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THE THEOLOGY OF RUDOLF BULTMANN AND SECOND-CENTURY GNOSIS¹

In the second chapter of the Prolegomena to his recent study 'Salvation as History' (*Heil als Geschichte*)² Oscar Cullmann argues for the similarity of Rudolf Bultmann's theology and the gnosis of the second century. Cullmann works out the comparison starting with both gnosticism and Bultmann's denial of the idea of salvation as history. And if, in the second century, the early church's struggle with gnosticism was really a matter of life and death, is there not, Cullmann asks, in the present theological debate something similar at stake?

This thesis is a challenge to the historian. My considered opinion is that Bultmannian theology and gnosis *do* have something to do with each other, and I should like to try in this paper to determine the relation of the two systems of thought more closely.³ In doing so, I do not want to fail to do justice to Bultmann, by not adequately pointing out in Part I the *differences* between him and the gnostics of the second century.⁴

I

Bultmann himself has, of course, often expressed his opinion of gnosis in his historical-exegetical works.⁵ It is not too much to say that his penetrating grasp of the basic traits of gnosticism is correct. Bultmann has even the merit (cf. also Hans Jonas, *Gnosis und spätantiker Geist*)⁶ of having steered gnostic research away from the predominant effort to set the gnostic systems only in history-of-religion categories and directed it towards the phenomenon of world- and

¹ A paper read at the Cambridge meeting of *S.N.T.S.*, on 31 August 1966.

² Tübingen, 1965, pp. 6-10. Eng. ed. 'Salvation in History', *S.C.M.*, New Testament Library, 1967.

³ This, of course, can be only a modest contribution to the discussion. The problems we deal with here are much too complex; they cannot be 'solved' in a few pages. I must also, unfortunately, let all that has been written on Bultmannian and Cullmannian theology in the last few years, itself a flood of literature, go by untouched.

⁴ Cullmann's view must not be misunderstood to mean that he compares the theology of Bultmann *as such* with the theology of the gnostics of the second century, and then rejects them both. Cullmann sees the affinity of Bultmann and the gnostics *only* in their common rejection of the salvation-as-history theology. Cullmann could, therefore, put more emphasis on the differences between the two, although it is not important to him in the context of this treatment.

⁵ Cf. for example (according to the date of appearance): art. 'γινώσκω, γινώσις. . .', in *Th.W.B.* 1, 688-719; *Das Evangelium des Johannes* (Meyer-Komm.) 10.-14. Aufl. (1941-56); *Das Urchristentum im Rahmen der antiken Religionen* (Zürich, 1949), especially pp. 181 ff., 193 ff.; *Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, 5. Aufl. (1965), § 15, pp. 162-83; further: *Glauben und Verstehen*, II (1965⁴), 129 ff., 203 ff.; IV (1965), 78 ff.

⁶ I, 1. Aufl. (1934), *FRLANT* N.F. 33.

self-understanding manifested in them. Even if opinion on various individual issues has to be revised (e.g. on Mandaëism); even if our knowledge of Egyptian gnosis has been considerably enlarged since the findings of Nag Hammadi; even if the question about the origin of gnosticism has been re-considered recently again,¹ Jonas' and Bultmann's grasp of the essence of gnosis will certainly remain valid.

As a matter of fact, with gnosticism an understanding of existence new to the antique world emerged.² The Jew and Greek had felt at home in their world, in their clan: gnostic man discovered his essential other-worldliness, his strangeness in the world and a loneliness to go with it. Gnostic man felt himself enslaved to 'powers' and so reached out for salvation, which was granted him in 'gnosis' as a message from the 'upper world' which yet simultaneously welled up out of his innermost self.

Bultmann emphasizes that as soon as early Christianity settled on hellenistic soil there had to be a confrontation between Christianity and the gnostic 'Zeitgeist'; and there was. In that confrontation the inner affinity, and *also* the difference, between gnosis and Christianity showed up. This early meeting explains why gnostic terminology and mythological ideas were not only adopted by the heretical Christian gnosis (afterwards excommunicated), but also by the main stream of the church tradition. Gnostic terminology and mythological ideas were even assimilated by various New Testament writers (especially Paul and John), not, however, without their reinterpretation from the viewpoint of the Christian faith. I need not mention particulars of this assimilation and reinterpretation, for Bultmann has done this in his writings in a cautious, perceptive, practically incontrovertible way.

