

CHAPTER FIVE

CONTINENTAL DEMYTHOLOGIZING

Bultmann's programme of demythologizing, proposed during the second world war in an essay, *Neues Testament und Mythologie* (1941) was confined to the continent for some years but is now a central issue throughout theological discussion.¹ His connection with Consistent Eschatology is interesting, for although markedly distinct² 'nonetheless, the influence of Weiss and Schweitzer is strong upon Bultmann; for him Jesus is as thoroughly eschatological in his views of the kingdom of God and its coming as for them'.³ The affinity with Dodd's Realised Eschatology is well expressed by Mörghenthaler:⁴ 'Bultmann geht auf demselben Wege, den Dodd schon ein Stück weit gegangen ist, noch einen Schritt weiter . . . Dodd legt in seiner realisierten Eschatologie einen Entmythologierungsversuch vor, der mit dem Entmythologierungsversuch Bultmanns darin übereinstimmt, dass er nicht auf die hergebrachte Weise auf der Ebene der Subtraktion bleiben will, sondern sich als Aufgabe eine Interpretation des Mythos gestellt hat . . .'

Bultmann maintains that the early church, conscious of an encounter with God through Jesus Christ, sought to express the significance of this for itself and the world. But in doing so it partly failed to penetrate to the full significance and also it expressed

¹ Bartsch, in *Kerygma*, I. p. vii, writes, 'No single work which has appeared in the field of N.T. scholarship during the war years has evoked such a lively discussion. An increasing number of translations, contributions and criticisms are appearing in this country: cf. esp. Bultmann, *Theology of the N.T.* I and II (1952 and 1955): *Essays*, (1955): *History and Eschatology* (Gifford Lectures, 1957): Bartsch (ed.) *Kerygma and Myth* I (1953), II (1962): Henderson, *Myth in the N.T.* (1952): Gogarten, *Demythologizing* (1965): Miegge, *Gospel and Myth* (1960): MacQuarrie, *An Existentialist Theology* (1955): *The Scope of Demythologizing* (1960): Malevez, *The Christian Message and Myth* (1958): Bornkamm, *Jesus of Nazareth* (1960): Cairns, *A Gospel without Myth?* (1960): Robinson, *The Problem of History in Mark* (1957): *A New Quest of the Historical Jesus* (1959). For an outline of this Bultmann epoch and the post-Bultmann view of the 'historical Jesus' the last mentioned book is informative.

² Cf. Turner, *Pattern*, p. 23.

³ Bowman, 'From Schweitzer to Bultmann', in *T.T.* XI, 1954, p. 168.

⁴ *Kommendes Reich*, p. 94.

itself in terms which can no longer be meaningful for us.¹ The Parousia idea, Bultmann argues, is an example of the former kind. The early church has not properly understood the significance of its encounter: 'history did not come to an end, and, as every schoolboy knows, it will continue to run its course. Even if we believe that the world as we know it will come to an end in time, we expect the end to take the form of a natural catastrophe, not of a mythical event such as the New Testament expects'.² Eschatology in general, however, he holds to be an example of the latter kind. Here, 'Christ as the eschatological event' is a concept which can be and must be demythologized. What its precise truth is, and how this can best be expressed are problems to be dealt with, but the main point is (Bultmann contends) that there *is* something valid to be re-interpreted.³

Our criticism of this thesis must be concerned firstly with Bultmann's methodology, in order to lay the foundation for differences in exegesis which will concern us in later chapters: and then we shall venture some general remarks concerning his programme of demythologizing and its meaning for eschatology.

Characteristic of Bultmann and many of his followers is a radical scepticism concerning the data of the New Testament. The old antithesis between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith is ostensibly rejected by the acknowledgement that history and interpretation, event and meaning must go together, and that purely objective history is impossible.⁴ The New Testament gives us, to be sure, the kerygma of the early church: a proclamation not only that 'Jesus died' (event) but also 'that he died for our sins and rose again for our justification' (interpretation).⁵ Bornkamm rightly declares,⁶ 'Wir besitzen keinen einzigen Jesuspruch und keine einzige Jesusgeschichte, die nicht — und seien sie noch so unanfechtbar echt — zugleich das Bekenntnis der glaubenden Gemeinde

¹ Cf. in *Kerygma*, p. 16.

