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Rudolf Bultmann Revisited

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Early in the fifties the writer asked the late Paul Althaus of Erlangen whether in his opinion World War II ushered in a new epoch in the history of theology, as had been the case with the first World War. His answer was no. The emphasis in theology, he felt, had remained unchanged. Seen from the vantage point of the mid-sixties, we know that Althaus was wrong. Gradually through the fifties interest in neoorthodoxy declined. Karl Barth no longer dominated the theological scene. The name of Rudolf Bultmann began to claim primary attention. The historical problems of the New Testament gained momentum. Being at first a concern of New Testament scholars, the proper relation between faith and history, *Glauben und Verstehen* (faith and understanding), also became the central theme of systematic theology. Rightly or wrongly, the name of Bultmann has become the embodiment of all problems of recent theology.

In this essay we shall first examine two important publications dealing with the flurry caused by the Bultmann school, both originally published in 1966: Walter Schmithals, *An Introduction to the Theology of Rudolf Bultmann*,¹ and Heinz Zahrnt, *Die Sache mit Gott*.²

¹ Walter Schmithals, *An Introduction to the Theology of Rudolf Bultmann* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1968), trans. John Bowden from the German *Die Theologie Rudolf Bultmanns: eine Einführung*.

² Heinz Zahrnt, *Die Sache mit Gott* (München: R. Piper & Co., 1966). Since the com-

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Schmithals' book is an objective and for the most part uncritical review of the basic tenets of Bultmann's theology. Yet precisely for this reason it is a useful introduction to Bultmann.

According to Bultmann, the subject of theology is God, in Greek *theologia*,³ but talking of God does not mean talking about God.⁴ God is not an object of rational inquiry. If He were, He would be one object among many in the world of man. God is the transcendent one known only by revelation. Revelation has two poles: the revealer and the recipient. Without the recipient there is no revelation.⁵ Hence talk of God is at the same time talk of man. Theology and anthropology are intrinsically related. "Here," Schmithals says, "we come up against one of the basic phenomena of Bultmann's theology . . . which permeates all his theological thought."⁶ It is his method of hermeneutics, the phenomenon of the subject-object pattern of thought and the overcoming of it. According to Gogarten, this pattern of thought is linked with the Cartesian view of reality: *cogito ergo sum*. By means of this pattern Descartes posited an isolated subject and thus, inevitably, an

pletion of the manuscript of this article, the book has been published in English: *The Quest of God: Protestant Theology in the Twentieth Century*, trans. R. A. Wilson (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1969).

³ Schmithals, p. 22.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁵ Cf. Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, I (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 111 ff.

⁶ Schmithals, p. 28.

isolated object. Bultmann does not deny the priority of God. He is not a religious atheist. He is reported to have said in March 1943: "Naturally I do not maintain that God is a fictitious personification of subjective states of the soul."⁷ What he denies is the proper knowledge of God apart from faith. The theologian should not concern himself with the mere *historical* facts recorded in a document lest he would again fall into the trap of the subject-object mode of thinking; instead he should concentrate on the *historic* significance that the event has for faith. Bultmann quotes both Luther and Melancthon: To know Christ is to know His benefits.⁸ A mere rational acceptance of the Scriptures is no faith at all. Christian theology is eminently dialectical. "These two belong together, faith and God."⁹ Scripture "does not deal with the world and man as they are in themselves, but constantly sees the world and man in their relation to God."¹⁰ Paul's theology is at the same time anthropology. Theology is not talk *about* God but talk from God brought about by the Holy Spirit; it "is God's own talk."¹¹

Bultmann likes to illustrate this en-

⁷ Helmut Gollwitzer, *The Existence of God as Confessed by Faith*, trans. James W. Leitch (London: SCM Press, 1964), p. 34. Contrary to this interpretation, Helmut Thielicke includes Bultmann in his review of Cartesian theology because for Bultmann everything revolves around the self. See *Der evangelische Glaube: Grundzüge der Dogmatik*, I (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1968), pp. 50 ff.

⁸ Schmithals, p. 36.

⁹ Martin Luther, "Large Catechism: The First Commandment," in *The Book of Concord*, ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), p. 365.

¹⁰ Schmithals, p. 35.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

counter between God and man by the phenomenon of love. "Can I," he asks, "present love to myself as an object so that it becomes the object of my thought and speech? Or can I make the person I love an object of an investigation into the meaning of love?" Bultmann answers the question in the negative: "By making love an object of investigation I have put myself already outside of love. Love is no datum; it is not an object."¹² Unless a person has a *Vorverständnis* ("pre-understanding") of love, he cannot understand a text speaking of love.

In our opinion, Bultmann confuses the possibility and validity of talk of love and talk of God. Does *Vorverständnis* not involve some objective knowledge of love or God? Did Paul put himself outside of love when he penned 1 Corinthians 13? In the reported discussion Bultmann added: "God is outside me in so far as he encounters me—and that too, transforming my existence." Gollwitzer continues: "In more precise terms this sentence would surely have to run: I know God's being outside me only in so far as he encounters me. In the form it is ambiguous. It could also mean that God's being is identical with the event of the encounter, that is, with the event of the Word."¹³ In the final analysis, Bultmann's approach is rooted in the Kantian-Ritschlian tradition mediated by his teacher Wilhelm Herrmann—in Ritschl's distinction between religious or value judgments and theoretical judgments (*Seinsurteile*). Contrary to the widespread notion, Ritschl did not exclude being from value judgment. He meant that in religion the highest objec-

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 30.

¹³ Gollwitzer, p. 34.

tive interest is included, which is not the case in science, which is purely objective, factual. Likewise Bultmann does not want to deny the priority of God to man's encounter with God. But in his reply to his critics in *Kerygma and Myth* he adopted an indecisive intermediary position. On the one hand he says, "That God cannot be seen apart from faith does not mean that he does not exist apart from it."¹⁴ On the other hand he stresses that the relation between God and man is possible only in the concrete encounter between God and man. What remains transcendent in this experience does not belong to the encounter.

An act of God leaves the weft of history closed and undisturbed. "He [Bultmann] stands between revelational theology and

¹⁴ Bultmann, *Kerygma and Myth*, trans. Reginald H. Fuller, I (London: SPCK, 1953), 191—211, especially pp. 200 f. Much of the uncertainty is due to an "intolerable ambiguity" in Bultmann. "The events of revelation and history are thrown into a befogging twilight and their contours disappear" (Walter Kühneth, "Bultmann's Philosophy and the Reality of Salvation," in *Kerygma and History*, ed. Carl E. Braaten and Roy E. Harrisville [New York and Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962], p. 106). In faith an exchange takes place "that is wholly without analogy in the sphere of thinking. The sole analogy is the encounter between human beings, the meeting of person with person. . . . When I stand opposite to God, I am face-to-face with him who unconditionally is no 'something', who in the unconditional sense is pure 'Thou'" (Emil Brunner, *Truth as Encounter*, [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964], pp. 114 f.). Cf. also Gollwitzer on "The Analogical Character of Personal Talk of God," *op. cit.*, p. 183. He refers to Goethe who mockingly played off the superiority of his own supra-personal view of God against the personal view: "What boots me your aversion/ To the All and One?/ The Professor is a person/ God is none." *Ibid.*, p. 187.

