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The Faculty at Bethel on the "Demythologizing" Championed by Professor Dr. Bultmann

Introductory Note.—The discussion of "Demythologizing," advocated by Dr. R. Bultmann, goes on apace. A highly significant evaluation of his position appeared when the faculty of the Bethel Theological School (near Bielefeld) issued an opinion (*Gutachten*) on this subject. To make it possible for our clergy to inform itself on the chief items pertaining to the debate, this opinion is here submitted in an English translation prepared by the undersigned. The gracious permission of the Bethel theological faculty for the publication of this English version of the document is gratefully acknowledged. In addition the authors through a committee examined this translation and offered valuable suggestions. For this, too, we here express our thanks. — WILLIAM F. ARNDT.

THE officials of the Evangelical Church of Westphalia approached the faculty of the Bethel Theological School with the request to submit an opinion on the "demythologizing" championed by Professor Bultmann which would be suitable to furnish parish pastors clarification and direction in this important question.

In joint endeavors we have made the attempt to formulate this opinion.

The intention is not to pass judgment on the theology of R. Bultmann in general. To do that, a far more detailed discussion would be required, for which we do not have the space here. In concerning ourselves specifically with demythologizing as understood by Bultmann, we had to curtail to some extent the study of the problem and thus simplify some of the implications.

In order to view the thoughts of Bultmann as objectively and precisely as possible, we have prefaced our opinion with a brief summary of the demythologizing process. Several times in the opinion proper we shall have occasion to refer to this by way of repetition, abbreviation, or further elaboration.

What has been elaborated is not intended to make superfluous a person's own independent study of Bultmann and the examination of our theses; hence we submit references to the pertinent literature in this area.¹

The questions that arise are of such great importance that no one who is a teacher of the Church can be excused from occupying himself personally with the problem. We are far removed from the idea of furnishing a finished and forever valid recipe which can be accepted without further examination.

The fact that this opinion is signed by all teachers of our theological school does not mean that among ourselves there are not at some points differences pertaining to the understanding, viewing, and emphasizing of certain matters. We also are of the opinion that this declaration, duly limited as it is, puts upon ourselves, according to the divine Word, the obligation constantly to examine anew the positions here taken. But this consideration did not keep us from issuing this treatise as our joint opinion.

A. BRIEF PRESENTATION OF BULTMANN'S DEMYTHOLOGIZING PROGRAM

Bultmann² affirms that the Gospel in its Biblical form very largely has no appeal for the man of our age. He holds this can-

¹ *Kerygma und Mythos*, published by H. W. Bartsch and containing R. Bultmann's essay on "Demythologizing" and the contributions of Schniewind, Lohmeyer, Thielicke, a. o., 2d ed., 1951. — K. Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, Vol. III, 2, p. 531 ff. — G. Bornkamm, "Mythos und Evangelium," in *Theo. Existenz heute*, Nr. 26, 1951. — O. Cullmann, *Christus und die Zeit*, 2d ed., 1948 (translated by Filson with the title *Christ and Time*, Westminster Press, 1950). — Denkschrift der Evan. Theol. Fakultät der Universität Tübingen: "Fuer und wider die Theologie Bultmanns," *Sammlung gemeinverstaendlicher Vortraege*, Nr. 198/199, 1952. — H. Frey, *Das Wort ward Fleisch*, 1952. — W. Klass, "Der moderne Mensch in der Theologie Bultmanns," in *Theolog. Studien*, Part 24. — W. G. Kuemmel, "Mythische Rede und Heilsgeschehen im Neuen Testament," in *Coniectanea neotestamentica*, 11, 1947, p. 109 ff. — The same, "Mythos im Neuen Testament," in *Theol. Zeitschrift*, Part 6, 1950, p. 331 ff. — W. Kuenneth, *Theologie der Auferstehung*, 1951, 4th ed. — F. K. Schumann, *Wort und Wirklichkeit*, 1951. — E. Steinbach, *Mythos und Geschichte*, 1951. — H. Vogel, "Kerygma und Mythos," in *Schriftenreihe der Bekennenden Kirche*, Part 10, 1951/52. — W. Wiesner, "Anthropologische oder theologische Schriftauslegung," in *Evang. Theologie*, 1950/51, p. 49 ff.

² The writings of Bultmann which are referred to in the following are: "Die Entmythologisierung der neutestamentlichen Verkueendigung als Aufgabe," in *Kerygma und Mythos*, 1948, pp. 15—53; here cited as E. — "Zu J. Schniewinds, *Thesen, das Problem der Entmythologisierung betreffend*," in *Kerygma und*

not be attributed solely to the truth that for the unbeliever the Gospel message is necessarily an offense. The explanation, he thinks, is rather in part to be sought in this, that the world view has, since the days of early Christianity, undergone a fundamental change and that this change adds materially to the difficulties obstructing the acceptance of the Gospel. But here, so he thinks, the pulpit and professional theology do not occupy positions which cannot be surrendered, but rather owe it to modern man to remove these hindrances so that he may have free access to the Christian message (E., p. 16).

The "demythologizing of the New Testament proclamation" hence is conceived of as an endeavor which desires to make it easier for modern man to have real contact with the unabridged Gospel, in which he will learn to view himself and the world in a new light, having its source in God's plan of salvation.