² Cf. in *Kerygma*, p. 5.

³ Cf. 'History and Eschatology' in *N.T.S.* 1954, pp. 5ff. *History and Eschatology*, *passim*.

⁴ Cf. Gogarten, 'Theologie und Geschichte' in *Z.T.K. L*, 1953, p. 349. Robinson, *New Quest*, pp. 77f. Gogarten, *Demythologizing*, pp. 25f. Bornkamm, *Jesus*, pp. 11f.

⁵ Cf. Henderson, *Myth*, p. 42.

⁶ *Jesus*, p. 12.

enthalten oder mindestens darin eingebettet sind. Das macht die Suche nach den blossen Fakten der Geschichte schwierig und weithin aussichtslos.' From this recognition, two questions arise. The first is, are there any bare facts behind this kerygma? Bultmann anticipated this question,¹ realising that 'Christianity without Christ' *is* conceivable.² He claims to preserve (as he says, *unlike* the liberal theologies before him) a core of bare facts, but many critics³ feel that he does so rather uncertainly. Miegge, for example, writes, 'It is necessary to affirm, much more strongly than Bultmann finds himself able to do, the truth and objective reality of the historical and supra-historical event which is summed up in the name Jesus Christ, the Crucified and Risen One: Christian faith stands or falls with the objective truth of these events.'⁴ The danger of allowing historical theology to become mere religious psychology is a very serious one⁵ and the 'post-Bultmann school' strives to avoid it.⁶

The second question which arises is, what reliance can be placed upon the early church's witness to Jesus Christ as we find this in the New Testament? As Bultmann has shown,⁷ the units of tradition in the early church proclamation seem, generally, to have served some practical purpose in the church's life: but this discovery alone should not lead to scepticism regarding the historical veracity of the pericopae.⁸ Often it is claimed that form criticism supports this scepticism, but this is not so. Conzelmann⁹ for instance, argues that Mk. 1, 16-20 is 'altogether non-historical, but rather-ideal: the central word "I will make you fishers..." is a call

¹ In *Kerygma*, p. 22.

² Cf. 'There are people who will say that this whole account is a lie, but a thing isn't necessarily a lie even if it didn't necessarily happen' (Steinbeck, *Sweet Thursday*, Pan ed. p. 47). Which is what Knox, for example (in *Jesus, Lord and Christ*, pp. 258ff) is saying in a theologically respectable form.

³ Cf. Thieliicke, in *Kerygma*, pp. 138ff. esp. 147f. Schniewind, in *Kerygma*, pp. 66f. Malevez, *Christian Message*, pp. 71f (who tries to see a real objectivity in Bultmann's thought, though Miegge, *Gospel*, pp. 134f., thinks without success.).

⁴ *Gospel*, p. 136.

⁵ Cf. Butterfield, *Christianity and History*, pp. 128f. Cairns, *Gospel*, pp. 213f.

⁶ Cf. Bornkamm, *Jesus*, pp. 18f. Conzelmann, in *Z.T.K. LVI*, 1959, pp. 2ff. Fuchs, in *Z.T.K. LIII*, 1956, pp. 210ff. Käsemann, in *Z.T.K. LI*, 1954, pp. 125ff.

⁷ Cf. esp. *Geschichte* (1921): *Primitive Christianity* (E.T. 1956).

⁸ Cf. Manson, in *Background of the N.T.* pp. 212ff.

⁹ 'Die formgeschichtliche Methode', in *S.t.U.* III, 1959, pp. 54ff.

addressed to the present reader'. Of Mk. 15, 34 he says, it is 'originally a *Gemeinde* saying reflecting a particular theological motif. . .'¹ But form criticism cannot make such judgements.

