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Rudolf Bultmann's

View of the Resurrection

(The Halo of the Cross)

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## RUDOLF BULTMANN'S VIEW OF THE RESURRECTION

(The Hale of the Cross)

Rudolf Bultmann's view of the resurrection has to be seen in the context of his whole theological outlook. His theological effort is an attempt to discover the meaning of the New Testament for the man of today. To establish this meaning Bultmann moves in two directions at the same time. On the one hand, through the use of modern critical methods of historical research, he endeavours to establish what the New Testament meant to its first recipients (the purely historical question). On the other hand, he is concerned about what the New Testament has to say to us today (the historic or existential question). Bultmann starts with the assumption that the answers to these two questions differ widely.

It is Bultmann's contention that the New Testament contains elements that are completely meaningless for the man of today. Meaningless is not used in the sense that these elements are unintelligible but in the sense that they are without contemporary significance due to the nature of past events, the modern scientific world view and the nature of revelation. The meaningless elements of the New Testament he calls myths, and the task of reinterpreting them, demythologizing. He is not, however, interested in eliminating the meaningless features of the New Testament, like the old liberals, but in reinterpreting them, so that its message may ring into modern ears in all its purity and scandal.

In other words, Bultmann's problem, like that of any Biblical

theologian or preacher, is one of communication: How to translate the New Testament categories of thought into present day terminology. This is the problem of language. As a vehicle for translating the New Testament message, he has chosen the existential<sup>3</sup> categories developed by Martin Heidegger. He thinks that these convey most clearly to modern man the message of the New Testament. In fairness to him it must be said that he does not merely reproduce Heidegger's categories but infuses them with Christian meaning and indeed he transforms them for Christian purposes. This is possible, for as Bultmann maintains, the existential<sup>4</sup> categories are a secularized version of the New Testament view of existence.

Bultmann's definition of myth is very comprehensive and touches the major doctrines of the New Testament in one way or another. "Mythology," he says, "is the use of imagery to express the other-worldly in terms of this world and the divine in terms of human life, the other side in terms of this side."<sup>1</sup> This means that myth objectifies the unobjectifiable. It is for this very reason that the mythological statements of the New Testament are meaningless to the modern mind. By conceiving God as an object, these statements fail to show how God is related to man's existence. However, myth is only a way of speaking. The real purpose of myth "is not to present an objective picture of the world as it is, but to express man's understanding of himself in the world in which he lives. Myth speaks of the power or the powers which man supposes he experiences as the ground and limit of his world and of his own activity and suffering."<sup>2</sup>

The above statements as to the nature and purpose of myth

reveal Bultmann's basic principle. According to him, it is meaningless--i.e. it has no bearing on my existence--to speak about God in <sup>the</sup> objective language of the New Testament, namely, pre-existence, incarnation, atonement, resurrection, exaltation, Holy Spirit, miracles, etc. God's action can only be meaningful when it occurs in a relationship in which both God and man are subjects. God is personal and his action is only significant for my existence when conceived intersubjectively. Bultmann's theology can thus be conceived as an attempt to overcome the subject-object dichotomy that has plagued Western thought for centuries. Here, therefore, as said before, he aligns himself philosophically with the modern existentialist movement which traces its parentage to Kierkegaard. The latter's dictum, "Truth is subjectivity," becomes Bultmann's all-embracing principle. He is consequently concerned more about ontology than about epistemology. Mythological statements are objectionable because they contradict the view of divine being that he holds. Any image that violates his canon of subjectivity is therefore unacceptable and has to be demythologized. It is important to keep this basic principle in mind, for it is the controlling center of Bultmann's theology. Demythologizing is, therefore, the attempt to reclothe the mythological statements and images into a properly subjective form, i.e. it involves de-objectification of the New Testament myths. The whole Gospel must now be recast according to the principle of subjectivity.

In order to maintain his canon of intersubjectivity, Bultmann draws some corollaries that must also be brought into the picture. Firstly, God's action is at the same time transcendent and hidden. "The thought of the action of God," he says, "as unworldly and

transcendent action can be protected from misunderstanding only if it is thought of as an action which happens not between worldly actions and events but as happening within them. The close connection between natural and historical events remains intact as it presents itself to the observer. The action of God is hidden from every eye except the eye of faith. Only the so-called natural, secular (worldly) events are visible to every man and capable of proof. It is within them that God's hidden action is taking place."<sup>3</sup> It follows quite clearly that no man can ever isolate God's act and present it as an object of observation. God's act must not be demonstrable or even supported by objective evidence. God's act is only perceptible to the eye of faith. Miracles, since they present God's act as an object of observation, offend against the thought of God as acting in concealed ways.<sup>4</sup> It is also evident that Bultmann is taking for granted that both the realm of nature and the realm of history can only be explained in their objectivity from the scientific point of view, i.e. according to the laws of nature.