While the antipathy of modern man to the Biblical world of thought is the occasion of Bultmann's endeavor, it is not to be the basis of his method, as if, for instance, the offensive character of a N. T. statement were to be the criterion for determining whether or not we should adhere to it and, if so, in what sense (E., p. 22). Bultmann definitely says that he does not wish to destroy, but to establish "the paradox of the presence of the distant God in history" (E., p. 53). But he thinks that the nature of the *mythos* itself, "which represents that which is nonworldly and divine as worldly and human, and that which is otherworldly as this-worldly," which, e. g., describes "God's otherworldliness as a matter of distance in space," contains the challenge for us to "demythologize." In this way only, so he alleges, can modern man be brought face to face with the real offense; for the actual meaning of the *mythos*, according to Bultmann, is not to give a world view which is objectively true, but rather to state how man considers his own existence in this world. It is necessary, then, to inquire what the real intention of the *mythos* is, that is, it has to be given an existential interpretation (E., p. 23). That all this applies also to the

Mythos, 1948, pp. 135—153; here cited as E. — *Das Urchristentum im Rahmen der antiken Religionen*, 1949; here cited as U. — Review of the book of E. Hirsch: *Die Auferstehungsgeschichte und der christliche Glaube*, in *Theol. Lit. Zeitung*, 1940, col. 242ff.; here cited as ThLZ.

mythological presentations of the N.T. is, so Bultmann thinks, clear, not only from the often recurring inconsistencies between the various *mythologumena* (for instance, the death of Christ is viewed as sacrifice and as a cosmic event, Christ is spoken of as the Messiah and as the Second Adam, as pre-existent and as expected Helper, as being born of a virgin and yet existing from eternity, etc. E., p. 24), but above everything else, in the circumstance that in the N.T. itself a certain demythologizing is already in progress. Thus statements about the future found in Jewish apocalyptic (for instance, about Judgment, eternal life) are regarded in John's Gospel, especially in ch. 5, as referring to something that happens now; and thus the "Spirit," popularly viewed as a magical physical force, is in reality considered by Paul "as the possibility of truly living, opened up through faith" (E., p. 31, 33).

From all this follows for Bultmann the necessity of giving an existential interpretation to the *mythos*—a conscious departure from the procedure of the former liberal theology which got rid of the *mythos* by simply eliminating it.

This interpretation of Bultmann, because it is undertaken with the modern man in view, makes use of Heidegger's conceptual theories, without, however, adopting his "solution." To begin with, Bultmann interprets the Christian conception of *existence* in "non-mythological" fashion. Here existence without faith is regarded by him as a condition subject to decay and death, because belonging to the sphere of what is visible, extant, disposable (*sarx*), manifesting itself in worry, search for security, boasting—things out of which arise envy, anger, and jealousy, but likewise treaties, agreements, and customs, without, however, conquering "fear" (*Angst*), which ultimately lurks behind everything (E., p. 28 ff.). In contrast to this, the man of faith, the believer, subsists on what is invisible, unknown, not disposable. He is free of the past, wide open to the future, in his "*eschatological*" *existence* altogether dedicated to God (E., p. 30 ff.).

When the question is asked how a person passes from the condition of unbelief to that of faith, Bultmann departs from Heidegger and other philosophers. Man's knowledge of his *own real condition*, available to him through philosophic insight into his existence, does not rescue him from his state of decay; "what he

knows about his own real self is made ineffective (*verfaelscht*) because it is combined with the opinion that he is master of *his real self*" (E., p. 39). From this point of view man's condition of decay appears as presumptuousness, i. e., as sin; for presumptuousness is ingratitude and hence guilt. Now, man, who is guilty, experiences God's forgiveness as an act liberating him from himself through the fact of Christ, has freedom from sin to become obedient. According to Bultmann, the fact of Christ, too, is pictured in the N. T. as a mythological event. But its connection with the historical Jesus already is nonmythological. The mythological account is merely intended to bring out the significance of Jesus as Savior and of His career as a saving event. This is the meaning of the pre-existence and of the birth of a virgin ascribed to Him. The crucifixion in mythological presentation is described as an atoning sacrifice, but its real non-mythological significance becomes evident in the N. T. itself even in this, that aside from atoning for sins — both those of the past and those of the future — Jesus' death on the cross has this result, "that the believer has been freed from sin as the power that rules him, from the service of sin." That is the meaning of those statements which raise the cross beyond and above the level of expiatory value and give it a significance of cosmic dimensions: that Christ has disarmed principalities and powers and made a show of them openly (Col. 2:13-15; E., p. 45 f.). As an event which both judged and freed the world this historical event "for us" gets to have a saving value with cosmic significance; "for us," living many centuries later, it gets to be something contemporaneous (E., p. 46 f.).

The cross, of course, has this significance for us only as the cross of Him who is risen from the dead. But the resurrection is nothing else than something that expresses the soteriological meaning of the cross. The death of Christ by itself is victory over the power of death. The resurrection is not added as a second factor, as an attesting miracle. Rather it as well as the cross is an "eschatological" event, i. e., it must be laid hold of by us in our lives.

But how does a person arrive at faith in the saving significance of the cross? In no other way than this, that it — together with the resurrection — is preached and by its appeal reveals to us the possibility of the new understanding of ourselves. That which has to

be joined to the cross and hence make it intelligible as a saving event is not the resurrection (as attesting miracle), but the proclamation! Through it the cross and the resurrection become something contemporaneous, and the "eschatological now" gets to be a reality (E., p. 48 ff.).

If one believes that in the historical events constituting Jesus' life and death God's work of salvation was accomplished — and Bultmann contends this has to be our belief — then there remains, as he says, something mythological for the person who will "call even this mythology that we speak of God as *acting*, i.e., of His decisive eschatological activity." But in this case mythology no longer is identical with what disappeared through the discarding of the mythological view of the world. Here, rather, one is confronted with the actual paradox of the N. T. proclamation, that is, "that God's eschatological Messenger is a concrete historical human being, that God's eschatological operation is accomplished in what befalls a man, that hence it is an event which to the world cannot be proved to be eschatological" (E., p. 52).