The historical veracity of the tradition *must be* probed. Form criticism only rules out the possibility of reconstructing a biography.² But concerning the criteria which might be employed on the task, two points are vital. First, the criteria must accord with what can be learnt from the gospel records themselves and from elsewhere, of the composition and character of the early community, of its understanding of history and its attitude towards its task of preaching and witnessing. On this basis, many would conclude that considerable historical reliability can be attached to the gospel narratives in general. Cranfield,³ for instance, offers six arguments which he holds 'would seem to justify us in rejecting the radical scepticism of Bultmann and in believing that a substantially reliable picture of the historical Jesus was preserved in the sources available to Mark'.⁴ Secondly, the criteria should not *presuppose* a breach between Jesus himself and the early church witness to him. Such a presupposition would mean an acceptance of the old antithesis between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith. Cullmann rightly criticises Bultmann's methodology on this account. He agrees with Bultmann that 'all that contradicts the theology of the early church can be assumed to be authentic to Jesus' (else why should it have been preserved?).⁵ But, as he says, the opposite principle does not necessarily apply, namely 'that all that corresponds to the theology of the early church is foreign to the Jesus of history'.⁶ The reverence for Jesus' words and deeds (presupposed by the retention of pericopae which may well have occasioned difficulty or embarrassment) must suggest that in general we can expect to find that the early church has taken pains in fashioning its thinking and teaching on words and deeds of Jesus himself.

¹ Similarly Ackermann, *Jesus*, pp. 143ff.

² Yet Sjöberg's conclusion (*verborgene Menschensohn*, p. 216) that everyone agrees there is no biographical interest behind the N.T. witness, surely goes too far (as Wood, *Jesus*, pp. 148f. points out).

³ Cf. *Mark*, pp. 16f.

⁴ Cf. Manson, *Jesus*, pp. 20f. Manson, in *Background of the N.T.* pp. 211ff. Cullmann, 'Out of season remarks', pp. 131ff.

⁵ Cf. Cullmann, 'Out of season remarks', pp. 131ff.

⁶ Cf. Cullmann, 'Out of season remarks', pp. 131ff. and in *T.L.* I Jahrgang 83, 1958.

Bultmann and his followers build much upon a supposed discontinuity of thought not only between Jesus and the early church as a whole, but between particular elements in the early church itself. The old antitheses 'Jesus or Paul', 'Paul or John', 'John or the Synoptics' are again raised. Even within the Synoptics a cleavage is said to exist between Matthew and Mark on the one hand and Luke on the other.¹ In this way the New Testament is subjected to severe fragmentation and any unity of witness within the early church is discountenanced. Yet the profession of faith in the person Jesus Christ, the acceptance of the 'tradition', involved the several communities, whatever their differences, in 'one body, and one spirit . . . one hope of . . . calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism . . .' (Eph. 4, 4). Whether this unity of faith involved also a unity of witness or not, the *possibility* of such unity ought not to be excluded by any method of interpreting the several elements in the New Testament. Besides, as Bosch² points out, it is difficult to suppose that the gospel compilers reflected *so* carefully over each phrase, or sought to express their individualistic characteristics *so* emphatically as adherents of radical redactional criticism suggest.

These criticisms have been made here in order to serve as a basis for later exegetical discussion. We turn now to some general criticisms of Bultmann's programme of demythologizing in order to justify rejecting the concept of a demythologized Parousia. We have already mentioned the problem of understanding and interpreting picture language. Bultmann's concern is much wider than this: for he defines as 'myth' requiring re-interpretation most of the New Testament proclamation.³ As Henderson says, 'it is fair to say that Bultmann groups together a number of not particularly homogeneous elements under the heading of the mythological. The category

¹ Cf. Robinson, *Problem: Marxsen, Der Evangelist Markus: Bornkamm 'Enderwartung und Kirche': Bornkamm, Held and Barth, Überlieferung und Auslegung im Matthäusevangelium: Lohse, 'Lukas als Theologe der Heilsgeschichte', in Ev. T. XIV, 1954, pp. 256ff. Grässer, Problem: Lohse, 'Zur N.T.'lichen Eschatologie', in V.F. 1956 (Jahresbericht 1953-55) pp. 184ff. Conzelmann, 'Gegenwart und Zukunft in der synoptischen Tradition', in Z.T.K. LIV-LV, 1957-8, pp. 277ff. *Mitte*.*

² *Heidenmission*, p. 14 n. 14. Wood, *Jesus*, p. 61, rightly speaks of 'those elements which the distinctive temperaments of the Evangelists led them to emphasise . . .', but this complementariness does not amount to a presupposition of cleavage.