In spite of this, has Bultmann now become a heretical gnostic in his own work as an exegete of the New Testament? I really do not believe, on the basis of what has been said up to now, that this reproach is justified. In the main parts of his theology Bultmann's ideas diverge fundamentally from those of the heretical gnosis of the second century. For example, his conception of God is far removed from the dualistic conception of the heretical gnostics. God is, for Bultmann, at one and the same time the demanding one, the judge, *and* the gracious one, never the one without the other. In his Christology, in contrast to the heretical gnosis, Bultmann emphasizes the historical 'that' (*daß*) of the revelation in Jesus; the cross (a *skandalon* for every heretical gnostic!) even takes the central place within the Bultmannian doctrine of salvation—it is the cross of Christ which reveals to man his

¹ Here I have in mind the arguments of R. M. Grant, G. Quispel; cf. also E. Haenchen, G. Kretschmar.

² The question need not trouble us now how far this, in a more radical way, expresses a 'Weltgefühl' analogous to the one that broke into the open with hellenistic 'religious' philosophy and mystery religion piety and really built itself up further in hellenistic, even Palestinian, Judaism. When one has gone so far discovering these relationships, it is a temptation to find political and social causes for this spiritual change in late antiquity; and modern parallels seem to suggest themselves easily.

sin, his 'boasting', his 'want-to-do-it-himself', and which sets him before the decision For-or-Against God.¹ And finally, the anthropology of Bultmann is differentiated from the nature-bound fate dualism of the heretical gnosis by his presenting an ethical, person-bound decision dualism, which, when it comes to ethics, does not let the newly won freedom degenerate into asceticism or libertinism but keeps that freedom dialectically bound to the claim of love (faithful to the Pauline formula $\omega\varsigma\ \mu\eta$ which Bultmann likes). This genuine New Testament paradox—'as well as'—seems to me to be maintained in all the points mentioned (others could be given); and this paradox affirmed sets Bultmann's thought apart from the heretical gnosis.

We could press further and ask whether the fact that Bultmann deals with modern existentialist philosophy has turned him into a latter-day gnostic 'heretic'. Here too, a premature judgement is out of place. All theology is time-bound: this fact becomes obvious to the historian again and again. Theology is served, willingly or unwillingly, by the language of its time and milieu, together with the age's structures of thinking and contents of imagination. This adaptation from one's age includes critically argued adaptation, but one's being influenced (while influencing too) cannot be escaped. The very dispute between church and gnosis in the second century is a model example of such mutual attraction and repulsion: not only the (originally ethnic) gnosis was steadily influenced by Christianity when it made contact, but also church doctrine (originally rooted in Jewish thinking) opened itself up more and more to the influence of gnostic ideas. (This could be proved not only from the Alexandrians Clement and Origen but also from Irenaeus.) And so it has continued through the centuries. Why should not modern theology engage in dialogue with its 'contemporaries', with existentialist philosophy, without hiding it? If already the New Testament writers saw in the gnostic understanding of existence a genuine pre-understanding of Christian faith, which they thankfully used in order to make the kerygma of the crucified Christ comprehensible to their gnostic contemporaries, why should we Christians not deal today with the analysis of being that is found in the existentialist philosophy which has created a pre-understanding for the Christian world and Christian self-understanding (and so is related to gnosis despite all the differences²)? Seeking and finding a modern 'point of contact' for

¹ With such an emphasis on the Cross one can hardly regard Bultmann's disinterest in the 'historical Jesus' as a hidden docetism (cf. e.g. Bultmann's writing 'Die Bedeutung des geschichtlichen Jesus für die Theologie des Paulus', *Glauben und Verstehen*, 1 (1964⁵), 188–213; *Das Verhältnis des urchristlichen Christuskerygmas zum historischen Jesus* (Heidelberg, 1962³). The New Testament itself tends to let the 'historical Jesus' appear more as a 'cosmic person'. Nevertheless it must be said that Bultmann's Christology shrinks into the message of the Cross. (Cf. e.g. 'Die Christologie des Neuen Testaments', *Glauben und Verstehen*, 1 (1964⁵), 245–67.) On this cf. the critique of Karl Barth, *Rudolf Bultmann. Ein Versuch, ihn zu verstehen*, 1952 (Theologische Studien, 34).