B. THEOLOGICAL OPINION

Before we endeavor to express an opinion on this "demythologizing program," a few preliminary remarks have to be made.

1. Our aim in this discussion is not to pass judgment on the personal Christianity of Professor Bultmann. His repeated declaration that he desires to have the unique soteriological significance of Jesus Christ preached to modern man in such a way that it can be understood must be acknowledged and form a presupposition in this discussion. The question is rather how today the saving significance of Jesus must be preached in the Church and through the Church to the world. Of course, with the question "how?" is closely joined the question "what?" In this sense the theological thinking which has resulted in the demand for "demythologizing" in a high degree concerns every preacher, pastor, and teacher in the Church.

2. Not theology and theological thinking founded and maintained the Church, but this is done solely by the living Lord through the work of the Holy Spirit, who faithfully adheres to His Word. Hence nobody need fear a theological discussion, not even if it extends to the questions lying at the very center of our Christian

faith. On the other hand, however, theological thinking can become a peril to the Church if it obscures, distorts, or even destroys the center of our faith and thereby gives support to an erring message and to erring religious convictions. Hence the discussion which now follows is necessarily accompanied by concern about the future of the Church of Jesus Christ on this earth. The observation that the Church in spite of theological debates, and also without attention to them, has existed, and the conviction that it will continue to exist, must not keep us from viewing clearly the peril of the theological thinking just mentioned.

It is the duty of theology ever anew in critical fashion to ask the question whether the proclamation of the Church properly gives expression to the great deeds of God which have founded and maintained it. Since this truth gives direction to the task of theology, this task does not consist in an exchange of opinions which are all equally true or equally false, but with respect to the truth mentioned it must distinguish between what is "nearer" and what is "more distant," between what tends "toward it" and what tends "away from it"; indeed, it must be daring enough to say what is "true" and what is "false," what must be followed and what not. But since theology does not *per se* have the truth at its disposal, there has to be room in the Church for thorough and honest theological discussions. They cannot be silenced by majority vote or by the obligation of the leadership of the Church to adhere to the Church's Confession. In this matter all are jointly responsible to the Lord of the Church, and what is required is honest work, careful observation, and argumentation pro and con. This self-denying labor is as much a part of the Church's life as are the liturgy and the charity endeavors.

3. But before we concern ourselves with the demand that a demythologizing process be introduced, the real question at issue must be definitely stated. The salient point would not be touched if, on the one hand, one should say with a note of approval: Bultmann in fully justified manner gives attention to the hermeneutical problem how the Gospel must be preached to modern man; and if, on the other hand, with a note of censure one should say: At the same time Bultmann makes modern man with the latter's capacity of comprehension the norm of Gospel preaching (cf. A above). The

question at issue reads: Is it really possible to present in non-mythological form the full content of the "Word of the Cross" both as an offense and as a saving message? Bultmann says this is not only possible, it is even necessary.

According to Bultmann, we need merely continue along the lines of demythologizing which in initial form are to be observed in the N. T. proclamation, in order to arrive at the presentation of what is really aimed at in this proclamation. We ask: Does this "interpretation of the N. T. *mythos*, calculated to be in keeping with man's understanding of existence," really bring before us the true sense of the original Christian message, or is the message thereby made obscure, empty, and is it destroyed? The theological work of Bultmann requires that this question be given a clear answer.

It is significant that the hermeneutical problem is again given consideration, but the demand for a clear and theologically well-founded hermeneutical method with respect to the N. T. must not be separated from the manner of applying it. What we are concerned with in Bultmann's case is not the right to demand such a hermeneutical procedure, but the "how?" of its application. At this point we are face to face with the new idea which requires discussion.

4. In coming to grips with the real question at issue we must not overlook the fact that what, according to Bultmann, the *Mythos* expresses about man's existence in a remarkable degree agrees with what is taught by the existential philosophy of today. In his theological studies, and not through his own life experiences, Bultmann, when analyzing the meaning of existence, which he thought he found in the N. T., came upon the words and concepts of existential philosophy and with amazement became aware of what he had not at all expected — the high degree in which philosophy, too, can arrive at an understanding of truth (cf. p. 788; E., p. 35). Rejecting the "solution" of existential philosophy, though he to a large extent operates with its concepts, he thinks that at the decisive point he draws a sharp line of demarcation between it and himself (E., p. 38). As he proceeds on his way, the question, of course, arises whether at the just-mentioned decisive point a separation is still possible after such a long distance has been traversed jointly.

Furthermore, Bultmann says that for modern man it is "senseless and impossible" to repriminate the mythological cosmology of the N. T. with its three stories (Stockwerke). The scientific picture of the world, which man today cannot refuse to accept, is, so Bultmann thinks, evidently the causal-mechanical. According to the latest physics, even this view of the world is being questioned. Causal-mechanical categories no longer are adequate for describing the universe. For the modern physicist, for whom matter has become an ever active, mighty energy, for whom causal chains represent merely what has come to exist, not the mystery of coming into existence, for whom this coming into existence belongs to the categories of warfare, decision, insisting, yielding — for such a man, let it be said in all seriousness, a mythological picture of the world may contain more truth than one that is causal-mechanical. Thus the hermeneutical problem has taken on a different face. In the following, too, this problematical aspect of things casts its shadows. But since the theological questions which Bultmann raises are independent of these changes in the conception of the nature of the universe, they, for the first, are disregarded in order that the chief issue may not be obscured.

I. BULTMANN'S VIEW OF PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANITY

Beginning now to formulate our opinion, we state a point in which we fully agree with Bultmann: Jesus Christ comes to us in no other way than through proclamation (*die Verkündigung*). The proclaimed Word belongs to the work of Christ (E., p. 52; ThLZ., col. 245). There is no road bringing one to faith which by-passes the proclaimed Word. Not historical research, no discovery of certain facts or sources, can produce faith, only hearing the Word can do it. How has this Word to be proclaimed today? What is its relation to the historical account of Jesus? Precisely as we start from this given basis, our discussion with Bultmann gets to be necessary and meaningful.