Secondly, the revelation of God always takes the form of personal encounter. "I cannot speak of God's action in general statements; I can speak only of what He does here and now with me, of what He speaks here and now to me."<sup>5</sup> The encounter is always indirect and is concealed by the events that mediate it, namely, the Word of preaching and the existential situation of man.

Thirdly, God's action must give a man a new understanding of himself, which is not a timeless truth but something that has to be

continually appropriated. This self-understanding is the life of faith. Faith is freedom from the past and from the world and openness to God's future.

The problem that now arises in the context of the second corollary is how an event in the past can be made present. At this point Bultmann solves the problem by his distinction between Historie and Geschichte. An event is historisch in so far as it lies wholly within the past. An event is geschichtlich in so far as it is in the past and has an existential significance for the present. This distinction between Historie and Geschichte involves a corresponding distinction between two types of approach. Historie is apprehended "objectively" through historical research. Geschichte is known "subjectively" through personal encounter. The historian qua historian approaches the past in an objective way. But he can also have encounter with the past. When this happens, the historian ceases to regard Historie as an object and refers it to his own existence. He encounters those events of the past as his own history (Geschichte).

The past events upon which the Gospel rests cannot be regarded as events of either kind. Interpreting Bultmann's thought, Owen puts it this way: "It is not enough to regard them as objects in the past that the historian recollects in his memory, since then they would have no contemporary significance. But they cannot obtain this significance by becoming elements in 'my' past history since then they would lose their historical uniqueness. It is necessary both to correlate God's act with a unique event of Historie and, at the same time, to show how this act is a per-

manent possibility for Geschichte." <sup>6</sup> Bultmann thinks that he has achieved both aims through the dialectic of encounter mediated through the kerygma. He says: "This [the kerygma] does not present us with facts of the past in their bare actuality, nor does it lead to an encounter with human existence and its interpretation, but as a sacramental event, it re-presents the events of the past in such a way that it renews them and thus becomes a personal encounter for me." <sup>7</sup>

According to Bultmann then, the Gospel cannot be based either on Historie or Geschichte in the way these are described above. This means on the one hand that the Christ described by the "Jesus of History School" is not the Christ of faith, and, on the other, that he cannot be made our contemporary by a self-promoted encounter, i.e. by an assimilation of him to our own existence as did the Gnostics, who equated Christ with the divine element latent in the human soul. So Bultmann advances the event of the kerygma which is not a self-generated event and sets it up as the encounter-creating event. Through the proclamation God challenges the individual man to accept his call for a true and authentic existence in the here and now. The Word of God now becomes incarnate in the kerygma and addresses me personally. This Word of God is paradoxically related to the once-for-all eschatological event of God in Christ. It was in that event that the Word became flesh and continues to become flesh.

By the Christ-event Bultmann does not mean the Jesus of history but rather the significance that his figure came to have

for the first Christians. In other words, he means the Christ of faith, the Christ of the kerygma. The historical figure is presupposed in the kerygma, but nothing else. In a recent monograph on the relation of the kerygma to the historical Jesus, he maintains his former position that the continuity between the kerygma and the historical Jesus can only be advanced in terms of the Dass and not in terms of the Was and Wie.<sup>8</sup>

Jesus Christ was then for the early Christians the eschatological event and it is as such that He is the "once-for-all", and not as the historical Jesus. This becomes clear when Bultmann affirms: "This 'once-for-all' is not the uniqueness of a historical event but means that a particular historical event, that is, Jesus Christ, is to be understood as the eschatological 'once-for-all'. As an eschatological event, this 'once-for-all' is present in the proclaimed word, not as timeless truth, but as happening here and now.... The paradox is that the word which is always happening here and now is one and the same with the first word of apostolic preaching crystallized in the Scriptures of the New Testament and delivered by men again and again, the word whose content may be formulated in general statements. This is the sense of the 'once-for-all'. It is the eschatological once-for-all because the word becomes event here and now in the living voice of the preacher."<sup>9</sup> Every time the kerygma is proclaimed, eternity touches time in grace and judgment.