² This is why the phenomenological investigation of Gnosis by H. Jonas has proved so fertile, although he sometimes has heideggerianized gnosis. (The expression 'verheideggert' is found in H. J. Schoeps, *Urgemeinde-Judenchristentum-Gnosis* (Tübingen, 1956), p. 35; he refers mostly, however, to the first half-volume of the second part of Jonas' book, 1954.)

Christian preaching is legitimate.¹ Everything depends, however, on how this hermeneutic work is done, whether the 'translation' keeps the nucleus, the structure of the Christian message itself, developing it in a modern way, or whether the Christian message is betrayed to a foreign principle. It was on these grounds already in early Christendom that heretical gnosis was distinguished from the legitimate gnosis of the church. On these same grounds it must also be decided where Bultmannian theology belongs.

It seems to me that Bultmann has expressed himself clearly enough in his writings on this problem.² Relations with the given 'pre-understanding' serve only to uncover its questionability and to draw it into the light of the kerygma, where it is revealed as 'sin'. It is therefore unjustified to reproach Bultmann for having an anthropological starting-point to his theology,³ because the possibility of 'faith' (*Glauben*) really always implies the possibility of its 'understanding' (*Verstehen*). The difference between legitimate and illegitimate hermeneutics might well be demonstrated by opposing Bultmannian theology to heretical gnosis of the second century: while the heretical gnosis really starts from an anthropological pre-understanding which it labels *per se* Christian (note its denial of the New Testament concept of sin!), Bultmannian theology sharply emphasizes the contradictions of the Christian kerygma to human pre-understanding.

II

Thus Bultmann does not belong to the heretical gnostics of the second century—not because the bases of his theology are not born in existentialist philosophy or heretical gnosis, but because they stem from the New Testament itself.

Why does Cullmann then, and why do I dare, compare him to the gnosis of the second century? First of all, because Bultmann relies primarily on those writings of the New Testament which have exposed themselves most to the gnostic challenge and therefore have not remained free from gnostic influence. Bultmann's theology, therefore, has a one-sidedness to it for which Cullmann, standing theologically on the opposite side, has a specially sharp

¹ I think even Karl Barth would not react so severely against this position as he did in the forties!

² Cf. 'Das Problem der natürlichen Theologie', *Glauben und Verstehen*, I, 294–312; 'Die Frage der natürlichen Offenbarung', 'Anknüpfung und Widerspruch', 'Das Problem der Hermeneutik', *Glauben und Verstehen*, II, 79–104, 117–32, 211–35; 'Der Begriff der Offenbarung im Neuen Testament', 'Wissenschaft und Existenz', 'Ist voraussetzungslose Exegese möglich?', *Glauben und Verstehen*, III, 1–34, 107–21, 142–50. Cf. also *Glauben und Verstehen*, IV, 162 ff.

³ This reproach appears again and again: cf. already Barth, *op. cit.* (p. 335, n. 1 above). Also the critique produced by W. Pannenberg ('Hermeneutik und Universalgeschichte', *Z. Th.K.* LX (1963), 90 ff.) against the hermeneutics of Bultmann follows this direction (cf. also O. Cullmann, *Heil als Geschichte*, pp. 46 ff.) and does not seem to me to be substantiated enough, although he points out (legitimately) a certain narrowness in Bultmann's hermeneutic questioning. (We shall encounter it in the course of our investigation.)

sensibility.¹ Further, Bultmann presents this one-sided bias of the New Testament in a way that actually brings it *close* at points to falsification of the Christian message in the direction of the gnosis of the second century.

This will now have to be shown in three connexions, three matters related to the three aspects of salvation-in-the-past, salvation-in-the-present and salvation-in-the-future. Already now it might be stressed that the threatening gnostic falsification of the New Testament testimony seems to be greater as we proceed from one aspect of salvation to the next.²

(1) In Bultmann,³ there is not much positive connecting of the salvation process revealed in Christ to the past. The Old Testament exhibits for him more the type of the pre-Christian man who fails in his 'boasting' and therefore is only a foil to the true faith decision. The history of the people of Israel, as it is presented in the Old Testament, has consequently no positive *heilsgeschichtlich* sense and is in no sense an anticipating preparation and way leading to the salvation in Christ, but at best a derived secondary 'prophecy' of this salvation.