philosophy, between the existentialist interpretation as a *theological* method . . . of working out the proper interpretation of biblical texts and the existentialist interpretation as a transformation of the Bible's assertions into assertions of man's self-understanding without God's revelation, and thus with the loss of the real object of the Bible—between a theological and atheistic interpretation of the Bible."¹⁵

In Greek thought man is part of the cosmos. He is subject to the laws, the forms appointed for the world. These are eternal, "and man is eternal when he participates in them." Man is "a particular of the general and understands the enigmas of his existence in understanding the conformity of the *whole* to law." That means man is "an object of observation like the other objects of nature." Greek thought offers a comprehensive *Weltanschauung*. *Universalia ante rem*. *Esse* precedes existence.¹⁶

Bultmann rejects this view as an evasion of the New Testament view of authentic existence. Man realizes his existence not in the sphere of the abstract but only in a concrete situation. According to the Greek understanding of existence, man knows of his ideal determination and ought to shape himself to it. According to the Biblical understanding of existence, man must realize his existence in all concrete situations. "I become myself at particular times in particular situations." No universal law guides my decision. Man knows that he is possibility, and this is all he knows of the future. Man runs his

¹⁵ Gollwitzer, p. 31.

¹⁶ Bultmann, *Glauben und Verstehen*, II (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1961), 72 f.

course in the incidental, the individual, in the sphere of history.¹⁷

The student of the history of Christian thought will recognize in this view of man the heritage of Kierkegaard on the one hand and that of modern atheistic existentialism on the other. In *Fear and Trembling*, for example, Kierkegaard expresses the idea that Christian ethics is not a set of immovable rules to be applied regardless of time and circumstances. It is life to be lived under the lordship of Christ.¹⁸ Likewise Heidegger does not look for an answer to authentic human existence in the view of the cosmos, the universal; and Heidegger's understanding of existence corresponds exactly to what Bultmann regards as the Biblical understanding of human existence. These views have also shaped the approach of the modern situational ethicists such as John A. T. Robinson¹⁹ and Joseph Fletcher.²⁰

In this connection it is important to understand the difference made by Bultmann between *existentiell* and *existential*. "Other misunderstandings," Karl Barth has said, "may be forgiven. This one never."²¹ *Existentiell* is rendered by

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Cf. Otto W. Heick, *History of Christian Thought*, II (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 221.

¹⁹ John A. T. Robinson, *Christian Morals Today* (London: SCM Press, 1964).

²⁰ Joseph Fletcher, *Situation Ethics: The New Morality* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966); *Moral Responsibility: Situation Ethics at Work* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967). Schmithals discusses Bultmann's situational approach to ethics in chapter 12, pp. 273 ff.

²¹ Karl Barth, "Rudolf Bultmann — An Attempt to Understand Him," trans. Reginald H. Fuller in *Kerygma and Myth*, II (London: SCM Press, 1962), 83—132.

Schmithals as "existential," *existentiell* by "existentialist." Bultmann makes a strict distinction between them, and with this distinction he expresses a fundamental concern in his theology.

"Existentialist" analysis analyzes the general structure of man. Man separates himself from himself, making himself an object of investigation. He pursues ontology. He is a philosopher. He describes the different possibilities of existence but is not personally involved in his quest.

When man decides for a concrete possibility of existence, he is engaged "existentially." Existence never occurs "existentialistically" but always "existentially." "The concrete possibilities which man puts into existential realization are ontic." This is the fundamental concern of theology: decision for existential, ontic existence. Philosophy is descriptive, theology is concerned with a personal decision.²² Like his teacher Wilhelm Herrmann, Bultmann is a "liberal Billy Graham." A wide gap between Bultmann and Aulén, for whom theology is a purely descriptive endeavor, is evident. Like any other science, Aulén maintains, it has a place in the universities only as a descriptive discipline. Its existential concern is taken care of by the pulpit. Bultmann on the other hand "preaches" even in the classroom of the university.²³

We have introduced into our discussion the term "authentic" existence. This term needs further clarification. First, authentic existence implies the possibility of "inauthentic" existence.

²² Schmithals, pp. 68 f.

²³ Gustaf Aulén, *The Faith of the Christian Church* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1948), pp. 3 ff.

In Heidegger's view *Dasein* has always fallen away from itself into the "world." Man falls victim to the influence of everyday life "in which each man is the other and no one is himself." This seems to bring tranquility to man's existence. He finds security in being one of the herd, and the tempting tranquility heightens the fall. "All this happens on the basis of an anxiety in which the insignificance of my *Dasein* and the nothingness of the world dawn upon me."²⁴ Thus man is alienated from himself, from his real being. Of course, as a philosopher Heidegger does not qualify this fallenness as godliness. He is only interested in the movement of falling away as a basic structure of human life.

"Is not that exactly the New Testament understanding of human life?" Bultmann asks.²⁵ He thinks that this question must be answered in the affirmative. Schmithals remarks that Bultmann evidently attaches little importance to the fact that Heidegger's philosophy is hardly conceivable without the New Testament and Luther.²⁶ Of course, the New Testament goes further than Heidegger. It calls man's inauthenticity sin. This shows that it is interested not "in ontological structure but in ontic reality, not in existentialist comprehension but in the existential conduct of man."²⁷ Schmithals shows that Bultmann has a fine grasp of the Biblical understanding of sin as unbelief, not just as immorality. Repudiating his origin from God, man is delivered into the slavery of sin. It brings him death. He is chained to his

past, and because he never lives authentically, he is cut off from the future.

Corresponding to the understanding of sin as inauthentic existence, Bultmann explains faith as authentic existence. Faith is a new "self-understanding." Since man's existence is for death, authentic existence accepts the fact that man's being is a finite one. Being in the moment is man's authentic being. "In this sense Heidegger understands human being as future and at the same time as an everlasting dying. . . . For if a man exists *existentially*, he is never finished."²⁸

Schmithals remarks that this understanding of human existence "is hardly conceivable without the New Testament, but also that it is *possible* without reference to the New Testament."²⁹ This interpretation is not based on revelation but is an understanding of life that is given with existence itself. Bultmann is fond of using this analysis of authenticity. Of course, he is conscious that authenticity has in the Bible a more radical implication than in philosophy. As in Scripture inauthenticity is understood as sin, so authenticity of existence is a gift. It is possible only in surrender to God as the giver of life. The gift of authentic life liberates man from himself in his fallenness. The realization of this event the Bible calls "faith." "Consequently, Christian faith is by its very nature 'faith in', for the believer knows that at the very point where man can do nothing God acts — indeed has already acted on his behalf — he knows 'of an act of God which first makes surrender, faith,

²⁴ Schmithals, p. 73.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 64, 74.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

love, the authentic life of man possible.'"³⁰ God alone can give freedom from the fallenness of the past and the present enslaving power of the world. Faith then is openness for the future.