1. It may surprise a person, Bultmann's theological presuppositions being what they are, that we in this connection speak of a historical view. He maintains that just this is the strong point in his position, that his interpretation of the primitive Christian proclamation is independent of the actual history of primitive Chris-

tianity and of the never fully conclusive results of historical research. It must be remembered that the "myths" of the N. T. (virgin birth, miracle stories, death of Jesus as expiatory, resurrection, ascension, return), according to Bultmann's opinion, are not intended to represent historical events. He holds that the Christian truth of the "myths" consists in this, that they express what the fact of Christ signifies for the believer's understanding of existence. That these events are soteriological, he avers, comes about solely through the fact that they are spoken about, the history of Jesus itself being without significance.

2. But now it can clearly be seen that Bultmann's demand to demythologize the N. T. cannot be separated from the conception which he thinks he has to entertain as to the historical origin of Christianity. Indeed, it is only in the light of this conception that his demand becomes fully intelligible. In the theological work of Bultmann we are furnished a classical example showing that a systematic general conception of the primitive Christian message and historical study and understanding are always joined. The former gives direction to the historical research and inquiry, the latter supplies the general conception with new evidence and new material. How is it possible for Bultmann to maintain that just through the right interpretation of the "myths" in the N. T. the actual soteriological events are presented? Because it is his opinion that what they report has never happened. He holds that from the very beginning they have never been but an expression of faith. What has actually happened is, so he holds, hardly any longer ascertainable for us; Jesus Himself is to us a great unknown. We can just barely perceive that He radically increased the severity of God's demands, that He insisted on decision, proclaimed the God who is near and likewise far, and died on the cross. Bultmann holds there were no miracles authenticating what he said and did. This apparently insignificant career the disciples, so Bultmann avers, rightly understood to be *the eschatological* world-changing, saving event; and to this their understanding they gave expression through mythological matters of various origins (taken from Jewish Apocalyptic, Hellenism, and Gnosticism). According to Bultmann, all these elements became accretions of the story of Jesus, molded certain

parts of the message of Christ, and united in smaller and in larger units, and finally jointly formed our Gospel. If this conception of the origin of the "synoptic tradition" is adopted, there easily results the demand that demythologizing be instituted. The "myths," it is asserted, were misunderstood and regarded as if it had been their aim to report actual historical events. Such an understanding of them, according to Bultmann, removes the particular feature of Christ which places Him beyond the realm of ordinary proof (*die Unausgewiesenheit des Christus*). In that case, says Bultmann, one can readily see that Jesus was actually the Christ, and the offense of the cross in its radical definiteness is gotten rid of; faith is looking for support and by that very token ceases to be faith. Hence he holds that we have to go back to the real offense caused by the poverty and the undemonstrable nature (*Unausgewiesenheit*) of Jesus; and this, he maintains, is accomplished when we interpret the *mythos* properly, that is, when we demythologize the N. T.

3. Now, does this view of the origin and development of the synthetic tradition really do justice to the phenomenon which we call primitive Christianity? Did the fundamental witness of primitive Christianity really grow and coalesce out of the religious conceptions of the world about it? Is it a "syncretistic religion" which, of course — as Bultmann, too, definitely admits (U., p. 198 ff.) — at decisive points significantly diverges from the world about it?

Bultmann's view of history can indeed well explain the agreement with the surrounding world, but from where do the surprising differences come? To put it differently: How is it to be explained that early Christianity knew it was irrevocably separated from Judaism? Or, again, how is it to be explained that in the world of Hellenism, which, generally speaking, was known for its tolerance and its fusing of religious ideas, primitive Christianity did not get to be one of the many religions peacefully existing there side by side, but felt its life and death depended on its remaining separate? That would be inexplicable if the young Church had itself created the content of its faith out of ideas existing in the world about it. Here Bultmann's construction of history meets difficulties. The witness of primitive Christianity makes us see clearly that the witnesses and the whole Church looked upon the

content of their testimony not merely as an expression of their faith, but as giving the foundation of their faith. They are not masters of this content, but they are bound to it because it has been received by them, and the witness of the Spirit confirms it ever anew. That Jesus Christ, being in the form of God, possessing divine riches, became poor and a servant, that He became obedient, loved, gave directives, suffered in weakness, instituted the Holy Supper with the explanatory words "for you," that He was crucified and rose from the dead on the third day, appeared to the witnesses, and now as "Lord" reigns in glory, acting through His messengers — these peculiar and remarkable events are for Paul and the congregations of his sphere of activity matters on which their faith is based and not mutable terms in which their faith finds expression. This can be stated in this way, too: Paul testifies to the personal Christ, and thereby indeed a light is kindled for the believer to understand his existence, but in this way only, that the personal Christ is the Center of the light. This, however, no longer plays a role in the scheme of Bultmann. But a view of primitive Christianity which does not do justice to these facts, yes, which in reality puts them upside down, is wrong at the very beginning.