At first it seems we can detect the influence of the heretical gnosis here with its radically negative evaluation of the Old Testament. But this judgement would be premature. For a negative evaluation of the Old Testament has to some extent always been part of even the best in Church tradition. Israel's way of salvation was a blind road because of human sin. Therefore, revelation and legislation in the Old Testament appear to Christian eyes in a self-contradictory light.⁴ It means then only giving a different stress to the negative evaluation if already in the early church this inconsistency is attributed to divine permissiveness (as the main church tradition teaches) or to human addition (as the Jewish-Christian tradition teaches the doctrine of the false pericopes), or even to a *demiourgos* (as the gnostic tradition teaches). Even Cullmann now describes the salvation-as-history line as a wavy line, broken in consequence of human sin.⁵ So we are left with this result: the Old Testament is essentially a negative 'preparation' for the New Testament; it is the testimony of the 'Old' Covenant in contrast, even in opposition, to the 'New' Covenant.

Nevertheless, the Old Testament is still the testimony of the covenant

¹ This one-sidedness of Bultmann's theology seems to me, I might mention, the only point of comparison between Bultmann and the teaching of Marcion. The one-sidedness is, however, quite differently caused on both sides. But in both cases, the *danger* of heresy can be shown, a danger which is caused by this one-sidedness.

² In the following I rely (except for the writings mentioned on p. 1, n. 4) predominantly on Bultmann's pronouncements in the four volumes *Glauben und Verstehen* (1964², 1965⁴, 1965³, 1965), subsequently quoted as I, II, III, IV with the relative page number. Not every single statement, however, will be documented. Cf. also *Geschichte und Eschatologie* (Tübingen, 1958).

³ Cf. I, 313 ff. (also 268 ff.); II, 162 ff. (cf. 105 ff.); III, 91 ff. On the critique: J. E. Scheid, in *Kerygma und Mythos*, v, Erg.bd. 2, pp. 115 ff.

⁴ For this Bultmann says: 'in einem inneren Widerspruch' ('with an internal contradiction'); cf. II, 183.

⁵ *Heil als Geschichte*, pp. 104 ff.

which God has covenanted with man generally and with his people specially,¹ and as such this testimony is prophetic pre-representation, prophecy of what is to come (which only then shows prophecy in its full light). As a matter of fact Bultmann could hold to much of this too.² He does not deny that the Old Testament is the testimony of the covenant of God with his people, and that as such it proclaims also grace and forgiveness and the good, holy law (in the sense of the commandment to love)—but testimony in a kind of temporary shape which received its eschatological, i.e. final, fulfilment in Christ. Thus he does not deny that also the Old Testament is ‘Word of God’, seen from the point of view of Christ, or at least that it can be. However, for him the Old Testament is not God’s word in the sense of biblical proof texts or allegorical exegesis, nor in the sense of a history-as-salvation view, which adopts the progressiveness of salvation as election history (in correlation to the progressiveness of human unfaithfulness)—which for Cullmann, of course, is important.

Here we should look into another question. It is striking that when Bultmann speaks of the Old Testament,³ he almost exclusively speaks of Israelitic national history, which began with Moses; in juxtaposition to that history, then, of course, he can stress the absolutely new which came with Christ in the new aeon (under the rubrics ‘law’ and ‘gospel’). But the Old Testament speaks also of creation, of the first men and the patriarchs (although in mythical form). Does that not broaden the picture? Do we not here have the frame of reference *within* which the national history of Israel takes place? And is not this framework just as important for the New Testament (and naturally for the early church too) as the national history of Israel? Let us take two Pauline examples: Is not Adam the representative for *all* men and his fall the fall of *all* men, which is abolished through the obedience of the ‘second Adam’? And is not Abraham in his faith the archetype of *all* believing men after him, Jews and non-Jews?⁴ It seems to me that the happenings

¹ Only the Barnabas letter, to my knowledge, throughout the whole of the early church presents a contradictory interpretation. There are certain allusions, however, also in the *Kerygma Petrou* and in the letter to Diognetus.

² A proof of how little we can achieve if we try to pin him down to rigid patterns! This shows he cannot be put in the same line as Marcion. It is, however, interesting to see that even some branches of the heretical gnosis of the second century, e.g. the Valentinian gnosis in its special form of Ptolemaic teaching, have achieved a similarly positive or at least tolerant interpretation of the Old Testament.

³ Cf. at least the related writings of *Glauben und Verstehen*; it is only slightly different in III, 133 ff.; IV, 88 f. Cf. ‘Adam und Christus nach Rm 5’, *Z.N.W.* L (1959), 145 ff.