Faith, we said, is "faith in"; it has an object, the Christ-event. It has a historical basis, the saving act of God. Faith is not "piety," it is not work. The man of faith knows that he is chosen through the encounter with grace.³¹ Salvation consists in restoring to man his authenticity. Faith is not a mysterious supernatural quality but a gift restoring to man his authenticity, an event known to man existentially.³² As sin is bondage to the past, faith is life from the future. The state of faith includes a "now already" and a "not yet" (Phil. 3:12). Faith is an act of obedience; it occurs at each particular moment. It is an act of the *whole* man and therefore actualizes itself in everyday life. It is freedom from sin but not freedom from sinning. The man of faith does not live in a state of moral perfection. Yet he is free from an idolatrous devotion to the world. However, detachment from the world does not mean asceticism, which is based on a dualistic world view. Instead of free *from* the world, the man of faith is free *for* the world.³³

As an existential trait of human existence, faith is self-understanding. It is far from being a *sacrificium intellectus*. It is not blind faith accepting the incomprehensible on the basis of external authority. Precisely because Christian faith is "faith

in," it is self-understanding, for we can grasp God's action only *in* a new understanding of ourselves. "One does not acquire knowledge about the Messiah; one either acknowledges him or rejects him. . . . The *acknowledgment* of Jesus as the Messiah is the material content of that revelation, but that means that Paul now *understands* Jesus as the Messiah — for without understanding there is no obedience. To understand someone else as Lord accordingly means to have a *new understanding of oneself*, as standing at the service of the Lord and finding one's authenticity in such service."³⁴

According to Bultmann, self-understanding must not be confused with self-consciousness. Self-consciousness means awareness and affirmation of one's self. Self-understanding is given by encountering another in love and trust. The former is a static condition of the mind; the latter can remain true only as a repeated response to the repeated encounter with the Word.³⁵

In this discussion of faith Bultmann reveals a genuine understanding of the Reformation doctrine of faith. Melancthon, for example, was very explicit in rejecting the Scholastic teaching of *fides historica*. "Scholastic faith," he said, "is nothing but a dead opinion." An opinion held concerning "things to be believed" is not faith at all. Faith is a ready response to the will of God "in every vicissitude of life and death."³⁶ The departure from the Ref-

³⁰ Bultmann, *Kerygma and Myth*, I, 30; Schmithals, p. 100.

³¹ Schmithals, p. 104.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 105.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 115 ff., 275 f.

³⁴ Bultmann, *Glauben und Verstehen*, I, 203.

³⁵ Schmithals, p. 124.

³⁶ Melancthon, *Loci communes*, trans. C. L. Hill (Boston: Meador Publishing Company, 1944), pp. 178, 193. Cf. Otto W. Heick, *op. cit.*, I (1965), 391.

ormation, however, is marked and wide in Bultmann's view of the event of the cross and resurrection of Jesus.

It will not be necessary in detail to follow Schmithals in his discussion of this aspect of Bultmann's theology, for Bultmann's view on these matters is well known and is the main stumbling block of his whole theology.

Bultmann's view of the "saving event" is contained in nutshell in a paper delivered originally on June 4, 1941, *Neues Testament und Mythologie*. It contained little that Bultmann had not said before. But presented in such a condensed form it served as an eye-opener for many. Some were shocked, others delighted. Bonhoeffer wrote in 1942: "Bultmann let the cat out of the bag . . . the liberal cat out of the bag of the confessing church [of which Bultmann was a member], and I am glad. He dared to say what many, myself included, tried to suppress without having it overcome. He has rendered a service to intellectual honesty. The doctrinal pharisaism of many brethren pains me. . . . But the window has also to be closed again unless the weak will catch a cold."³⁷

A brief résumé of the paper will suffice.

The world view of the New Testament is mythological, with the earth at its center and with heaven above and hell below. Man is subject to God from above and to demons from below. The message of the Gospel, too, is couched in mythological terms. A preexistent being appeared in history, performed miracles, suffered vicariously, rose from the dead, ascended

into heaven, and will return at the end of time to judge the quick and the dead.

The older liberals tried to remove the *skandalon* of the Gospel by eliminating much of the material from the New Testament. Bultmann wants to interpret the message existentially. God acted in Jesus, He created the kerygma. But the disciples expressed the saving event in terms borrowed from late Judaism and pagan Gnosticism. Modern man can no longer accept this. But if stripped of its ancient form, the Gospel can prove to be a power to salvation even today. Historical reality is the only reality we know. Entering history, therefore, Jesus lived His life according to the structures of history where miracles, as reported in the New Testament, including His physical resurrection, are impossible. Jesus rose, as it were, in the kerygma when the saving event was proclaimed. "For faith grows, not from supposed saving facts, but from the saving event of proclamation. . . . For the saving event is no objectively established fact of the past."³⁸ To exist in faith means to exist eschatologically, to be related to the *eschaton* that is already present. Both the redemptive history and the eschatological fulfillment in the Bible are submerged by Bultmann in the present Word-event. Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, Ascension, Pentecost, *Totensonntag* (the last Sunday after Trinity with its message of the Second Coming), all fall on one day, the day of proclamation.

Bultmann deserves credit for having tackled anew the old problem of faith and history, the "ugly ditch" (Lessing) yawning between those two, a problem that Karl Barth had consistently ignored. Bult-

³⁷ Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Theologe — Christ-Zeitgenosse* (München: Kaiser-Verlag, 1967), p. 800.

³⁸ Schmithals, pp. 176—77.

mann does not want to dismiss Jesus as a mere cipher; he attaches importance to the historicity of the Man of Nazareth. But rejecting much of the Biblical story of Jesus as myths, Bultmann reduces the significance of the Gospel narratives to a mere "thatness," to the mere fact *that* Jesus was a historical person of whose life, however, we know next to nothing. It was at this point where the disciples of Bultmann began to revolt against their teacher. Thus started the "new quest of the historical Jesus."

Before taking up this "new quest" we shall first turn to the criticism of Bultmann by Heinz Zahrnt. Zahrnt has set Bultmann in a wider concept of Protestant theology. The arrangement follows the Hegelian pattern of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis: the discovery of God in the theology of Barth, the discovery of the world by Bonhoeffer, Bultmann and others, the synthesis of God and world in the system of Tillich.

Zahrnt himself has defended modern theology many times. His criticism of Bultmann, therefore, carries greater weight than perhaps that of Bultmann's avowed opponents.³⁹

Zahrnt registers a number of reservations that deserve serious consideration.

1. Bultmann seems to surrender lock, stock, and barrel to the philosophy of the younger Heidegger. Per se, there is nothing wrong with using philosophical categories. All of us are doing it. Augustine used Platonic categories; Thomas Aquinas used Aristotelian modes of thought; and

so forth. But the thing becomes dangerous when a theologian permits philosophy to be the master instead of using it as a servant. In that case, philosophy will inevitably adulterate the Gospel. "Is this the case with Bultmann?" Zahrnt asks.⁴⁰

2. Whatever Bultmann may have gained by his existential method, has it not resulted in a narrow anthropocentric view of the Gospel? In Bultmann, as in Heidegger, possibility is assigned precedence over historicity (*Geschichtlichkeit*). Man is no longer grounded in the experience of history. On the contrary, the possibility for history is conditioned by the historicity of human existence. But the solution is not a simple "either . . . or," rather a dialectical "not only . . . but also." Man would not experience history as reality if it did not meet him as his own possibility; vice versa, history would not meet him as his own possibility if man did not experience history as his own prior reality. Man's *Dasein* is always limited by the historical horizon.⁴¹

3. Because of the narrow personal approach to history, Bultmann loses sight of the comprehensive universal interest in history as is typical of the Bible. The great Biblical drama of God is turned into an existentialistic chamber concert. In Bultmann everything revolves around man's self-understanding. The future of God is reduced to the future of man, and the past is only a foil or model for a decision to be made by the individual at present.⁴²

4. This individualization of the faith involves a spiritualization of Christian ex-

³⁹ Zahrnt, pp. 260—325. (Zahrnt is editor of the theological section of *Allgemeines Deutsches Sonntagsblatt*; Hans Lilje is editor in chief.)