The separation between Historie and Geschichte in Bultmann is complete. Strictly speaking, the once-for-allness and repeatability



of the Christ event is not a question of Historie and Geschichte, but of Geschichte which has become Historie and of present Geschichte, i.e. of past kerygma and present kerygma. / In final instance they are the same with the Dasein of Jesus presupposed. / It is the proclamation of the end of all human understandings of existence and the bringing in of a new understanding. This new understanding, however, is tied up with the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Bultmann eliminates all the cosmological aspects of the eschatological event of Jesus Christ and keeps only the historized eschatology of John, which to a lesser degree was present also in Paul. The event of Jesus Christ is the kerygma and the kerygma has two aspects: the crucifixion and the resurrection of Christ. The message of the kerygma comes to me as a word of grace and judgment. It demands that I crucify my old self and be open to God's future. To understand myself as crucified and resurrected in Christ, this is the kerygma, this is the new self-understanding. But already we are dealing directly with the resurrection and it is about time that we turn our minds to our main subject. Really we have been dealing with it all along, for Bultmann's theology determines his view of the resurrection.

According to Bultmann, the crucifixion-resurrection complex forms an inseparable unity. We shall therefore consider briefly his view of the cross and proceed to treat more extensively the resurrection. The cross is seen by Bultmann ~~from~~ the double perspective of Historie and Geschichte. Jesus indeed was crucified; this is the bare historical fact. But as a historical fact the cross of Jesus has no meaning for us, although it had for the disciples. The cross of Jesus presented to them a question and also

disclosed to them its own meaning. However, "for us the cross cannot disclose its own meaning; it is an event of the past. We can never recover it as an event in our lives."<sup>10</sup> But the historical cross is only the launching pad for the cross of Christ, the geschichtlich occurrence. Stripped of all mythological elements that present the cross of Christ as an action of God that takes place outside of us and of our world--Son of God who dies, atonement, vicarious suffering--Bultmann sees the cross of Christ as the word of judgment that God addresses to us. The cross is the judgment of ourselves as fallen creatures enslaved to the powers of the world. "To believe in the cross of Christ," he says, "does not mean to concern ourselves with a mythical process wrought outside of us and of our world, with an objective event turned by God to our advantage, but rather to make the cross of Christ our own, to undergo crucifixion with him.... The cross is not an event of the past which can be contemplated, but it is the eschatological event in and beyond time, in so far as it (understood in its significance, that is, for faith) is an ever-present reality."<sup>11</sup>

The present reality of the cross is seen in the sacraments and it is also an ever-present reality in the everyday life of the Christian, that is, it is the constant challenge to crucify ourselves. The historical (historisch) event has created a new historic (geschichtlich) situation. "The preaching of the cross as the event of redemption challenges all who hear it to appropriate this significance for themselves, to be willing to be crucified with Christ." <sup>12</sup>

It is obvious that Bultmann proceeds relentlessly to inter-

pret the event of the cross in complete agreement with the principle and corollaries presented above. The objective fact as such is meaningless; it only elicits questioning on the part of the disciples. The revelation occurs in the understanding of the event. They see through the eye of faith that this is the eschatological event; it is the challenge of God to the person to let go of all worldly security, that is, to die to himself and the world completely and to trust completely in Him. All objective imagery is abandoned; there is only the de-objectified language of personal encounter, the word of address of the kerygma. Eschatology is completely historicized and individualized. Eternity meets us every time we encounter the challenge of God in his word. At that point eternity crosses time.

According to Bultmann the resurrection narratives and every other mention of the resurrection in the New Testament are to be understood as an attempt to convey the meaning of the cross.<sup>13</sup> As such the resurrection simply cannot be a visible fact in the realm of human history.<sup>14</sup> Paul's attempt to prove the miracle of the resurrection by adducing a list of eye-witnesses is entirely unconvincing,<sup>15</sup> "for a historical fact which involves a resurrection from the dead is utterly inconceivable."<sup>16</sup> Both the legend of the empty tomb and the narratives of the appearances insist on the physical reality of the body of the risen Lord, but these are most certainly embellishments of the primitive tradition. In short, Christ did not rise from the dead on the third day; there was no empty tomb. However, one may explain the resurrection

appearances, the only thing that we have to go by is the Easter faith. How this faith arose has been completely obscured by tradition and is basically of no importance!<sup>17</sup>

The resurrection conceived as a miracle cannot be a proof of the redemptive significance of the cross because the resurrection is an article of faith and one cannot invoke an article of faith to prove another. Besides, the resurrection of a corpse tells us nothing about the significance of the event, namely, the eschatological fact of the destruction of death.<sup>18</sup> The resurrection is in fact a way of speaking about the eschatological event.