⁴ Cf. also Gal. iv. 22 ff., Rom. i. 2 and the row of witnesses in Heb. xi. It is clear to me that I should have to go into individual exegesis of the relative New Testament passages in order to substantiate better my (rather generalized) statements (as in other cases!). These substantiations must be made some other time. I just point out the following investigations: (1) *Ad Rom.* v: E. Brandenburger, *Adam und Christus. Exegetisch-religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zu Röm. 5, 15–21 (1. Kor. 15)* = Wissenschaftl. Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament, 7, 1962 (on this cf. what seems to me the justified critique of E. Jüngel, in *Z.Th.K.* LX (1963), pp. 42 ff.; Jüngel makes clear the function of the law between Adam and Christ. I would, however, not confront ‘salvation history’ and ‘Word history’ so directly as Jüngel does; ‘salvation history’ comes, at least in the sense of Cullmann’s

of the Old Testament which come before the actual national history furnish the main points of contact for a positive integration (in the sense of 'history-as-salvation') of the Old Testament by the Christian Church because they obviously do not deal only with the people of Israel. These earlier 'histories', in contrast to the factual national history, are telling evidence for the progressiveness of salvation (or judgement) *within* the Old Testament as far as the New Testament is concerned (cf. also Rom. v. 20). One could show this, as Cullmann does, by way of the idea of vicariousness, or in some other way.¹

This problem which I have taken first seems to me to point to a certain one-sidedness in the Bultmannian starting-point. This one-sidedness is simply the result of a hermeneutic position which betrays itself even more clearly when it comes to interpretation of salvation-in-the-present and especially salvation-in-the-future, a hermeneutic which at the same time progressively removes itself from the Biblical view as a whole. This can be shown.

(2) Concerning salvation-in-the-present Bultmann² teaches the 'desecularizing' (*Entweltlichung*) and the 'dehistoricizing' (*Entgeschichtlichung*) of the individual in his personal act of faith.

Let us start with the 'desecularizing' of the individual. When you hear that, you seem to detect glimmerings of gnosticism (the Stoa too): for them salvation consisted in the individual's becoming conscious of his strangeness and loneliness in the 'world', and in trying to free himself from all attachment to the world both inside and outside of him. He had to 'keep his distance' from things.

It would be a crude misunderstanding if we were to reproach Bultmann with the presumptuousness of the gnostic pneumatic or the Stoic philosopher just because he frequently uses the phrases 'distance from things', 'to have as if one had not', for it is precisely Bultmann who protests vigorously against all Stoic or mystic escape. The Christian has to prove himself *in* the world, *in* the daily human encounters where every time it is decisive whether he opens himself up in love to the demand which meets him in the other person or whether he shuts himself off; whether he realizes his humanity in belief or ruins it in unbelief. A man is 'desecularized' only in so far as he receives forgiveness and passes on love *in* his worldly being. He is also 'dehistoricized' only in so far as he stands in his radically understood 'historicity'

terms, factually close to 'Word history'). (2) *Ad Rom.* iv: U. Wilckens, 'Die Rechtfertigung Abrahams nach Römer 4', in: *Studien zur Theologie der alttestamentlichen Überlieferung* (1961), pp. 111 ff. (cf. also Goppelt, in *Th.L.Z.* LXXXIX (1964), cols. 321 ff.). In a not so convincing challenge to this, cf. G. Klein, 'Röm. 4 und die Idee der Heilsgeschichte', *Evang. Theol.* xxiii (1963), 424 ff. Cf. now *N.T.S.* xiii (1966), 31 ff.; 43 ff.

¹ That Cullmann's 'progressivity' is not a 'cut-and-dried salvation pattern' in the sense of a linear and previously determined development has been so clearly shown in his new book that it cannot be misunderstood. I am purposely avoiding, in this context, going into the question of whether and how far Jesus sees himself in the line of Old Testament salvation history (e.g. in the consciousness of being the suffering servant of God), but I am personally convinced that also from this point of view a positive integration of the Old Testament is justified.

² Cf. I, 1 ff., 65 ff., 85 ff., 153 ff.; II, 1 ff., 133 ff.; III, 35 ff., 131 ff.

and temporality as a believing and loving person in the eschatological 'now' with the dialectic of *simul justus et peccator* proper to him.