³ Bultmann, in *Kerygma*, p. 16, finds two categories of mythical imagery in the early church witness: the one drawn from Jewish apocalyptic, the other from Gnosticism.

covers the account of the miracles of Jesus, descriptions of his person as the pre-existent Son of God, of his work as atoning for the sins of mankind, of the Holy Spirit as a quasi-natural power communicated to us through the sacraments'.¹ It is questionable whether the term 'myth' is well used in this sense. More seriously, Bultmann maintains that the subject of New Testament myth is man, and the purpose of myth is 'to express man's understanding of himself in the world in which he lives.'² But it is certainly possible to argue that the New Testament seeks to give expression not to what is being felt and experienced in the heart or mind of its writers, but to an actual encounter of God with man and to the history of this divine action.³ In other words, all that Bultmann calls myth in the New Testament is primarily to be understood not cosmologically, nor anthropologically, but theologically. Of course, the theological proclamation has cosmological and anthropological significance: but this is secondary.⁴ Notwithstanding some pictorial expression, some 'mythical' imagery, the *content* of the N.T. is not mythical in Bultmann's sense.⁵ 'Myth' understood as an expression of human self-consciousness in historical or quasi-historical terms is 'not native to the Bible or to the N.T.'⁶

The question remains how far the New Testament proclamation requires to be re-interpreted. This problem is by no means new nor the concern of Bultmann only.⁷ As MacQuarrie writes,⁸ much religious language becomes, over the course of time, debased and esoteric, and 'the Christian vocabulary stands in continual need of being re-interpreted if it is to remain meaningful.' To employ contemporary modes of thought and forms of language is ever the preacher's duty—and therefore the dogmatician's too. But this could involve demythologizing only if the subject of the N.T. were

¹ *Myth*, p. 46.

² In *Kerygma*, p. 10.

³ Cf. Barth, *Ein Versuch*, pp. 32f. Miegge, *Gospel*, pp. 98f. Wright in *Biblical Authority*, p. 224. Cairns, *Gospel*, pp. 100ff.

⁴ Contrast Bultmann, in *Kerygma*, p. 16. 'What is demythologizing' in *The Listener*, 5th Feb. 1953. p. 217. Brandon, 'Myth and the Gospel', in *H.J.* LI, 1952-3, pp. 121ff.

⁵ Cf. Stählin, in *T.W.N.T.* IV, pp. 771ff.

⁶ Miegge, *Gospel*, p. 106. Cf. Barrett, 'Myth in the N.T.' in *E.T.* LXVIII, 1956, pp. 345ff. and 359ff.

⁷ Cf. Munz, *Problems of Religious Knowledge*, p. 182.

⁸ 'Existentialism and the Christian vocabulary', in *L.Q.H.R.* 1961, pp. 250ff. cf. Schniewind, in *Kerygma*, pp. 87f.

man and his self-understanding, and this we doubt. It could mean re-mythologizing,¹ but then the question would need to be asked, whether the language of twentieth century existentialism is the best form for the Biblical proclamation.

This is a most important question, being related to the whole problem of the bearing of philosophy upon theology. Bultmann, of course, lays worth upon what we shall call 'preliminary philosophy'. The phenomenon of our existence as thinking beings means that we inevitably come to the New Testament, as to anything, with pre-conceived ideas. The question is, what status should be given to these inevitable thoughts. Here a deep cleavage exists between much Protestant thought and Roman Catholic theology, and it is not surprising to find, on the one hand, Malevez² agreeing with Bultmann that though a certain correction of these preliminary thoughts must be expected, the principle that hermeneutics is dependent on some preliminary philosophy is sound: and on the other hand, Barth arguing against such a *Vorverständnis*,³ maintaining that the possibility of knowing God occurs in the act of God revealing himself to us, thereby showing that God's word is fundamentally alien to man's thought. Hence, Barth holds, Biblical hermeneutics is not just the application of a general hermeneutic principle, but is unique.⁴ Bultmann's arguments⁵ against this position seem to be ineffective. Barth's hermeneutics are bound to appear 'only arbitrary assertions'⁶ for Barth is concerned primarily to repeat the proclamation of God's activity as this is testified in the Bible and is prepared to find his hermeneutic principles only as given in the commitment to this proclamation.⁷