It is as the eschatological event par excellence that the New Testament is interested in the resurrection. It was through the resurrection that Christ abolished death and brought life and immortality. <sup>to light</sup> The Christian participates in Christ's death and resurrection through baptism and also in everyday life. The resurrection is the holt of the cross, for actually to die means to live. Put in Bultmann's own words: "Faith in the resurrection is really the same thing as faith in the saving efficacy of the cross."<sup>19</sup> Simply stated, the cross-resurrection complex is the two-sided kerygmatic word that is addressed to man. Through the kerygma man is judged and saved at the same time; through it man is challenged to abandon his unauthentic life--the life of the flesh--and in the decision of faith to lay hold of authentic life--the life of the Spirit. This is the existential meaning of the death and resurrection of Christ. The event is eschatological, for when I respond to the kerygma, old things pass away and behold they are made new. At this point eternitiy crosses time. The cross-resurrection complex

is the new possibility of self-understanding that comes to man in the kerygma as a gift of God.

Again it is evident that Bultmann has applied relentlessly his basic presuppositions to the resurrection as he did to the cross. Gone is any trace of objectivity. The resurrection as an event in time is an impossibility and cannot be conceived. The resurrection appearances cannot explain anything apart from the fact that the disciples came to believe in the risen Christ. Everything again falls in grand fashion into the two-pronged concept of self-understanding through encounter. The crucified and the risen one exists only in the kerygma. "If he [the hearer] heeds it as the word spoken to him, adjudicating to him death and thereby life, then he believes in the risen Christ."<sup>20</sup>

Now that we have before us a fairly clear picture of Bultmann's conception of the cross-resurrection complex, let us attempt an evaluation of the same. The cross will not detain us in this criticism.

The basic question that we should like to raise is the one concerning the historicity of the resurrection. Bultmann seems to be very sure that there is no historical kernel behind the empty tomb and that nothing can be said about the resurrection appearances except that the disciples came to believe in the risen Christ. But is this a tenable position? Is the event of the resurrection to be reduced just to an article of faith as Bultmann would have us believe? Can it be maintained that Paul is destroying the genuine presentation of the kerygma when he adduces the list of

witnesses as an assurance of the resurrection?<sup>21</sup>

This is not the place to make a detailed form-critical study of the course of the Easter appearances and the empty tomb story in the tradition. However, von Campenhausen has made such a study and has come to the following conclusion: "From the confused quantity of traditional materials two facts stand out as essential: a series of indubitable appearances of Christ, which take place in Galilee, and the discovery of the empty in Jerusalem.... Both these facts...are to be retained and constitute the firm point of departure which must guide us if a connected reconstruction of the Easter story is to be outlined."<sup>22</sup> In respect to the empty tomb von Campenhausen reached his conclusion after eliminating all the legendary and polemical traces in the Markan pericope (Mk. 16:1-7, the oldest account of the empty tomb). Still he does not argue that the resurrection constitutes a miraculous proof for the unbeliever nor does he pretend to solve the question of the whereabouts of the body of Jesus. In connection with this last point, all kinds of fantastic solutions may be proposed; the field is as wide as unfruitful. But, "whoever instead of these would like to accept the bodily resurrection," asserts von Campenhausen, "leaves the realm of analogical understanding and with that the realm of every discussion feasible with historical means. However, the one who believes in the bodily resurrection of Jesus is not afraid of this. Since the question here is supposed to be in every sense one of a peculiar event with which the new 'Aeon' begins and in which therefore the old world with its laws really ends, the natural impossibility to accept

something of this kind as probable seems rather quite necessary and theologically speaking 'natural'. The situation is difficult only for the one who would like to take the resurrection faith seriously and holds, however, that the bodily resurrection is superfluous or entirely vexatious. There remains to him the peculiarly painful solution to follow on the one hand the early Christians in the confession of the resurrection but, on the other, the Jews as to what called forth that confession," i.e. that it was all a sham or a swindle.<sup>23</sup>

To our way of thinking, von Campenhausen has brought to our attention a factor in the resurrection witness of the New Testament that cannot simply be thrown overboard, namely, the historical basis of the resurrection narratives. He also has been careful not to go beyond the realm of historical probability. This, of course, does mean that the objective historical fact is not unimportant and meaningless. Is this too much for Bultmann? Obviously, yes. He cannot accept this approach to the problem, at least for three reasons: (1) his historical skepticism; (2) his abandonment of history to natural law; (3) because an event like an objective resurrection would violate his basic principle of intersubjectivity.