Yet there are still questions which remain here. On the one hand, the character of the 'time-in-between' we inhabit since the Christ event comes to clear expression in this dialectic,¹ but on the other hand, is there not an over-subtlety in the dialectic when Bultmann dismisses the world and its structures from the zone of the *eschaton* (and thereby from the zone of theological reflection) by emphasizing most of the time the opposition of 'world' (= profaneness) and 'faith' but rarely viewing these two together?² Does not the New Testament proclaim (albeit in mythical form) the present-day universal sovereignty of Christ even over the 'powers'? It seems to me that Cullmann³ has drawn the New Testament lines clearer in this regard than Bultmann, who probably fears a wrong objectifying of faith in the sense of *securitas*. But does not such a faith in the ruling kingship of Christ over this world shatter any attempt to 'prove' it? Is not such a faith essentially a hoping?⁴

We could comment also on Bultmann's concept of church similarly since it is also characterized by 'desecularizing' and 'dehistoricizing'. It is so that Bultmann does not at all resolve 'church' into believing individuals, as happened in the gnosis of the second century.⁵ Bultmann does hold to the church as the 'body of Christ' which has its relative historical place: the proclamation of Christ in word and sacrament.⁶ All those belong to the church who stand in the community of faith and love. One should not take it ill of Bultmann that he warns us against all the undialectical proofs of faith in the visible (institutional or dogmatical) church. I would agree with him, too, on the church's needing to lead a 'desecularized' existence. But is the church therefore taken out of history? For gnosticism, yes, because for gnosis one pneumatic simply associates with the other until their number is complete. But the New Testament knows differently: does it not know a *history* of the church in the present-day time which has significance for salvation? Let the 'prejudiced' Luke account go—but how does Paul see it? Does he not in Romans ix–xi, in the fact of Israel's stubbornness and the change of the mission to the Gentiles, see a progression of salvation history, a progression which has eschatological meaning?⁷ It seems to me that here too

¹ Bultmann comes very close to the Cullmannian view of the 'interim period' in III, 35 ff.

² With a strong qualification a concession is made to humanism: III, 61 ff.; cf. II, 133 ff., 274 ff.; also IV, 42 ff.

³ Besides *Heil als Geschichte* cf. especially *Königsherrschaft Christi und Kirche im Neuen Testament* (1950⁹) (Theologische Studien, x) and *Der Staat im Neuen Testament* (Tübingen, 1961⁹).

⁴ Cullmann gives expression to this with his parable of the Victory Day (which implies the idea of judgement).

⁵ It must be said that Bultmann puts the emphasis very much on the individual and not on the church. Hence the misunderstanding in R. Marlé, *Bultmann et l'interprétation du Nouveau Testament* (1956) (cf. with this III, 178 ff.).

⁶ But also in loving action: what Bultmann says about this (in III, 122 ff. Cf. also IV, 113 ff.) is truly great.

⁷ Bultmann says, however, that history is swallowed up by eschatology (III, 99 ff.). But he has to admit that several passages in Paul, e.g. Rom. ix–xi, cause difficulties for this interpretation.

Cullmann teaches in the sense of the New Testament when he speaks of an enlargement of localized and time-bound salvation in the church and through the church.¹ Cullmann also emphasizes that this salvation history is not a matter of objective proof but of eschatological hope.²

In the desecularizing and dehistoricizing of salvation in Bultmann's theology I see a gnostic *danger*. Let me emphasize once again: Bultmann has not derived his view directly from the gnosis of the second century but rather out of the New Testament itself, which can be understood and interpreted in this way *too*; and church history factually proves that in any case it was possible to hear *also* this message in the New Testament. All that I would like to state is that this view is at least one-sided, that on the one hand already the New Testament itself (and not just post-Biblical early catholicism) shows a more positive thinking about the church and its history than Bultmann adopts, and on the other hand the same New Testament (and not just the Constantinian era) takes a more positive relation towards the 'world' than Bultmann adopts—notwithstanding the dialectic maintained.³

Bultmann's 'unhistorical' view of the salvation process *in this sense*⁴ is shown still more distinctly in his view on the future of salvation. So we proceed to this third and most important point.

(3) As is well known, Bultmann⁵ demythologizes, in line with his programme, the eschatology of the New Testament. Because Christ, for Bultmann, is the end not only of the law, but also of salvation history, because the essence of faith, according to Bultmann, rests in the 'dehistoricizing' of the believer, it is evident that futuristic, realistic eschatology has lost any literal meaning for Bultmann, for example, pronouncements of the New Testament on future resurrection of the dead, future judgement, the new creation at the end, or even the millennium. All these things are Jewish apocalyptic 'remnants' which the New Testament still drags along. But this whole business really becomes delicate when you have to assert that even St Paul,

¹ On this argument: here too Cullmann will be right if he bases the 'prolongation of time' not so much on the negative aspect of the Parousia delay but on positive new happenings.