4. Other details enter in which enable us to see the mystery of the N. T. still more definitely and which likewise lead to a different conception of early Christianity. In speaking of these matters, one must always remember that it is only through the proclaimed Word that faith is generated, not through historical research.

a. Without a doubt the primitive Christian tradition appeals to eyewitnesses (Luke 1:1-4). Even if a person should hold — an opinion which we do not consider justified — that nowhere in the N. T. do we hear the words of these eyewitnesses themselves, the question would have to be asked, how we are to conceive of this testimony of the eyewitnesses. They surely testified what they had seen and heard when they were with Jesus. Did they bear witness of the "poor" Jesus of Nazareth, unsupported by powerful deeds and miracles? Did these eyewitnesses not meet the risen Master? Did *they* fill the story of Jesus with mythological ideas? Or did those who first heard their message do it? And in that case, of course, only in this way, that the succeeding generation believed it was handing on the word of the eyewitnesses or that the eyewit-

nesses themselves gave sanction to the message of their successors which had in this manner been distorted and "enriched"? All these things are questions which, if Bultmann's view is adopted, cannot be solved. How much more clear and intelligible is the situation if we believe the testimony that in the message of the eyewitnesses there were included the very matters which we today call "mythological." In that case the message of later Christians is not a distortion, but may perhaps be called an unfolding. The picture of primitive Christianity given by Bultmann does not at all agree with the fact that the author of the third Gospel appeals to eyewitnesses and that he maintains that he has investigated everything carefully from the very beginning.

b. It is of great significance that the third Gospel and the Book of Acts were probably written by a man who lived near Paul; for in spite of a number of questions pertaining to details, it still is the most probable view that the person who wrote the "we" sections of Acts is the author of the third Gospel and the whole Book of Acts (cf. M. Dibelius, *Aufsätze zur Apostelgeschichte*, 1952, p. 169 ff.). A man belonging to the circle about Paul undertakes to prove the "certainty of the Word" in which a Christian of the second generation was instructed, by telling the story of which these words testify. Hence Luke through living near Paul did not learn to be indifferent toward the details of the life of Jesus, but it is precisely he who gives careful attention to what has actually happened. Paul is not correctly interpreted if one understands him to entertain no interest in the historical Jesus. He does not belatedly project a *mythos* of Christ as Redeemer into the life of Jesus, but merely hands to others what he, too, has received.

c. Connected with this is the consideration that the words speaking of the poverty of Jesus and His being in the form of a servant must not be interpreted as if they indicated that the respective N. T. authors did not know the abundant tradition of the glory of Jesus in the days of His flesh. Passages like 2 Cor. 8:9; Phil. 2:9-11. 1 Tim. 3:16, especially John 1:14, do not contradict the words of the lowliness of Jesus, but they rest on the statement that "Jesus was mighty in deed and word before God and all the people." John 1:14 is found in that Gospel which attests the "*doxa*" of Jesus more than any of the others. Hence these words do not con-

tain, in comparison, let us say, with Luke 1 and 2 and Matthew 1 and 2, with the miracle reports and the words of Jesus in which He claims Messiahship, a silent endeavor to demythologize, but it is only in connection with the whole tradition that they can be correctly understood. In this way only—as we shall endeavor to show—do they get to have their real meaning.

d. In speaking of the rise of the Gospel tradition, one must not only be concerned to show how the Gospels gradually coalesced out of various separate units, but likewise to understand the real impelling motive which brought about the forming, handing on, and collecting of these units. This impelling motive was the following: Whoever desired to give a correct testimony of Jesus to his contemporaries and to the Church had to testify to something that had happened. He had to appeal to the story of Jesus to show that the message of the Christ was well founded. Without the events pertaining to Jesus the witness would have been empty. This aim in the formation of the Gospels makes it impossible to hold that indeed the historicity of the events mentioned has to be sacrificed, but that the message nevertheless will retain its significance. Whoever bases his interpretation on this presupposition does not through his interpretation set forth the meaning of the primitive Christian testimony, but says something altogether different from what the old witnesses had in mind.

Here, of course, we must not lose sight of it that when the witnesses appealed to the story of Jesus, this very appeal constituted a testimony of Christ addressed to their own contemporaries. They do not appeal to a mere list of events, but to a story which is effective in their own time and which continues. While proclaiming Christ as present then and there, they set forth history pertaining to the life of Jesus. It is one of the mysteries of the N.T. that the testimony of the present Lord does not put into the background the memory of the life of Jesus. Both are inseparably joined together. This feature makes the Christian witness rich and varied. In the freedom of the spirit every witness gives new expression to his witness. But that, in the last analysis, is not a problem of literary history of the N.T., but is due to the facts themselves. There is no science of the tradition as such which could disregard the content of the tradition.

II. HISTORY AND PROCLAMATION

1. For Bultmann, as the foregoing discussion has shown, the problem of what should be the relation between present-day preaching and the story of Jesus of long ago is rather simple. The story of Jesus still has for the proclamation of Christ only this one meaning—that it did take place (E., p. 148). The proclamation in reality does not bear witness to events of the life of Jesus, but brings to man illumination of his existence. He can accept it. In that case he ceases to be subject to decay and death, to what is visible and disposable, to worry, boasting, and anxiety (*Angst*) (E., p. 29 f.). He gets to be a person who lives on what is invisible, liberated from the past, open to the future, absolutely dedicated to God in this "eschatological" existence (E., p. 30 f.). Through this decision on his part when he was confronted with the proclamation he became a "believer."

This description of the relation between the story of Jesus and the proclamation of the Christ does not agree with what the primitive Christian witnesses had in mind. The proclamation is empty if it is not carried forward by, and filled with, events in the life of Jesus. Only if it has the support of these events does it become "reliable" and "true." It is just through this understanding of the connection between history and proclamation that many difficult questions arise which Bultmann seems to have solved as he proceeds from his basis, but which still require our consideration.