In respect to Bultmann's historical skepticism we can only say that it seems to us that he goes beyond the canons of sound historical procedure by exaggerating and emphasizing the inextricability and insufficiency of the available reports and by explaining that the history of the resurrection is not to be caught at all with the tools of historical criticism. What remains is the kerygma which demands faith. In reality this solution is too

simple for it only serves to withdraw faith from the challenge which comes from history and historical reason. Actually, one of the reasons why Bultmann can be so skeptical about historical research is due to the fact that his existential kerygma is not at all affected by historical criticism. This untouchability of the faith in turn produces recklessness in the evaluation of historical data.

The other objection that Bultmann would advance against the view of the resurrection that we are advocating is that such a thing is an impossibility and cannot even be conceived. It is indeed amazing how Bultmann throughout his works again and again says that such and such a thing in the New Testament is meaningless today because of our scientific world view. What does he mean by scientific world view? In the writings of his that we have been able to read, nowhere does he give an account of what he means by scientific world view, except in the most general way. It seems to us that he is propounding the view that miracles cannot happen because they break the law of nature and the connection of historical events. But can we accept this view of nature without further ado? And furthermore, are the canons of natural science valid to deal with the realm of history? As a consequence, in order to maintain freedom and spontaneity he sets up the realm of the invisible and trans-objective personal reality where what happens is all in the dimension of self-understanding through personal encounter and the relation to the outside (objective) reality is only tangential. This involves the renfing of reality into two mutually exclusive realms, one under the dominion of the law of nature



and the other the realm of decision and freedom. There is an out and out dualism that seems to have as theme: "East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet."

It might be helpful to bring in at this point Niebuhr's definition of nature. "Broadly speaking," he says, "we may refer by the use of the term to our idea of the whole system of categories by which we comprehend the environment in which we participate individually and socially. Or, the term may refer to a particular event, or groups of such, which has its own nature or physis, that is, way of acting and existing... Let us call the system of law by which we interpret and organize the events of our environment Nature; and let the term nature stand for the peculiar mode of activity and existence which characterizes any individual as an individual. It is important, then, to realize that every historical event participates in Nature only if it has nature, but that the system of Nature does not necessarily include all aspects of the nature of any individual."<sup>24</sup> It is further to be observed that the primary characteristic of the idea of Nature is lawfulness and that "the laws of Nature are essentially generalized descriptions of classes of events."<sup>25</sup> Besides these laws of Nature are highly abstract; they are "merely highly refined propositions of a very general character based on ordinary human modes of knowledge."<sup>26</sup> Also, these laws have a historical genesis and are not therefore a priori laws of thought. They are not formulated on the basis of a self-evident regularity. Rather, it is the confrontation with the contingent that "elicits our capacity

to construct operational hypotheses and to organize experience."<sup>27</sup> However, the laws that we formulate "do not formulate the events to which they apply. The individual events to which laws are applicable remain themselves in their givenness, inexplicable on the grounds of the law itself."<sup>28</sup>

If, then, this distinction between Nature and nature is valid, and we think it is, it follows that the assertion that the resurrection is an impossibility or cannot be conceived is a gratuitous statement based on an idea of Nature which pretends to determine the totality of the nature of an event. It is this last concept which is an impossibility, and really should not be conceived. The resurrection as such has its own nature defined by the individuality of Jesus, and as such transcends the apostolic testimony.<sup>29</sup> Bultmann refuses even to allow us to imagine the resurrection, but his prohibition is given by his confidence in the validity of the idea of law as a pattern of history.<sup>30</sup>

And now let us turn our attention to the third objection that Bultmann would raise against the view of the resurrection that we are sponsoring. According to him, such a view contradicts his basic distinction between subject and object. God is personal and his action can only be significant for existence when conceived intersubjectively. This is the issue of Historie and Geschichte. To some extent it was touched on in the last point. Bultmann's theology is basically so simple that anything said at one point applies to all points along the line.