² Cf. *Heil als Geschichte*, pp. 268 ff.—Cullmann underlines exactly as Bultmann does the eschatological character of the Christian present as a whole. And Bultmann himself admits that (1) the 'Lucan' development had to come, and (2) in this development the eschatological dialectic was still kept, although in a transformed shape (cf. III, 131 ff.). Cf. also *Geschichte und Eschatologie* (French edition, 1959, pp. 44 ff.).

³ In so far as 'early catholicism' is concerned, cf. e.g. E. Käsemann, 'Paulus und der Frühkatholizismus', *Z. Th.K.* LX (1963), 75 ff. As to the relation to the world, cf. Cullmann, *Der Staat im Neuen Testament* (p. 358, n. 3). But it has to be admitted that *active* participation of Christians in the life of the state and in the development of culture before Constantine cannot be shown. In spite of this, there was an openness towards the problems of the world already before Constantine, starting, for example, with the apologists and the Alexandrian theologians.

⁴ If I say 'unhistorical', I have to defend myself against a misunderstanding: since Bultmann has made the very 'historicity of existence' a *Leitsatz* of exegesis, 'unhistorical' in the sense used here is therefore to be understood as a denial of progression of the salvation history in the eschatological time since Christ's coming.

⁵ Cf. I, 38 ff.; 134 ff.; III, 15 ff.; IV, 141 ff. K. Barth thought quite similarly in *Die Auferstehung der Toten* (1924); he does not, or hardly ever, criticize Bultmann on this point in his study of 1952.

otherwise a principal witness in Bultmannian theology, drags along such 'remnants' so that Bultmann is reduced to only certain passages in the Gospel of John for supporting his view (which Johannine texts others then also question) and perhaps I Cor. xiii. 13 as he thinks of it—all this forgetting St Paul's challenging the gnostic deniers of the resurrection in I Cor. xv (cf. II Tim. ii. 18). This business is delicate, not to say dubious, because Bultmann not only interprets one-sidedly on this point (i.e. does not take into account well enough the New Testament 'as well as'), but puts himself into contradiction to an almost unanimous New Testament tradition.

Where does this strange fact come from in the exegete Bultmann who otherwise grounds himself thoroughly in the soil of the New Testament? Of course such a train of ideas makes us think immediately of gnosticism. Gnosis of the second century, as a matter of fact, was unable to do anything with a realistic expectation of the end even though (as a consequence of its cosmogony) it admits to the idea of a future, individual salvation—imagined as the soul's journey to heaven after death (with the 'world' gradually vanishing into nothingness). But second-century gnosis was actually not so interested in that; it was mostly concerned about salvation-in-the-present. But here too, as in the other areas, Bultmann is not influenced by the ancient gnosis.¹ It seems to me rather that Bultmann agrees here with a widespread rationalistic doubt about the possibility of realistic eschatology which in modern times proliferates more and more within the church.² Such a realistic hope, even if it stands in the Bible, is simply 'finished' in the twentieth century because such an eschatology—it is contended—stands and falls with the antique world-view.³

What remains of Biblical eschatology after such demythologizing? Not very much. The constant openness, the readiness to give up things past and to reach out for the future of the genuine, *das Ganz-Andere*, remains; the hope that God is always there, wherever a man goes, that God is always there first, even in the darkness of death, this remains. In other words, conscious knowledge about the temporal future is definitely out of place: *ignoramus—ignorabimus*.

Over against this—in itself commendable—self-modesty there has to be said a word in favour of the New Testament which teaches us a realistic eschatology, even if it naturally does so in a mythical, that is, not verifiable, way. In this connexion, it seems to me, Cullmann's theology with its phrase of the 'already, but not yet' gives us the key we are looking for.⁴ When the Christian

¹ Of course he can prove that this gnostic, cosmic-individual view is adopted in the New Testament, besides the historical-apocalyptic view. But it is his intention to demythologize this view too.

² E.g. also for A. Schweitzer and C. H. Dodd as well as their pupils the futuristic eschatology is no longer acceptable.

