his knowledge. We were concerned with the Word, God's gift and message to man. We felt that the Word of God also throws light on the words men address one another. Our aim was to emancipate understanding, both of the Bible and of things in general, from the Egyptian bondage in which one philosophy after another had tried to take control and teach us what the Holy Spirit was allowed to say as the Word of God and of man in order to be open to understanding. Although we did not know the Word, we were seeking to demythologize the belief that man was the measure of his own understanding and of all other understanding. It turned out a long and arduous path. We stumbled upon many obstacles, sometimes alone, sometimes in company with our colleagues. There were many bypaths and false turnings, and we had to be constantly recalling ourselves and our colleagues to the main road. I am far from thinking we have reached the end of the road. But we were quite sure this was the right road. Now, as I see it, Bultmann has forsaken our road and gone back to the old one again. He has gone back to the old idea of understanding which we had abandoned. Here is the main reason why I don't want to pursue my attempt to understand him any farther, at any rate for the time being. Unlike most of those who cannot follow him, I am perplexed not so much by his

resolute opposition to anything smacking of the supernatural, or the denials and eliminations in his restatement of the kerygma, as by—shall I call it—the “pre-Copernican attitude” which lies behind them.

Nobody knows whether his work will prove to mark the turning point in theology for the second half of our century. It could be, if only because the younger generations have never known the Egyptian bondage first hand, the era of Ritschl, Harnack, Troeltsch, and their predecessors and are, therefore, unable to appreciate why we were so eager to escape from it. Already some of them seem to think that it was they who discovered America! What I mean is that they have just found out that there is nothing better than radical criticism, whereas we had found out that there was something even more important. Maybe, of course, they are more in debt to the general return to ecclesiasticism than they are aware of. Of course, I would not wish to measure everything by what we did in the twenties. Nevertheless, at the final meeting of my seminar on *Kerygma and Myth* during the Winter Semester of 1951–2 I could not help reminding my students how the people once lusted after the flesh pots of the Egypt they had left behind, and how soon they got tired of the manna and the quails. I ended with a pious hope which I should like to repeat here. If theology in the second half of our century becomes a theology of demythologizing and of existentialist interpretation, with a prior understanding as its *sine qua non* and its own framework of imagery, let us at least hope that Israel will not be punished with too many quails!

But perhaps heaven (mythologically speaking) has not yet decided that this will be the theology of the future!

Appendix

I had just finished the manuscript of this article when the recently published second volume of *Kerygma und Mythos* came into my hands.¹ It is dedicated, curiously enough, to the World Council of Churches at Geneva.

¹ Ed. by H.-W. Bartsch, Hamburg-Volksdorf, 1952.

To my mind this second instalment bears out my belief that the Bultmann discussion has reached an impasse. This need not have happened. The new symposium contains several essays which might have led to some advance.

Let me hasten to add that, of course, I cannot include in this judgement the attempt of those two forceful and able young men, Otto Hartlich and W. Sachs, to put me in my place, humble as I am and ready to learn, and much as I admire their erudition. Forty years as a theologian have taught me to take it, and so I bear them no malice. But there is a remarkable thing about Bultmann and his disciples. That is, if we cannot follow their exegesis they tell us brusquely to study its underlying principles. And when we tell them it is just these that we have difficulties with, they get angry and ask us why we are not prepared to engage in exegesis with Bultmann (p. 125). In my case this means learning that the New Testament and the Christian faith are not concerned with an event in space and time or with an assessment of that event. Indeed, to engage in exegesis with Bultmann is to enter upon a critical examination of Bultmann's exegesis and its hermeneutic principles. The dog is chasing its own tail! I bow to their judgement, but I am astonished that the master himself regards their essay as the best contribution to the debate (p. 179).