According to the New Testament, Christ belonged in a wholly new way to Historie and Geschichte. But this transformation of

the historical into the historic does not take place as Bultmann alleges, through the kerygma, but rather through the resurrection--the same event that Bultmann robs of all factuality. When Paul preached the resurrection he was proclaiming a historical event that had objectively occurred and had been attested by many witnesses. However, at the same time he proclaimed the reality of the historic person who was present subjectively to the believer through the Holy Spirit. The event was thus simultaneously historical and historic. There is an indissoluble union between the two that cannot be rent asunder without falsifying the event. At this point it may be mentioned that one of the outstanding features of the resurrection appearances is the fact of the identity between the Jesus that the disciples had known and the one they were now beholding, although it must be added immediately that the element of strangeness was also present. On the issue of identity the empty tomb story is important, as Kech has shown.<sup>31</sup>

But this is not acceptable to Bultmann, for it violates his canon of intersubjectivity. Again we have to say that it is Bultmann's principle that determines his conclusion and accordingly it must be rejected as inadequate. Owen also notices the inadequacy of Bultmann's basic presupposition. "The difference between the New Testament and Bultmann," he says, "is a difference in the relation that they posit between time and eternity. The New Testament speaks of a unique movement in past history whereby God took time into his being and eternalized it. Bultmann knows only of a Kierkegaardian dialectic according to which eternity crosses time whenever God meets man in an encounter. He would certainly claim

that he is demythologizing (i.e. de-objectifying) the New Testament, but all he does in fact is to exclude from consideration any view of history that does not square with his own subject-object dichotomy. In trying to make the Gospel fit his own conceptual framework he deprives it of the very uniqueness that so sincerely he wishes to conserve."<sup>32</sup> We do not see how Bultmann can escape this charge for the offense of the Gospel is not merely that eternity crosses time every time God speaks to man through an encounter, or that the present encounters the Christian enjoys were made possible by the past events of Christ's life and death. "The offense is simply that the eternal God himself entered time and took time into his own nature--that He himself entered Historie and made it Geschichte." <sup>33</sup> This involves taking the incarnation as something more than a symbol, and this Bultmann would not do. Yet to our way of thinking, departure from this central point involves such a radical transformation of the New Testament message that one wonders whether there has been any revelation at all.

And this leads us to ask the question whether Bultmann's kerygma has its locus in the New Testament. How the disciples received their insight into the meaning and import of the death of Christ, Bultmann does not explain. It cannot obviously be explained on the basis of the kerygma, for it is the kerygma itself that is the insight. At any rate, how can the cross of Jesus, which is an objective event, produce an encounter with God, when there is no kerygma to start with? The answer that the cross--the bare fact--elicits the kerygma seems to us completely unwarranted

if we are to follow Bultmann's principle. To grant that the cross as such produced the kerygma amounts to saying that an objective event can be taken as an action of God. This, according to Bultmann, cannot happen except when seen through the eye of faith. All that can be said, then, is that the disciples were inwardly illuminated, notified by God that this was the meaning of the cross. But is this what the New Testament means by the Christ-event?

If this is so, the question might legitimately be asked of Bultmann whether his concept of the kerygma cannot be attached to such a passage of the Old Testament as Isaiah 53, where the concept of death and the life-bringing character of such a death are so strongly emphasized. Is not Isaiah 53 a kerygmatic passage à la Bultmann? If this is so, then there is no need of Christ, for in final analysis, what can be said about Christ is that through his death men are challenged to die to themselves, and to die is to live. Can we not legitimately infer this from Isaiah 53, especially if some other passages of the Old Testament and even from the intertestamental literature are brought in? This is a very serious criticism of Bultmann, for it shows that his kerygma does not have its locus in the New Testament but can be pegged to any theory of existence that takes God, history and death seriously, as they are taken in Isaiah 53 and other passages in the Old Testament. Then why hang the kerygma onto the bare cross of Jesus? It would be interesting to see how a Jewish existentialist would handle Isaiah 53 and the Jewish concept of eschatology. We suspect that his conclusions might be very similar to those of Bultmann.

We are aware of the fact that Bultmann has consistently affirmed

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that his kerygma presupposes the historical Jesus in the sense that the eschatological event is predicated on the basis of the historical cross. However, his affirmations seem to us quite unconvincing in view of the fact that it might not take much effort to relate Bultmann's concept of the kerygma to the Old Testament, especially in view of the concept of the word present there and in the apocryphal literature. In this connection Owen points out that Bultmann's statement that eternity crosses time every time we have an encounter with God is rather the message of the prophets than of the New Testament. "Bultmann," he says, "formulates his dialectical principle in the language of existentialism, but the principle itself is implicit in the Old Testament. According to the prophets, eternity enters time whenever God's Word comes to man through a historical event."<sup>34</sup> All this means that we must take more at face value such concepts as pre-existence, incarnation, resurrection, and the Holy Spirit.