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 312 f.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 313 f.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 314 f.

istence. Is self-understanding possible without a proper relation to the world, to history and society? Bultmann ignores God's dealing with the world as a whole; he ignores that man has not only a head but also a heart and a body; he ignores that besides man God has also created animals and plants, sun and moon and stars, mountains and lakes. All these are passed by in Bultmann's theology. Just as faith concerns itself not with history but only with historicity, so faith has to do not with creation but only with creatureliness. Bultmann's modern man is an abstract, anemic being. His theology suffers from a new type of schizophrenia: no longer an "up there" and "below here," but man here and nature over there. Zahrnt quotes Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker, the eminent scientist: "A division between existence and nature in such a way that existence is a matter of faith, nature the object of the exact sciences, is artificial; it limits the field of interest for both."⁴³

5. Related to this abstraction is Bultmann's unhistorical, if not to say antihistorical, attitude. He is radically opposed to the quest of the historical Jesus. It is sufficient for Bultmann to know *that* Jesus came into this world. This explains the meager account of 29 pages given to the study of Jesus in Bultmann's *Theology of the New Testament* as compared with the extensive discussion of Paul, 166 pages, and of John, 89 pages.⁴⁴ Bultmann has a special predilection for these two writers because, he maintains, neither one was interested in the historical Jesus. Bult-

mann expressed his skeptical attitude already early in his little volume *Jesus and the Word*: "I do indeed think that we can now know almost nothing concerning the life and personality of Jesus."⁴⁵ Bultmann makes a virtue of necessity. In his critical studies he is guided by the Reformation doctrine that faith must not depend on any "work," in this case on the result of Biblical research; it must rely exclusively on the word proclaimed to man. In a recension of the book on Jesus the book was called "a book on Jesus without Jesus." Zahrnt remarks that this method of separating the Jesus of history from the Christ of faith leads to a dangerous second self of the person of Jesus. "In the twinkling of an eye Jesus is transported from the arctic circle where his whole life is buried under ice to the equator where the ice of his past is melted into his present meaning for faith. . . . Buried by the critical method the text rises existentially."⁴⁶

6. Last — but not least — the Christ-event as a gift of God is at stake. It becomes "an empty paradox." It only tells *that* God has acted but has nothing to say about *what* God did. Here we encounter a trend of late medieval nominalism, Zahrnt maintains. In an almost arbitrary fashion God confronts man with a *that* of revelation, leaving the fact unexplained, uninterpreted. Is this not the same positivism of revelation as in orthodox theology except that a mere "that He came" has replaced the miracle of the virgin birth, of the empty tomb, and of the ascension? Zahrnt quotes Otto Küster, who said: "We

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 317.

⁴⁴ Trans. Kendrick Grobel, Vol. I (London: SCM Press, 1952); Vol. II (New York: Scribner's, 1955).

⁴⁵ Trans. L. P. Smith and E. Huntress (New York: Scribner's, 1934), p. 8.

⁴⁶ Zahrnt, p. 322; footnote 85, p. 484.

cannot accept the thesis that God could have accepted the sacrifice of any convenient person, be it Paul or even one of the malefactors. The cross is not the sign of a mere, unqualified contingency."⁴⁷ Zahrnt adds: "Bultmann's consistent call to decision and obedience reveals not so much Jesus' call to discipleship as Heidegger's call to authentic existence. This casts a shadow of gloom and melancholy over the theology of Bultmann."⁴⁸ Two otherwise very different scholars, Karl Jaspers and Karl Barth, agree that Bultmann's message bears a cheerless note.⁴⁹

Bultmann maintains that his theology is a theology of revelation. The New Testament does not proclaim universal religious truths. His aim, he says, is to set forth the meaning of the Gospel in terms modern man can understand. But are there still any traces of mythology in the demythologizing attempt of Bultmann? Bultmann himself asked this question. His answer is: "There certainly are for those who regard all language about an act of God or of a decisive eschatological event as mythological. But this is not the kind

of mythology in the traditional sense, not the kind of mythology which has become antiquated with the decay of the mythical world view, for the redemption of which we have spoken is not a miraculous supernatural event, but a historical event wrought out in space and time."⁵⁰ The answer is significant for several reasons. First, as always, Bultmann confuses *Weltbild* (picture of the world) with *Weltanschauung* (world view). But the meaning of the Gospel is independent of either the Ptolemaic or the Copernican picture of the universe. In Scripture itself God is not confined to an upper story of the cosmos (Ps. 139, Jer. 23:23, for example). His ascension notwithstanding, Jesus promises to be with His church until the end of time (Matt. 28:20). Surely Bultmann must know about the conflict between Luther and Zwingli with its climactic occurrence in the same town where Bultmann has spent the greater part of his life: how Luther rejected the ascension as a local movement and heaven as a place "up there," how he ridiculed Zwingli for his naïve spatial view of the spiritual world. Bultmann has said nothing new in these matters. Second, there is nothing new in Bultmann's emphasis on the fact that God's revelation is "indirect," that it cannot be established by rational inquiry, that it is always a matter of faith. He is just repeating what Luther, Kierkegaard, and Karl Barth have been saying all the time. Luther's notion of *Deus absconditus* and his violent protest against the "theologians of glory" surely must be known to Bultmann. In the third place, this statement of Bultmann raises doubt

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 324.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 324 f.

⁴⁹ Bultmann is "boring as a historian. . . . I don't know whether his views can stir a pastor. At all event, they do not stir a man who does not share them out of his own faith. . . . He shrouds the splendor of the Bible with an enveloping layer of dry, objective language" (Karl Jaspers, *Myth and Christianity* [New York: The Noonday Press, 1958], p. 54). "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" (Karl Barth, "Rudolf Bultmann — An Attempt to Understand Him," *Kerygma and Myth*, II [1962], 117).