2. In the following we shall endeavor to group together the statements on which the primitive Christian testimony in all its forms rests. The number can be increased. And they do not all have the same significance, but a brief grouping is necessary, since everything depends on a comprehensive survey of these remarkable facts. Jesus knows that He was "sent," He "went out" into this world. He manifested His power over demonic forces; and here all His mighty deeds have this twofold aspect: they signify victory and help, a demonstration of power against the demon and mercy for the sufferer. These deeds manifested His glory, His Messianic dignity, that is, they, too, were a revelation, they manifested who and what God is. As His deeds, so His Word was marvelous. Directly or indirectly He voiced the claim to be the Christ, forgiving sins, called men to Himself, joined them to His person, calling

Himself "the Son of Man," and speaking of His coming in glory. And all this was done in *weakness* and *poverty*. He took upon Himself the Baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins; at every step He had to inquire about the will of the Father; His Word was rejected. He did not win the nation, though with powerful words He called men to Himself and healed sick people. He was condemned by the court of the nation to which He knew He had been sent. It was exactly on account of His Messianic claim that He was put to death. He did not defend Himself. He died on the cross. His *death* according to the witness of the Gospels is the beginning of *life*, His *defeat* the hour of *victory*, of perfect love, and the severest tensions (*Anfechtung*). Jesus Himself speaks of His suffering as something necessary, to which He joins the expression "for you." For the disciples of Jesus His death was a catastrophe. Having risen, He placed them in a new beginning. He taught them to view His death and resurrection as a unit, as based on Scripture, and to regard the wonderful story of which they had been eyewitnesses as the beginning of the last age, which was to be followed by a coming of their Lord in glory. The Gospels take on their peculiar nature through the juxtaposition of these individual statements. This simply makes them unique. Jesus is King and Servant. He manifests His glory, but He dies nevertheless; but He who dies conquers through His very death. He who in despair suffered and who actually died steps before His disciples as the living Lord. These features are all seen in one view by people who met Him who had risen. And, again, this comprehensive view is not a deep theological attempt of men to give an interpretation, but it is the effect and gift of Him who was risen. This meeting with Him who was risen is the Source of the primitive Christian tradition. On this fact the proclamation rests, from it the proclamation results; for He who is risen, who teaches how all these facts are connected and belong together, likewise is the One who sends out the disciples. This fact becomes effective in the proclamation.

3. Now the question arises whether Bultmann is not right, after all, when he maintains that through the above presentation the "offense of the cross" is removed and the true nature of faith is corrupted, because thereby the undemonstrable character of the Christ of God seems to have been eliminated. In Jesus' miracles His glory appeared, and faith is given a support, for it is shown

the deeds of Jesus. Is Bultmann in this situation not justified when he raises the charge that the signs of Jesus as such, for instance, the resurrection, if viewed as a historical fact, compelled people to believe? Not at all. Faith indeed has a support in the marvelous deeds of God, but the perception of such deeds does not cause faith. In this relation of history and proclamation, as we feel constrained to view it, the offense of the cross is not removed, but made very evident. Now it is clearly seen that He who is rich became poor; that He who could have experienced joy suffered the cross; that He who laid claim to the Messianic dignity and performed eschatological deeds died in helplessness and weakness and did not defend His dignity as the Christ. For Jews and Greeks these things are mutually exclusive. That both kinds of facts are reported together, that is the thing which constitutes the offense of the cross. The undemonstrable character of the authority of Jesus (*die Unausgewiesenheit der Vollmacht Jesu*) does not consist in this, that we know nothing or only very little of Him, but that facts are reported about Him which are mutually exclusive. In Bultmann's presentation the death of Jesus gets to be a tragic fate; it is only when it is combined with His claim to be the Christ and with His life as the Christ that it becomes an offense.

4. To have faith it is necessary that the Holy Spirit open one's eyes and one be led to see the glory *and* the weakness, the death *and* the resurrection, which combined in a unity to form the work of Christ. In the weakness the glory comes to perfection, the glory remains in the state of weakness. That is, of the N. T. "*pistis*," too, to use Bultmann's terms, we can speak only in "mythological" fashion. But in that case the mythological terminology has to be viewed as being necessitated by the facts, as one from which we cannot subtract, since in faith we are always concerned with the union (*Zusammengehörigkeit*) of things divine and things human, or rather with the union of God and man, of weakness and glory, and not with the idea that something divine is presented as something human. In the demythologizing endeavor faith in the final analysis is nothing but the decision to say yes with respect to the proclamation. But the proclamation, too, participates in the victory and the weakness of the Lord. It really is the continuation of His history (ThLZ. col. 242). The act and the content of the proclamation remain weak. One can contradict it, for only as Word does it come

to us. But at the same time it is powerful, for it conquers and liberates the human heart; and him whom it has conquered it endows with the adoption into sonship and with love. The *kyrios* comes to be the Victor. He overcomes and presents gifts. Thus "*pistis*," too, involves indeed daring and decision in view of the weakness of the Word, but at the same time and in a far higher degree a being-conquered, a receiving, a state of security in Him who through mighty deeds and miracles and the resurrection proved that He is the Victor. The formula: In faith man comes to himself, comes to understand his real being, he gets to be open toward the future (E., p. 30 ff.), cannot reflect the real nature of the N.T. "*pistis*." This formula, too, signifies an emptying, a perversion of faith into its very opposite; for he who believes does not know himself, but he knows his personal Lord and through Him arrives at knowledge of himself.

5. The position which is outlined above apparently at one point is very weak, and that is something which requires special consideration. In Bultmann the proclamation was independent of the results of historical investigation pertaining to the Gospels; this investigation has lost its theological significance. But the historical endeavors with respect to the Gospels cannot be discarded in such a simple fashion. If the proclamation of the Church rests on facts, then it is theologically significant what historical research says about these facts. This relation causes anxiety because it brings many tensions and questions before us. It is true that the certainty of faith does not rest on historical research. But nevertheless the believer cannot be dispensed from asking the question What took place? if he has given his adherence to a message which has reported events to him. Whoever destroys this relation — tormenting and distressing though it may be in its details — does not take seriously the statement that "the Word was made flesh." Only in this constant mutual relationship the proclamation remains conscious of it that it is joined to an historical account, and historical research remains conscious of it that it has to do with facts which even today are still set forth as the basis of our salvation.