The weakness of Bultmann's theology seems to lie in the fact that the kerygma rests completely on the apostolic understanding of the cross-event. The resurrection as a separate event is robbed of all reality. It seems to us, however, that it is the resurrection that qualifies the cross and not viceversa. In other words, the resurrection is not just a way of speaking about what men are called to do, but is the eschatological event that makes any kerygma possible. The order cannot be reversed.

The only reason why the kerygma has power to grip men's minds today is because of the resurrected Christ, because of the new dimension present within the reality of God on account of the

incarnation, the cross, and the resurrection. Bultmann has transferred the creative power of the resurrected Christ to the kerygma. If Bultmann is right, we have to say that all Christian trinitarian formulations are off base. The kerygma indeed challenges man to change his ways and to understand himself as created by, in and for God, and to trust in Him completely. Yet behind it stands the power of the Resurrected One, the one who even now intercedes in and for us. Behind the creative word stands the creative person and this one is the Christ of God. The priority pertains to the person and not to the Word. The mystery of God cannot be reduced to the mystery of the word; on the contrary, the mystery of the word can only be grasped in the light of the mystery of the triune God--Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

This view of revelation breaks existentialist categories. In this case existentialist categories can be characterized as the old wineskins that cannot contain the event of the revelation of God in Christ. Before the event of the revelation, all human conceptualizations break down and have to be surrendered, together with the old self. There is no such thing as the perfect philosophical approach to an understanding of the Gospel. Before the revelation we sit and hear and respond in faith and obedience. The formulations are necessary but they cannot become absolute. Nevertheless, we should not fail to profit from such a theological effort as Bultmann has undertaken. His insights as to the meaning of Christian life are very much in line with the message of the New Testament. The only thing wrong is that he dissolves the very

basis of the message and stands, so to speak, in mid-air. But that is where he wants to stand and can stand, granted his pre-suppositions. But we are not inclined to follow in his footsteps.

It seems to us inconceivable that the early Christians came to conceive of the Christian faith as a new understanding of existence in the light of the cross, apart from the event of the resurrection, granting all along that the narratives have been embellished by legendary elements and distorted by the apologetic motif. Yet the kernel remains: the empty tomb and the appearances of the Christ. It is within this complex of fact and experience that the Easter faith arises. It is not merely a new understanding of human existence in the light of the cross, but rather a new understanding of the human situation in view of the mighty act of God in raising Jesus from the dead. It is because of this deed that the cross is seen as an instrument of his saving purposes. But Bultmann cannot allow the resurrection to stand on its own legs because it is inconceivable from the scientific point of view and because it violates his canon of subjectivity. The fact remains, however, that the Christian faith is based on historical events that can be variously interpreted and are at the same time all-important to the faith. The problem cannot be solved by abandoning all the historical basis of the faith and by creating a new realm of meaning that protects the faith against historical uncertainties. Would it not be more in harmony with the faith character of the message to affirm on the one hand its historical basis--which cannot be eliminated on any grounds--and on the other, the finality of the same? At any rate, it does not detract



from faith to understand it within the realm of probability as to its historical rootage, for after all, this is the best that historical reason can do.

FOOTNOTES

1. Rudolf Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology," Kerygma and Myth, ed. Hans Werner Bartsch. (Harper & Row, New York, 1961), p. 10, note 2.
2. Ibid.
3. Rudolf Bultmann, Jesus Christ and Mythology (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), pp. 61-62.
4. Ibid., p. 65.
5. Ibid., p. 66.
6. H. P. Owen, Revelation and Existence (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1957), p. 114.
7. Rudolf Bultmann, "A reply to the Theses of J. Schniewind," Kerygma and Myth, p. 175.
8. Rudolf Bultmann, Das Verhältniss der urchristlichen Christusbotschaft zum historischen Jesus (Carl Winter: Universitätsverlag, Heidelberg, 1961), passim.  
Here Bultmann also denies the validity of the attempts of men like Fuchs, Ebeling, Käsemann, Bernkamm and Robinson to see the kerygma already present in a nutshell in the message of Jesus. He maintains that at no point can these scholars overcome the discrepancy between the message of Jesus and the message of the church, i.e. the proclaimer becomes the proclaimed.
9. \_\_\_\_\_, Jesus Christ and Mythology, pp. 81-82.
10. \_\_\_\_\_, "New Testament and Mythology," Kerygma and Myth p. 38.
11. Ibid., p. 36.
12. Ibid., p. 37.
13. Ibid., p. 38.
14. Rudolf Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament, Vol. I, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), p. 295.
15. Ibid.
16. \_\_\_\_\_, "New Testament and Mythology", Kerygma and Myth, p. 39.