⁵⁰ Bultmann, *Kerygma and Myth*, I (1964), 43.

again as to his understanding of God. Certainly, "redemption is wrought out in space and time." But by whom? one may ask. Is it by one who is also contained in space and time? Is Bultmann's God, as the God of Tillich, the impersonal Ground of Being? His concentration on the historical seems to point in that direction, for if historical reality is the only reality, then God too is part of the cosmos; He is just as in Ebeling the "whence" of faith and love, the activity that underlies man's passivity in man's birth and death.⁵¹

Finally, what is the real significance of Jesus? We have heard that Bultmann rejects the idea of vicarious suffering as mythological. This leaves room for Jesus only as our *Vorbild*, as a pattern of the Christian life (Schleiermacher). Then Jesus is not the Christ in whom we believe, rather the first Christian whom we are to imitate. Significantly, another student of Bultmann, Ernst Käsemann, said at the Church Rally at Hanover, Germany, in 1967: "On the cross Jesus remained faithful and obedient to God. Nothing else happened at Golgotha."⁵² This is the "subjective view" of the cross as held by Abelard in the Middle Ages and by the Ritschlians in more recent times.⁵³ "The Gospel as Jesus proclaimed it, has to do with the Father only and not with the Son. . . . The sentence 'I am the Son of God' was not inserted in the Gospel by Jesus himself, and to put that sentence there side by side with the others is to

make an addition to the Gospel."⁵⁴ The lecture of Käsemann is a vivid illustration of this statement made by Harnack at the turn of the century.

THE POST-BULTMANN AGE

In 1952 Ernst Käsemann, then at Göttingen but now at Tübingen, wrote: "The whole New Testament maintains that at Easter the disciples recognized not some strange heavenly being nor abstract dogmatic statements but Jesus himself. There is a continuous frame of reference between the historical Jesus and the kerygma. A theology motivated by historical skepticism or by a strange dogmatic does not deserve its name."⁵⁵

A year later, at a gathering of former students of Bultmann at Marburg, Käsemann delivered a lecture, "The Problem of the Historical Jesus." Challenged by Käsemann, a lively debate originated in which the disciples turned against their teacher, the teacher against his followers, the latter in part against one another, and all of them were attacked by outsiders. Since much of this material has been made available in English by James M. Robinson and Reginald H. Fuller,⁵⁶ we shall limit ourselves to a few fundamentals.

Käsemann proceeds strictly methodologically. The historian must assume the genuineness of all material in the gospels that is not derived from the Jewish en-

⁵¹ Gerhard Ebeling, *The Nature of Faith*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1961), p. 82.

⁵² *Lutherische Monatshefte*, VII (February 1968).

⁵³ See Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor* (London: SCPK, 1953).

⁵⁴ Adolf von Harnack, *What Is Christianity?* trans. T. B. Saunders (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1957), pp. 144 ff.

⁵⁵ Zahrnt, pp. 326 ff.

⁵⁶ James M. Robinson, *A New Quest of the Historical Jesus* (London: SCM Press, 1959). Reginald H. Fuller, *The New Testament in Current Study* (New York: Scribner's, 1962).

vironment of the apostolic church. As an example Käsemann refers to the sayings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount: "Ye have heard that it was said . . . but I say unto you." This "I say" elevates Jesus to a position unacceptable to a pious Jew. The same applies to Jesus' criticism of laws concerning cultic cleanliness. Käsemann, then, acknowledges a uniqueness about Jesus in what He said, in His proclamation. But Jesus did more than teach the fatherhood of God and the infinite value of man. "He offered and lived the freedom of the children of God." Zahrnt points out that this understanding of Jesus transcends that of the older liberalism. Jesus did not affirm a general ethicoreligious truth. He brought something new. Jesus is significant not only for what He taught but also for what He did. He proclaimed Himself as an act of God.⁵⁷

According to Hans Conzelmann, Jesus proclaimed the eschatological reign of God, effectively engaging men already in the present world. He demands decision, response, obedience.

Ernst Fuchs puts emphasis on Jesus' gracious activity. He eats with publicans and sinners. His *Verhalten* (conduct) is neither that of a prophet nor that of a teacher of wisdom, rather that of a man who dares to act in the place of God. He forgives sins.

Gerhard Ebeling stresses faith in his treatment of Jesus. Ebeling remains close to Bultmann. He is not interested in *bruta facta*: what did happen? He rather poses the question: *Was ist zur Sprache gekommen?* (What was discussed?) The inter-

pretation, the Word, is more important than mere facts. Jesus is a witness of faith. Everything in the gospels revolves around faith. But Jesus did not discuss His own faith. He did not reveal His own God-consciousness. He wanted to call others to faith, not to faith in Himself, although faith cannot be divorced from His person. Easter revealed Jesus as the witness of faith. Easter did not make Jesus an "object" of faith. He remains the witness of faith and the basis of faith. To believe in Jesus means at His word to believe in God.⁵⁸

Günther Bornkamm emphasizes the humble submission of Jesus on the one hand and His great sense of authority as expressed in word and deed on the other. Contrary to Bultmann, who excluded the Resurrection from his book on Jesus, Bornkamm includes the Easter stories not as records and chronicles but as evidence of faith. By the events of Easter the one "who proclaimed the coming of the kingdom of God . . . became the one proclaimed, the one who called to faith, became the content of the faith." Record and confession are woven into one.⁵⁹

Although at variance at many points, these scholars, then, hold that the apostolic kerygma has its basis in the historical Jesus. It does not remain suspended, as it were, in midair. To express the continuity between the pre-Easter faith and the

⁵⁸ Ebeling, *The Nature of Faith and Other Writings*. See also *The Problem of Historicity in the Church and Its Proclamation*, trans. Grover Foley (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967).

⁵⁹ Günther Bornkamm, *Jesus of Nazareth*, trans. in collaboration with others by James M. Robinson (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1960), p. 188.

⁵⁷ Zahrnt, p. 328.

post-Easter faith, Conzelmann uses the term "indirect Christology," Ebeling calls it "implicit Christology," others use the term "Christology in a nutshell." The various concepts of Christology on the part of these scholars in turn determine their respective views of "the essence of Christianity." For Käsemann and Bornkamm, both the historical Jesus and the post-Easter faith are the constituent factors of Christianity. Fuchs and Ebeling on the other hand want to eliminate everything from the faith that has no support in the life of the historical Jesus. The confession that Jesus is true God and true man must be so interpreted that He truly lived His life within the limits of historical existence. Nothing supernatural should be predicated of Him.⁶⁰

If Käsemann and Bornkamm represent the right wing of the Bultmann school, with Fuchs and Ebeling holding a center position, Herbert Braun is an exponent of the extreme left. The theme of the New Testament is the salvation of man. In the explication of the theme it contains contradictory statements that, Braun maintains, cannot be harmonized and that are unacceptable to the modern man. The "religious" interpretation of Jesus as Messiah and *Kyrios* is unacceptable. The concept of eternal life as an extension of the mode of the present life is naïve; it is neither credible nor worthy to aspire to. The view of the Law as rooted in a divine will and eschatology as directed by a personal deity presupposes a view of God that we cannot share. The sacramental teaching of the New Testament implies a materialistic concept of salvation and objectifies

the deity. Braun admits that the New Testament moves in these, in his opinion, inadequate modes of thought. It does objectify God. But we can no longer visualize God as an object or species. Even the trend in the New Testament points in a different direction. God is *das Woher meines Umhergetriebenseins* (the whence of my restless existence), moving between the two poles of *Ich darf* (I may) and *Ich soll* (I must). The impulse to security and duty reaches me not from the universe. Like speech, it originates in my neighbor. Christianity is *Mitmenschlichkeit*.⁶¹ "He who abides in love abides in God" (1 John 4:16). This is the testament of Jesus: "No one comes to the Father but by Me" (John 14:6). Here the God of metaphysics gives way to "my God, to the whence of my existence."⁶² The saving facts in the New Testament *are* not history in the traditional sense, they rather have their history in theology.⁶³ "Anthropology is the constant, Christology the variable." The kerygma has its origin in the historical

⁶¹ Braun, "Die Theologie des Neuen Testaments," in *Gesammelte Studien zum Neuen Testament* (2d ed.; Tübingen: Mohr, 1967), pp. 325 ff., especially the concluding paragraphs on pp. 340 f. See Braun, "The Problem of a New Testament Theology," trans. Jack Sanders, in *Journal for Theology and the Church*, ed. Robert W. Funk (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), I, 169—83. The translation accepted by some writers, "fellow-mankind," is ambiguous because "man" in English can refer to a male as distinct from the female (*Mann*); it can also signify a member of the human race irrespective of sexual difference (*Mensch*). The abstract noun *Mitmenschlichkeit* speaks of the quality of the latter. It describes him as sympathetically involved in the life of his fellowmen. It means the practice of brotherhood.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 298.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 302.