³ Cf. e.g. iv, 100; 143 f. The same doubt extends also to a whole row of other 'mythical' expressions of the New Testament. This is shown by Bultmann in his manifesto in *Offenbarung und Heilsgeschehen* (1941), which has become famous. (Cf. *Kerygma und Mythos*, I, 15 ff.; II, 179 ff.; and the whole discussion which has come about as a result of this, those for and those against Bultmann.)

⁴ Cf. *Heil als Geschichte*, pp. 147 ff. (The Cullmannian 'already—but not yet' is in its sense the exact contrary of the Bultmannian 'no more—not yet'.)

church believes that with Jesus Christ the *eschaton* has *already started*,¹ then, in my opinion, it necessarily follows, even without theological reflection, from any kind of analysis of our human situation (existential, depth-psychological or simply common-sense analysis): it necessarily follows that this *eschaton* has not yet come to fulfilment in this present world time. It follows that its visible realization is for the greatest part still to come because all fulfilments which presently happen in church or world are only a forerunner of what we call the final realization.

Realistic eschatology seems to me also to be a theological consequence of the New Testament testimony of the bodily resurrection of Jesus, which Bultmann, here also in contradiction to St Paul, denies as a historical fact. In addition we could say Cullmann is right when he thinks he recognizes a *purposefulness* in the plan of God as the Bible reveals it in moving from the Old to the New Testament, a plan which tends to a cosmic one of salvation (including humanity and creation) and which showed in the (provisional) 'reduction' of salvation to the old and the new Israel only a means (made necessary by human sin) to effect the divine purpose.

For the above-mentioned reasons I am not afraid that the proclamation of realistic eschatology cannot get through to modern man any more. Realistic eschatology will get through to modern man just as the genuine *skandalon* of the cross disclosed by Bultmann gets through to him. There is no need, therefore, to destroy biblical eschatology (although one should avoid—this is a legitimate demand—describing it apocalyptically).

Does it not, from this third point—the salvation-in-the-future—become especially obvious that it is the 'unhistoricity'² of Bultmann's theology which creates the problems also in the other areas, salvation-of-the-past and salvation-in-the-present, although it comes to less clear expression in these other areas? With this we meet again—after several detours—the nucleus of Cullmann's thesis I began this paper with: his reproach that Bultmann's theology denies the view of salvation as history, and *in that respect* compares it with second-century gnosis.

In spite of everything I would, however, interpret Bultmann *in meliorem partem*. I would say: he stands on the ground of the New Testament, although not on the ground of the *whole* New Testament, but on the ground of a (sometimes very thin!) layer of New Testament writings which, when all is said and done, he does indeed tend to interpret in a way which carries him quite close to the gnosis of the second century. In spite of all that, I am not of the opinion—this remark might be permitted to me at the end—that we would have to choose unconditionally Cullmann or Bultmann, if we struggle for a proper understanding of the New Testament. I much rather think we

¹ Thus far Bultmann would agree, but he would say 'has come' in a final and ultimate sense.

² Cf. p. 359, n. 4.

we should put it this way: Does not the very fact that both Cullmann and Bultmann can refer to the New Testament—rightly so!—in order to substantiate their views show once again how rich (and at the same time problematic!) the New Testament is in itself?¹ Cullmann himself stresses again and again the legitimacy of Bultmann's endeavour, and Bultmann cannot help admitting to Cullmann at least that he has understood Luke. (You could add: Other things too!)²

This leads me to a final comment: Would it not be promising if especially the younger pupils of the two scholars would try to listen carefully to each other and so to learn from each other? And would it not be fruitful if those who are independent of the 'two schools', who are certainly better situated to be more objective in their judgement of the theological discussion, if they should help to bring about a *rapprochement*?—so far as such *rapprochement* is in any way possible in our 'interim period' as it is called theologically. And that is another reason for hoping for the *parousia*!

¹ This fact calls for a 'catholicity' of the hermeneutical method, as it has been developed in the Montréal-Rapport (1963) of the North-American section of the Faith and Order Department of the WCC on the subject 'Christ and the Church'.

² If I were to formulate it schematically (and I realize how schematical it is), Cullmann seems to represent in thrust especially the Old Testament judaistic-apocalyptic direction, which flowed from its source as a large stream into early Christianity, whereas Bultmann represents rather the hellenistic-gnostic direction which has come out of the meeting of Christianity with Gentile and Jewish gnosis.