17. \_\_\_\_\_, Theology of the New Testament, Vol. I, p. 45.
18. \_\_\_\_\_, New Testament and Mythology, p. 40.
19. Ibid., p. 39.
20. \_\_\_\_\_, Theology of the New Testament, Vol. I, p. 306.
21. Perhaps I Cor. 15 is the greatest obstacle that Bultmann finds along the road of demythologization. Paul is our first and most reliable witness and yet he seems to have believed in an objective resurrection event. Bultmann has no other choice but to declare Paul's argument unconvincing.
22. Hans Freiherr von Campenhausen, "Der Ablauf der Osterereignisse und das leere Grab," Tradition und Leben (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1960), p. 96. See appendix for a summary of von Campenhausen's reconstruction.
23. Ibid., pp. 111-112.
24. Richard R. Niebuhr, Resurrection and Historical Reason (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1957), p. 164.
25. Ibid., p. 165.
26. Ibid., p. 164.
27. Ibid., p. 167.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid., p. 164.
30. Ibid., p. 165.
31. Gerhard Koch, Die Auferstehung Jesu Christi (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1959), pp. 157-170. "The significance of the empty tomb," he says, "can be ascertained to the place where it points to the appearances and on its basis the appearance of the crucified one becomes clear. It is the sign of the identity of the person and the unity of the two world-functions of Jesus Christ... It is not a symbol which can be declared from the world. It is the 'corresponding sign' to that which realizes itself in the appearance of the resurrected one." (pp. 170-171)

When accused that he destroys the continuity between the historical Jesus and the kerygma--since for the early disciples the Risen One was identical with the earthly Jesus, Bultmann answers as follows: "From the fact that I emphasize the discrepancy between the historical Jesus and the Christ of the kerygma,

it does not follow that I destroy the continuity between the historical Jesus and the primitive proclamation. I say explicitly between the historical Jesus and the primitive proclamation and not between the historical Jesus and Christ. For the Christ of the kerygma is not a historical figure which can stand in continuity with the historical Jesus. However, the kerygma which proclaims him is a historical phenomenon; it is only a question of the relation between the latter and the historical Jesus." (Das Verhältnis der urchristlichen Christusbotschaft zum historischen Jesus, p. 8).

In this statement Bultmann carefully avoids the identification of Jesus and Christ. This is what is to be expected from one who denies the reality of the resurrection. But it is precisely his view of this event that determines his interpretation. Once the resurrection is denied, a separate existence as a historical event alongside of the other historical events, then the neat distinction between Jesus and the Christ holds true.

32. Owen, op. cit., pp. 116-117.

33. Ibid., pp. 118.

34. Ibid., p. 117.

# APPENDIX

After analyzing form-critically the course of the Easter events in the Pauline, gospel and apocryphal traditions, von Campenhausen makes the following reconstruction ("Der Ablauf der Osterereignisse und das leere Grab," Tradition und Leben, pp. 107-108):

1. After the arrest and death of Jesus the disciples at first remained in Jerusalem (all the Gospels) but did not come into the open (Mk. and Mt.). Concerning their state of mind we are given no more precise information. They were perplexed and defeated but were by no means finished with the event (Lk.).

2. Very soon, probably "on the third day", women from the circle of the disciples of Jesus discovered that his place of burial was open and empty. (all the Gospels). Appearances of Jesus did not take place here at first (Mk., Lk.).

3. The report caused restlessness among the disciples. Peter above all seems to understand the empty tomb as a guarantee of a successful resurrection and to have influenced the others in this direction (Lk.).

4. Thereupon the disciples traveled under the direction of Peter toward Galilee (Mk., Mt., Gospel of Peter) in the hope of meeting Jesus there (Mk., Mt.).

5. Then followed first an appearance before Peter alone (P. ls., Lk.), then before "the twelve" (P. ls., all Gospels), then before five hundred brethren (P. ls.), then before James (P. ls., Gospel to the Hebrews) and then before all the apostles (P. ls.). The occurrences are most easily thought of as coming in quick succession. However it is possible that the last appearance or the last two took place already in Jerusalem. In any case, here are to be found later Peter, James, "the twelve" and a larger circle of the Galilean disciples (P. ls., Acts).

6. Much later the last appearance before Paul followed, falling in this respect outside the series (P. ls., Acts). It is not excluded that in the first time additional resurrection appearances took place. But all the reports are to a high degree doubtful.

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