⁶⁰ Zahnt, p. 346.

Jesus. He did two things: He radicalized the requirements of the Law and rejected the striving after merit and award. He proclaimed the love of God, seeking and accepting precisely the lost. This is the unheard paradox in the New Testament: the radical demand and the radical love of God. "Jesus takes form (*geschiebt*) in my I may and I must, and thus Jesus will take form from time to time."⁶⁴

The most extensive criticism of Bultmann and his school, especially of Braun, is Helmut Gollwitzer's book *The Existence of God as Confessed by Faith*, previously referred to. But Braun has remained unyielding. In his reply to Gollwitzer he re-emphasizes his basic conviction: a transcendent God is an illusion. God does not "exist"; He happens (*geschiebt*) in *this* life, in my existence, in my faith and love. In this way, he believes, the New Testament can be of value even for an outright humanist or atheist.⁶⁵

With the publication in 1961 of *Offenbarung als Geschichte* by Wolfhart Pannenberg and his friends, a third generation

⁶⁴ Zahrnt, p. 352.

⁶⁵ Herbert Braun, "Gottes Existenz und meine Geschichtlichkeit im Neuen Testament. Eine Antwort an Helmut Gollwitzer," in *Zeit und Geschichte*, ed. Erich Dinkler (Tübingen: Mohr, 1964), pp. 399 ff. Gustav Stählin quotes Werner Wiesner: "The Word, i. e., the biblical text, from which no one speaks to me, not God because he does not exist, not men for they have long been dead, becomes a sort of a *deus ex machina*, creating existence. One is tempted to ask Herbert Braun, how a text can do such marvellous things? Evidently because the text is mythologized. The denial of the existence of God issues in the deification of a text written by men" ("Wie redet die Bibel von Gott?" in *Fuldaer Hefte*, No. 17 [Berlin und Hamburg: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1967], pp. 117 f.).

of scholars, Zahrnt says, made their views known.⁶⁶ If Kierkegaard is Bultmann's spiritual ancestor, Pannenberg can claim Hegel as his theological forebear. Pannenberg developed his view more in detail in *Grundzüge der Christologie* (1964), translated under the title *Jesus — God and Man* (1968).⁶⁷

Pannenberg characterizes his movement as a protest against the "theology of the Word" in both Barth and Bultmann. Both, he maintains, evade the problem of faith and history, Barth by taking refuge in *Übergeschichte* (superhistory) or *Heilsgeschichte* (salvation history), Bultmann in the kerygma, in revelation as a "word-event." Pannenberg turns the method of Bultmann upside down. Not existence but history is the medium of divine revelation. God makes Himself known in the process of universal history. God's redemptive acts are self-evident. History consists of a succession of contingent events, meaningfully related to one another. This has its basis in a God as Lord of all history, as the Intelligent Mind directing the course of the world. No special revelatory word is necessary to interpret history. Reason is sufficient to know of God, for no historian who is in his right mind can deny the contingency of historical events.

Pannenberg applies these general principles consistently to the interpretation of the New Testament. "Kähler," he says, "was right when he protested against the tendency to drive a cleft between Jesus

⁶⁶ Zahrnt, pp. 368 f.

⁶⁷ Trans. Lewis L. Wilkens and Duane A. Priebe (Philadelphia: Westminster Press). On the former writings of Pannenberg see Daniel F. Fuller, *Easter Faith and History* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), pp. 177 ff.

and the Apostolic witness.”⁶⁸ Käsemann, and the others too, are right when they stress the continuity between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith. But the doctrine of Christ must not be made the conclusion or answer to human needs. Thus Pannenberg also distinguishes himself from the neo-Lutheranism of the Erlangen school. Nor does Barth find favor in his eyes. In Barth the sonship of Jesus is presupposed. The Eternal enters into space and time. This explains Barth’s failure to do justice to the earthly life of Jesus. Barth by and large swept the problems of the historical Jesus under the carpet. Nor are we to be guided by a metaphysical principle such as the Trinity (Tillich). We must think from below, that is, rationally. Pannenberg calls his theology a “theology of reason” or of an “eschatologically oriented ontology.”⁶⁹ The dogma is to be grounded not in the kerygma, not in what Jesus means for us. The starting point must be the history of Jesus Himself. “Christology must remain prior to all questions about his significance, to all soteriology. Soteriology must follow from Christology, not *vice-versa*.”⁷⁰

History itself is an act of revelation.⁷¹ Hence Pannenberg’s chief concern is to establish the history of the Resurrection. His Christology is a Resurrection Christology. Emphatically he says that the Resur-

rection is a historical event, accessible to the inquiring historian, apart from the faith of the church. The Resurrection occurred at one moment in history. The tomb was empty on the first day of the week around the year A. D. 30. Pannenberg quotes Althaus: the Resurrection kerygma “could not have maintained itself in Jerusalem for a single day, for a single hour, if the emptiness of the tomb had not been established as a fact for all concerned.”⁷²

The Resurrection speaks for itself, it needs no interpretation. The objection that Paul does not mention the empty tomb bears little weight. Having Luke as a companion he must have known of it. Paul was concerned with the likeness between Christ and the believers. As He is risen, so they shall rise. Yet the greatest number of bodies of believers will be completely decomposed at the time of the Second Coming. Strictly speaking, our graves will not be opened as it was in the case of Jesus. However, all of us will rise like Jesus. The body of the resurrection will be a *sōma pneumatikon*.⁷³ From our own observation the following might be added: humanly speaking, Paul had not mentioned the institution of the Lord’s Supper if the occasion in Corinth had not called for it. In that case, scholars would argue that Paul knew nothing of the institution of Jesus!

Pannenberg is fully aware of the fact that in speaking of the Resurrection he is using metaphorical language, for “the intended reality and the mode in which it is expressed in language are essentially different. The intended reality is beyond

⁶⁸ Martin Kähler, *The So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historic-Biblical Christ*, trans. Carl E. Braaten (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964).

⁶⁹ Pannenberg, *Jesus — God and Man*, p. 12.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

⁷¹ Cf. Karl Barth’s development of this thought throughout his *Römerbrief*: History may be a predicate of revelation, but revelation can never be a predicate of history.