6. A further consideration, which has not yet been expressly mentioned, sums up in a way everything that has been stated. For Bultmann, too, the life of Jesus is an "eschatological" event. But

he states that this does not mean there will be a final section of history, pressing forward to a certain goal, but the life of Jesus is eschatological because it always in the life of individuals makes it possible for a person to turn away from the visible world and to dedicate himself absolutely to God. The *eschaton*, he holds, occurs every time a man through the proclamation gets to be a believer; in that way the *eschaton* becomes a matter of the present time (cf. p. 789); and this acceptance of faith in the moment of the proclamation is the eschatological now; the thought of an eschatology which includes a final period of this world's history and tends towards a certain goal is mythological (E., p. 145 ff.). When, for instance, the Gospel according to St. John emphasizes the eschatological now in the presence of the Christ and the acceptance of faith on the part of the hearers of His Word, it demythologizes, Bultmann holds, the eschatology speaking of the end of the world (E., p. 31 ff.). At this point, too, he says, we ought to follow the hint of the N. T.: the moment of the proclamation and the creation of faith in the hearers is the only *eschaton* which we have knowledge of, the eschatological "now."

These thoughts again signify an emptying and abridgment of the N. T. at a decisive juncture. In all Biblical books and in all forms of the *kerygma* there is found, corresponding to the eschatological "now" in the life of Jesus, in the presence of the Spirit, in the act of proclamation, an eschatological goal which has not yet come into view. One cannot be separated from the other. The eschatological now has its eschatological significance for this reason only, that it points to a final goal. Without this note and without realization of this last goal it does not signify a real cutting of the cycle of sin and death. The *eschaton* of the N. T. is not merely the object of our hope, for in Christ Jesus it is a present reality; but neither is it contracted and shriveled up to be a mere now, for the Christ will come as Victor for the whole world. It is an error to say that the N. T. "demythologizes" through its emphasis on the eschatological "now." Rather through putting the accent at one time on the now and at another on the future it attests solid facts resting on the events pertaining to Christ.

The elimination of a final eschatological period has extraordinarily profound results. For the witnesses of the N. T. the message of

the coming Lord always includes this idea: God does not abandon this earth; He will come as Conqueror just as He in Christ conquered disease, death, demons, and sin. These victories — inclusive of the resurrection of Jesus — are a promise and a sign for the coming victory over the whole world. They are all merely phenomena accompanying the message of the coming kingdom of God. From this point of view once more light is shed on the interest the Biblical witnesses felt in the factualness of the events. On this earth, in this visible sphere, saving events occurred. Just as on this earth there is found a history of misery, so also there is found on it a history of salvation, of true victories of God, which all point to His final victory. Whoever knows only the eschatological "now" no longer is able to give expression to this aspect of the Biblical proclamation. The victories of God get to be for him always invisible occurrences, the visible world, the creation of God, no longer possesses any promises for him.

With this something else is joined. In speaking of the eschatological "now," Bultmann is always concerned with the act of proclamation and the decision of the hearer. But the message of the N. T. is far too rich to be enclosed in these categories. It does not merely see many single eschatological factors which in ever new decisions are joined one to the other, but it sees one continuing history which is governed by the exalted Lord and tends toward its end and goal. In other words, the story of Christ does not aim merely at decisions of individuals, but at a new people of God which performs its pilgrimage through the catastrophes of the final age till the Lord appears, a people which in this pilgrimage is given food and drink in the Word and the Sacrament, which is united in its confession of the Lord, and which displays its peculiarities in prayer, praise, and loving service (*Diakonie*). According to the conceptual categories of Bultmann, the "*ekklesia*" of the N. T. can be spoken of only in "mythological" fashion. It is in his view an eschatological event, not a "historical" (*historisch*) event in the sense of being a mere fact of universal history in past time, it is "historical" (*geschichtlich*) in the sense that, being ever anew all-important and decisive for us, it is realized in the story of our lives today (E., p. 52). In contrast to this, according to our opinion, what is true of faith, of the proclaimed Word, and of Christ Him-

self, where we always find a union of powerlessness and power, of what is divine and what is human, is true of the Church, too. It represents not merely ever new occurrences, but likewise a definite continuity which is based on the faithfulness of God. Just as in other respects, so here, too, demythologizing would mean spiritualizing, and the essence of the Church could no longer be understood by means of the fitting analogy of the incarnation of the Word. It would find its meaning solely in the relation (*Verkehr*) of the individual to God, and no longer in the additional concept of the "*communio sanctorum*."

7. At various points of our discussion it has become evident that when a person eliminates the so-called mythological sections of the *kerygma*, the latter suffers important subtractions. Now there arises once more the unavoidable question whether Christ or, respectively, the events pertaining to Christ can be separated from the world view in which they have been encased in the N. T. proclamation, whether there can perhaps be elaborated a pure presentation of the saving events, not obscured by any additions resulting from a contemporaneous world view. It is part of the historicity of the Word that it with its incarnation likewise accepted the form of a world view current at a given time. But just as it always casts aside the fetters of its bodily (*fleischliche*) existence, so it, already in the N. T., always lays aside the world view with which it is joined through the incarnation (cf. p. 788). That circumstance contains for us the hint that while the saving events are for all time connected with a concrete view of the universe, this world view as such is not meant to have validity for us. World views change; the modern scientific one, too, cannot claim to possess finality.