I would mention first Prenter's essay “*Mythus und Evangelium*” as representing a real advance in the discussion (pp. 69f.). Here the relation between the negative and positive elements, demythologizing and existentialist interpretation, is given a thorough spring-cleaning. We must admit, whatever our own attitude may be, that that is something which needs doing, and which is not clearly evident in Bultmann himself. There is also an essay by W. G. Kummel entitled “*Mythische Rede und Heilsgeschehen im Neuen Testament*” (pp. 153f.) in which the writer attempts to distinguish between myth in the New Testament which is adequate to kerygma and myth which is not, between myths which can and myths which cannot be demythologized. We may argue about this, but it is certainly a point worth discussing. Kummel, incidentally, is one of those historians who show little interest in the existentialist side of Bultmann's her-

meneutics. Finally, there is Fritz Buri's ultra-radicalization of Bultmann's radicalism, entitled "*Entmythologisierung oder Entkerygmatisierung der Theologie*" (Demythologizing or dekerymatizing of Theology). Note this further enrichment of our German language! "The kerygma is a last vestige of mythology to which we still illogically cling" (p. 96). It requires very little understanding of Bultmann to see that this is an attack on the very foundation of his theology. Yet it is based on Bultmann's own presuppositions, and makes out a good case for itself.

I am, therefore, all the more astonished that in his "Reply to his Critics" which forms the climax of the whole symposium (p. 180f.; E.T. (part only), *Kerygma and Myth*, I, pp. 191-211) hardly takes any note of Kümmel except to say that his suggestion on page 85 is absurd. Nor does he or any of his pupils answer Prenter or Buri. Or perhaps we must take it that Buri's essay is disposed of in the editor's remark (p. 6) that "no German theologian would agree with it". Why not? I for one would be most eager to know what the master and his pupils had in mind to counter Buri's arguments. And the scholasticism so patently manifested in their replies (which are only a rehash of what they had said already) seems to me a poor substitute for their curious silence over Buri, Prenter, and Kümmel.

The only new thing I came across in Bultmann's Reply (and it was a point which had already been singled out by the advance publicity was the parallel to the Pauline and Lutheran doctrine of justification. Demythologizing, we are told, is that doctrine pushed to its logical conclusion in the field of epistemology. I am surprised that this is Bultmann's own "self-understanding", but I am not sorry that I myself said just as much, and indeed thought it the best place to put him in in the history of theological development (cf. p. 121 above).

No, there is little new in the second volume of *Kerygma und Mythos*. How could there be with things as they are? Another publication I received after completing my manuscript was Hellmut Traub's *Anmerkungen und Fragen zur neutestamentlichen Hermeneutik und zum Problem der Entmythologisierung*, Neukirchen, 1952. It contains important material, particularly for developing

the suggestions in section VIII of my essay. It would be better if there were a little more give and take on both sides. Bultmann can hardly be serious when he complains we do not want to understand him, or that we have not paid enough attention to the questions he has asked. He can hardly complain, either, that we have neglected his suggestions in the realm of exegesis, or the principles which underly it. Have we not all stood round him for the past ten years, racking our brains, and wondering how we can possibly meet his challenge? And does he realize that other people have their own questions and desires, with a different slant and emphasis from his? Surely, he hardly expects us to submit to cross-examination from him to see whether we are prepared to take his line and go as far as he does both in what we affirm and what we deny. Can he understand anyone but himself and his own programme? Does it surprise him that there are others who cannot identify themselves with him, cannot understand him, and cannot help misunderstanding him? Can Bultmann or his pupils contemplate any discussion except one in which they do all the talking and everyone else agrees? Whenever anyone raises an objection, it only shows he has failed to understand him! There is apparently little likelihood of there being anything in the reservations which other people have expressed about him, nor could he profit from a discussion with them. After all, he has never yielded an inch—admirable doggedness in its own way, but such as to preclude any real meeting of minds. One wonders where the New Testament comes into all this, especially when one thinks of the contributions to this second volume of *Kerygma und Mythos*. And, finally, what is the debate really all about? The holy evangelists and apostles? Or that apparently immutable and majestic hypostasis, the demythologizing of the New Testament? Must demythologizing become a subject of discussion for its own sake? Must everyone be concerned with it, and with nothing else? Surely, something has gone wrong here. It is all too dogmatic for words. And as I look back over this essay of mine, I wonder what desert I have landed myself into too. No doubt Bultmann will put me in my place. There seems little point in going on with the game any further. Much better to

mind our own business. I had to throw all these questions into an appendix, because the second volume of essays gives the impression that the whole debate is in danger of getting bogged down in sterility and boredom, and if it is continued at all, there is little prospect of any improvement.