⁷² Pannenberg, p. 100.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 88 ff.

the experience of the man who lives on this side of death."⁷⁴ Man is the only creature who knows that he must die. If death is the end, then all hope for a coming fulfillment of life is foolish. Modern medicine has recognized that radical hopelessness is a destructive zone. "The phenomenology of hope indicates that it belongs to the essence of conscious human existence to hope beyond death."⁷⁵ The Platonic idea of immortality of the soul is an inadequate expression of this hope. The dichotomy involved in this view is untenable. Life after death implies the existence of the whole man. Though a historian may not share the apocalyptic hope of the Bible, the nature of a full-grown humanity compels him to hope beyond death, and this is precisely what the New Testament means when it proclaims the Resurrection of Jesus.⁷⁶ In the main body of his work Pannenberg is more in dialog with Barth than he is with Bultmann and his school. He is critical of the incarnational doctrine of Christ. He dismisses the concept of the virgin birth as legendary.⁷⁷ "The unity of Jesus with the Father," he says, "can be found only in the historical particularity of the man Jesus, his message, and his fate. This is not to say that the basis of this unity resides in Jesus' humanity. Of course, the incarnational doctrine is quite right in affirming that the initiative in the event of the incarnation can be sought only on the side of God. However, we can perceive this unity only from the perspective of its result, from the perspective of Jesus' historical reality. Jesus is

no synthesis of human and divine of which we can only see the human side in the historical Jesus. But rather as this man, Jesus is God . . . as man in this particular unique situation. . . ." ⁷⁸ The unity of Jesus with the Father is one of complete dedication to the Father's will. This unity, confirmed by God in the Resurrection, "is the medium of his essential unity with God and the basis of all assertions about Jesus' divine Sonship."⁷⁹ In incarnational Christology the oneness of Jesus with the Father is the presupposition of His unqualified dedication to God. In Pannenberg's view Jesus' obedience vindicates His Sonship. Pannenberg creates at times the impression that he favors an adoptionistic, dynamistic view of the unity of Jesus with the Father. But this is evidently not what he intends, for he says quite clearly: "If Jesus as a person is 'the Son of God', as becomes clear retroactively from his resurrection, then he has always been the Son of God."⁸⁰ Again he quotes Althaus, who writes in his *Die christliche Wahrheit*: "Jesus was what he is before he knew about it."⁸¹ The difference between incarnational Christology and Pannenberg's Resurrection Christology is basically a matter of method. In the former the Incarnation warrants the perfect obedience of Jesus, while according to the latter view the Resurrection affirms Jesus as the obedient Son who always had the Father's goodwill.

Zahrnt says of Pannenberg that he holds a position mediating between Barth and

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 75.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 85.

⁷⁶ Ibid., pp. 83 f.

⁷⁷ Ibid., pp. 141 ff.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 323.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 323.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 349.

⁸¹ Althaus, *Die christliche Wahrheit*, II (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1952), 440.

Bultmann. While Barth begins in heaven above, in eternity, and Bultmann down below, with the kerygma and human existence, Pannenberg establishes himself solidly on history. Pannenberg does what Bultmann abhors; he looks behind the kerygma in order to find a firm foundation on which faith can build: I know what I can believe. Zahrnt minces no words in criticizing Pannenberg. Pannenberg, he says, remains stuck to the past, he has no message for the present (we should not overlook the fact that Zahrnt had no access to Pannenberg's book on Christology).⁸²

In our own opinion, Pannenberg's view of faith is too rationalistic. He fails to understand Luther's dialectical view of revelation, the tension between revelation and the hiddenness of the revealed God. He also fails to appreciate Kierkegaard's understanding of faith as a venture, as a leap. Though we don't want to dismiss lightly Althaus's and Pannenberg's emphasis on the empty tomb, the empty tomb is at best a pointer to the Resurrection (Barth); it does not prove the Resurrection. The disciples could have stolen the body of Jesus "as this story has been spread among the Jews to this day." (Matt. 28:15)⁸³

Another attempt to lead theology beyond the position of Barth and Bultmann is to be found in Moltmann's *Theology of Hope*. While Pannenberg is looking to history, to events that happened in the past, and Bultmann's thought revolves

around existence, around the man of the present, Moltmann directs his reader to the future. In the Middle Ages, Anselm of Canterbury set up the principle *fides quaerens intellectum* — *credo ut intelligam* (faith is seeking understanding—I believe that I may understand). Today, Moltmann says, theology should follow the principle *spes quaerens intellectum* — *spero ut intelligam* (hope is seeking understanding—I hope that I may understand). "Faith hopes in order to know what it believes."⁸⁴ Traditionally, eschatology is called the "doctrine of the last things." It is more appropriate, Moltmann maintains, to call it the doctrine of the first things, for "Christianity is eschatology, is hope, forward looking and forward moving, and therefore also revolutionizing and transforming the present; . . . it is the medium of Christian faith as such, the key in which everything in it is set, the glow that suffuses everything here in the dawn of an expected new day."⁸⁵ If faith depends on hope, then unbelief is grounded in hopelessness. Hopelessness can assume two different forms: it can express itself in "presumptions" or despair. In the 19th century presumption is found at many points in German idealism, including Goethe as well as Karl Marx, whereas despair was a sign of a non-eschatological bourgeois Christianity. In the middle of the 20th century the literary writings of the existentialists represent the form of apostasy from hope. "There is only Camus' 'thinking clearly and hope

⁸² Zahrnt, p. 376.

⁸³ On this problem see also Fuller and the literature there discussed, in particular, Frank Morison (pseudonymous for A. Ross), *Who Moved the Stone? The Evidence for the Resurrection* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1962).

⁸⁴ Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, trans. James W. Leitch from the 5th German edition (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), p. 33.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

no more'” and the theologians retreat to love and *Mimenschlichkeit*.⁸⁶

The concept of God has frequently been marred by Greek categories, Moltmann says. In this connection he does not mention the ancient fathers. Instead, he expresses criticism of Kierkegaard and modern theology in general. They speak of eternal life as life “in the absolute present, in the consciousness of the presence of God. . . . Hence man’s ‘present’ is nothing else but the presence of God.” Man steps out of time and lives in the present. This is not the God of hope of whom the Bible speaks. Hope deals with the future. In the Bible God comes. He is present in promising the future.⁸⁷ For the Greeks the *parousia* was the presence of God. In the New Testament the *parousia* of Christ signifies the advent of Christ, as our Advent hymns proclaim. Both Barth and Bultmann failed to do justice to this Biblical understanding of eschatology. In both systems the future is stated in the paradoxical term of the *nunc aeternum*, in the history of existence.⁸⁸ A theology of hope, yea, Christianity itself, stands or falls with the reality of the resurrection of Jesus. The Easter event is not the “Easter faith of the first disciples (Bultmann); it is the fact of the resurrection itself.”⁸⁹ Since the days of the Enlightenment the Biblical narratives of the Resurrection have been subjected to historical criticism. Scholars have been moved by a *Vorverständnis* (pre-understanding) of what is historically possible. In Biblical times the controversy was between the disciples and the Jews

whether God had raised Jesus from the dead, according to His promises. The modern controversy is concerned with the question whether resurrection is historically possible. The historical question of the historicity of the Resurrection includes the questionability of the historical method as such. The present historical method follows Ernst Troeltsch, who set down the principle of correlation between all historical processes. “The analogy of that which happens before our eyes . . . is the key to criticism.”⁹⁰ As it is plain, the message of the Resurrection does not fit in with this concept of the historical. A scholar, therefore, may dismiss the narrative of the Resurrection as unhistorical. Yet this dealing with its history is theologically incomprehensible for faith. Another possibility is the veering off into the subjective decision of faith as in modern existentialist theology. We are simply asked whether we believe that God acted in the visionary experiences of the first disciples (Bultmann). But the cognitive power of understanding can also be directed towards observing what is dissimilar and individual, accidental and new, similar and the like, Pannenberg argues.⁹¹ But this method too leaves much to be desired; it is too rationalistic. “If . . . Christian theology were to manifest merely a supplementary interest in the individual, contingent and new, then that would be only an interesting variant in the historical picture of history as a whole, yet one that would be possible and conceivable also without a theology of the resurrection.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 24.