Accordingly it will have to be an inalienable part of the proclamation to state that the world view underlying the message of the life of Christ was a contemporaneous one. But since Jesus Christ Himself is at work, the saving events are to such a degree a present reality that—as we see again and again—the hearer whose world view is different can be touched by the message without experiencing that the difference in world view is a barrier to his faith.

Thus, to give an example, in preaching about the ascension of Christ, the emphasis will have to be placed on this, that Christ now

no longer is with His disciples in a visible way, but is with the Father and invisibly has begun to rule the world—a truth which the N.T., its contemporaneous world view notwithstanding, is eager to teach us.

III. BIBLICAL HISTORY AND THE MYTHS OF THE NATIONS

The N. T. itself always employs the word *mythos* and the things it signifies in a derogatory sense (1 Tim. 1:4; 2 Tim. 4:4; Titus 1:14; and 2 Peter 1:16). Whatever view one may take of these passages as to details, it is clear that the witnesses, in the moment when early Christianity came in contact with the world of the *mythos*, felt that they were separated from this world. It is plain they wished to say that what they were offering was not something devised by themselves, something formed by human phantasy and profundity, but something that had occurred and which had been entrusted to them, of which they were not the masters. Now, it cannot be denied that what the N. T. attests as the story of Christ has some relations to the *mythos* of the nations in general. These relations pertain to form and content. For one thing, they pertain to form. The definition of the *mythos* that it, as it is put, presents divine matters as human (E., p. 26, n. 2) can be applied to every story in the life of Jesus, yes, in the final analysis, to the whole N. T. With respect to content, too, there are relations. The *mythos* of the nations dwells, among others, on three great themes: the subject of the dying God who rises again; of the Redeemer who is sent from the world of light into the world of matter to take men as children of light into the world above; and of the coming Ruler of peace who, begotten and born in a miraculous way, will inaugurate the golden age. The similarity with the story of Christ is patent. But the great difference is clear, too. The dying and rising god of the *mythos* represents a law of life. Just as this law of life repeats itself one year after the other, so a cultic ceremony repeats the dying and rising from death of the respective god in lamentations and orgiastic exultation. In the N. T. there is not the slightest trace of the repetition of Jesus' death and resurrection. On the contrary, both events have the characteristic of occurring once and of not being repeated. In the same way Jesus does not enter the world of matter in order to free men in the role of Redeemer from its power and to lead them to the realm of light. He enters the

world of estrangement from God, and as the Lamb of God He brings about freedom from guilt. Again, as promised Helper He does not usher in the golden age of the *mythos*, but He brings peace with God as a pledge of the final consummation. These are not merely a few differences alongside of many agreements, but these differences utterly contradict the ideas which form the soil that produced the pagan myths. These differences present everything else in a different light and demonstrate in the very similarity with the themes and the respective vocables and concepts that here there exists a contrast which is contradictory.

How is this situation to be explained? There is only *one* answer which does justice to the witness of the N. T.: it has pleased God to let the story of Christ in its special relation to the O. T. revelation take such a course that it from the beginning through its historical development has become the fulfillment also of the *mythos* of the nations. Just as He lets the history and the expectation of Israel reach its goal, so He "fulfills" the expectation of the nations. Here, of course, a significant difference must not be overlooked. Only if a person has the meaning of the Old Testament disclosed to him through the New and can see the story of Christ as fulfillment of the O. T., will he understand that the Christ of Israel likewise fulfills the promise given to Abraham with respect to all nations. The Servant of God, who dies in Israel, brings salvation to the "islands." He comes as the "Consolation of Israel" and as a "Light to lighten the Gentiles." But the story of Christ fulfills the *mythos* by at the same time striking it out, judging it, and destroying its validity. What was expected became—in relation to the expectation and yet altogether differently from what was expected—a one-time and never-to-be-repeated event. As this event occurs, it is at once made clear that it has significance for the nations, too, and that it can be proclaimed to them as salvation which they can lay hold of in repentance and faith, and in no other way.

C. CONCLUSION

As we mentioned above (cf. p. 700), Bultmann, at the end of his essay from which we have quoted, asks the question whether any "mythological remnant" is left (E., p. 52). If Bultmann thereby indicates his willingness to acknowledge the "paradox" of an acting

God (who must not be conceived of in philosophical categories as perhaps a quiescent *ens*, not as something undiscoverable, not as an all-pervading force of nature or a highest value, but as a rescuing, saving, personal God, seeking the well-being of men) without intending to have this terminology regarded as mythological, why, we ask, should this paradox not be extended to pertain to the *manner in which* He acts? If a person in all seriousness assumes that *God* acts — and that is something which Bultmann wishes to cling to (E., p. 43 and 52) — how can he prescribe to God how He has to act, and what He in that way may accomplish and what not? How can we dictate to Him a world view — and at that, one that is transitory — which fixes the limits beyond which He must not go because otherwise our world view would be interfered with?

It simply has pleased God to act and work on this earth in facts whose unrepeatable uniqueness consists in the indestructible union of what is human and what is divine, of weakness and of glory. Demythologizing cannot give us the intended significance. It changes the facts and destroys the things that are to be given attestation. Bultmann's interpretation against his wish gets to be elimination. In truth, there is no method which guarantees the right apprehension of the saving events. We are not masters of the content of the proclamation. We can merely pass on the witness which we have received. The herald makes his proclamation unprotected by any method; it is important that in preparing for the proclamation through employment of all philological and historical subsidiary means he remains ready to obtain from his unique message itself the categories for the right apprehension of the saving events. In this way only, considering himself an associate of all questioners and doubters to whom he has to preach keeping his ears open, awaiting the promised activity of the Holy Spirit, will he testify with assurance that the myths of the nations have long ago in the story of the Christ of the N. T. been demythologized by God Himself.

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