⁸⁷ Ibid., pp. 28 ff.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 160.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 165.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 175.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 178. It should be noted that Moltmann too wrote prior to Pannenberg’s *Grundzüge der Christologie*.

..."⁹² The raising of Christ involves not the category of the accidentally new but the exceptional category of the "eschatologically new." This new event proves to be "a *novum ultimum* both as against the similarity in ever-recurring reality and also against the comparative dissimilarity of new possibilities emerging in history."⁹³ The Easter stories are proclamation in the form of a narrative and narrate history in the form of proclamation.⁹⁴ The modern distinction between factual truth and existential truth is foreign to them. The reality that lies behind these reports must be of a kind that *compelled* proclamation to all peoples and a continued formation of a new concept of Jesus. Hence we must inquire into what is before us, into the future announced by the event of the Resurrection and the coming Lord.⁹⁵ The people who worship Him also present themselves in weekly worldly callings. Here he discusses the role of the church in the social and political realm. Zahrnt remarks that Moltmann sets forth certain fundamental principles but fails completely to show how they may be realized in our contemporary world. Thielicke's monumental work in ethics, therefore, still remains unparalleled in Lutheran theology.⁹⁶

⁹² Ibid., p. 179.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid., pp. 188 ff.

⁹⁵ Ibid., pp. 304 ff.

⁹⁶ Zahrnt, pp. 256 ff. Helmut Thielicke, *Theologische Ethik*, 3 vols. (Tübingen: Mohr, 1951), edited in an English translation by Wm. H. Lazareth (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968). Lately Moltmann has spelled out the political implications of his theology in "Existenzgeschichte und Weltgeschichte. Auf dem Wege zu einer politischen Hermeneutik des Evangeliums," contained in *Perspektiven der Theologie* (München: Kaiser-Verlag, 1968).

Concluding our critical review we shall call attention to Oscar Cullmann's recent book, *Heil als Geschichte*. The English title reads like an interpretation of the author's fundamental understanding of the problem: *Salvation in History*.⁹⁷ His main object of criticism is the Bultmann school; but he also declines to follow Pannenberg and his associates. Cullmann does not identify *Heilsgeschichte* with universal history. God's dealing with the world cannot be discerned by reason, because *Heilsgeschichte* is not a continuous unbroken succession of events. *Heilsgeschichte* is selective. Its working can be known by faith only. Since the decision of faith asks me to align myself with that sequence of events, these events must not be demythologized, dehistoricized or de-objectified.⁹⁸ Cullmann is highly critical of modern hermeneutics with its rejection of the subject-object mode of thought. Surely, he says, it is correct that exegesis without presuppositions is an illusion. But to make this conclusion into a principle is more dangerous than not to observe it at all. To interpret a love-song I must know what love is (*Vorverständnis*). A confrontation with the love I have experienced happens quite automatically. "For this a particular

See also Wolf-Dieter Marsch, ed., *Diskussion über die Theologie der Hoffnung* (München: Kaiser-Verlag, 1967).

⁹⁷ Cullmann, *Salvation in History*, trans. S. G. Sowers and others (London: SCM Press, 1967). For consideration of space we shall not include Walter Künneth, *Theology of the Resurrection* (London: SCM Press, 1965). The book was first published in German in 1933. The English translation by James W. Leitch is based on the German edition of 1951. Künneth has long been in the forefront of forces opposed to the Bultmann school.

⁹⁸ *Salvation in History*, p. 70.

effort is seldom necessary. On the contrary, a *special effort* is needed if I am not simply to ascribe my own love experiences of a particular kind to the writer of the love-song, who could have had very different experiences."⁹⁹ Rather than paying so much attention to the philosophical observation about subject-object relationship, we should, Cullmann says, "take to heart the simple necessity that has become the perennial principle of all sound exegesis, the principle not to interpret myself into the text."¹⁰⁰

The term *Heilsgeschichte* means that God carries out His redemptive plan in a series of historical events.¹⁰¹ It is not a history *alongside* general history; rather it unfolds *within* history and thus belongs to history. It belongs to history, but it is not identical with it. It forms only a narrow line within history.¹⁰²

In the final part of his book, Cullmann discusses the relationship between salvation history and church history. Church history, he says, is not simply *Heilsgeschichte*, and the history of dogma is not simply interpretation of the dogma resting on divine revelation. Yet church history is the place where we must look for the divine unfolding of *Heilsgeschichte*, and the history of Christian thought is the

place where we must look for the unfolding of its interpretation in constant contact with the Bible.¹⁰³ Protestants should avoid a too narrow concept of the canon. To be sure, the formation of the canon marks the conclusion of the apostolic period, but it stands also at the beginning of the post-Biblical period as a point of departure for another stage in salvation history. Catholicism maintains the forceful notion of standing in the process of unfolding, according to God's plan. On the other hand, it shares something of the Protestant trend of denying the continuity by introducing an infallible office that jeopardizes the continuity of the present with the past. For this very reason, the Biblical period ought to remain in its exclusiveness as norm, "but, on the other hand, the present period ought to be recognized in the light of this norm as the unfolding of salvation history."¹⁰⁴ The Bible teaches us also to observe the "signs" of our times. As members of the church, therefore, "we must put the newspaper beside the Bible and, more particularly, the Bible beside the newspaper."¹⁰⁵ The contemporary history of the Jews, he says, is not without significance for the church.¹⁰⁶ Even after Christ's resurrection the call and election of God are irrevocable. Election does not mean the limiting of salvation to the elect "but election for the special mission of proclaiming salvation to the world. That is the path of all salvation history — *universalism as its goal, concentration as the means of its realization.*"

Waterloo, Ont.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 67.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 67. Compare the critical remarks of Jaspers: "Without objectivization there is no consciousness. While I am awake, I arrive at clarity only when I have some object before my eyes or before my thought. But each object implies a subject" (Jaspers, p. 96 [note 49 above]). See the recent book by P. H. Jørgensen, *Die Bedeutung des Subjekt-objektverhältnisses für die Theologie* (Hamburg: Ev. Verlag Herbert Reich, 1967).

¹⁰¹ Cullmann, p. 76.

¹⁰² Ibid., pp. 153 ff.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 309.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 310.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 304.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.