The homiletic expedient of using current concepts clearly needs to be considered seriously. But if the New Testament *is* concerned to confess and proclaim a divine activity (if the New Testament 'myths' *are* theological) then such contemporary concepts should

¹ The principle of analogy underlying the use of mythological language is, surely, indispensable (as Bultmann admits, in *Kerygma*, p. 44), Bultmann's language being no less analogical than the 'less sophisticated language of the Bible' (Owen, in *S.J.T.* XIV, 1961, p. 197. Cf. Lohmeyer, in *Kerygma*, pp. 126ff. Wright, in *Biblical Authority*, p. 224).

² *Christian Message*, pp. 170f. 183f. 190.

³ Cf. *Ein Versuch*, *passim*.

⁴ Cf. Malevez, *Christian Message*, pp. 170ff.

⁵ Cf. *Essays*, pp. 259ff.

⁶ *Essays*, p. 261.

⁷ Cf. also Barth, *C.D.* III/2, p. 534.

only subserve this proclamation and 'have no right to pontificate' over the subject matter.¹ This means that no one particular philosophical language and thought form should be elevated to the position of sole interpretative medium for whilst one thought form could subserve the proclamation here and now it might not tomorrow or in another place.² Whether or not the particular philosophy of existentialism is as vital an interpretative medium to-day as Bultmann would suggest it is, is open to dispute: doubtless the technical terminology of existentialism is more difficult for many to grasp and understand than the more naive language of the New Testament.³

Another very serious question which must be asked is, whether Jesus' life as historical event is properly or adequately evaluated by Bultmann. If the thesis 'God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself' (II Cor. 5, 19) is a valid affirmation of the significance of Jesus' life, then although this 'once for all'⁴ event must be contemporised if it is to have full significance 'for me'⁵ the historical particularity and self-sufficiency of the Christ-event must never be abandoned in favour of this contemporising which it demands and facilitates. The historical particularity of the Christ event is presented in the New Testament as meaningful for the past and for the future, as well as for each 'now', for in his encounter with man, Jesus Christ reveals himself to be the One who was and who will be, as the 'pre-existent Son of God' and as the 'Judge of the End time'. In that encounter is given impetus and authority to refer God's activity in Christ both backwards into the past, involving some idea of creation, and forwards into the future, involving some idea of a Parousia. Whatever imagery and vocabulary we choose to express and elucidate this significance, the concept of a salvation-history is contained and imparted in the central event of revelation, the once-for-all event of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ.⁶

At this point the problem of time in the New Testament is raised.⁷ Bultmann has no wish to return to the idea of 'timeless

¹ Lohmeyer, in *Kerygma*, p. 133.

² Cf. Barth, *Ein Versuch*: Malevez, *Christian Message*, p. 198.

³ Cf. Miegge, *Gospel*, p. 134. Schniewind, in *Kerygma*, pp. 89f.

⁴ Rom. 6, 10. Heb. 9, 12, 9, 28, etc.

⁵ Cf. Barth, *C.D.* III/2, p. 447.

⁶ This is, of course, what Cullmann maintains in *Christ and Time*. Many, in various categories, seek to affirm the same—cf. for example Brunner, *Das Ewige*, esp. pp. 35ff.

⁷ Cf. above, chapter 2, p. 17 n. 1 concerning the O.T. view.

truths' (though some think he does in effect do so¹): but he maintains that futurity is simply a phenomenon of existence and claims that to hold to a particular hope concerning the content of the future is to seek to emancipate oneself from the essential conditions of human life, and is therefore sin. There can, therefore, be no Christian teleology. Time, he says, is a phenomenon which involves a future as much as a past: but about this future, nothing more can be said than that occasion will be given in it, through the word of preaching, for further encounter with God in Christ.² Eschatology, on this view, if not made positively timeless is certainly de-temporalised. It is a definition of the quality of the Christ-event and man's participation in it. Let Bultmann speak for himself: 'The New Testament understanding of the history of Jesus as eschatological event is not rightly conceived either in the conception of Jesus as the centre of history, or in sacramentalism. Both are solutions of the embarrassment into which the Christian community was brought by the non-appearance of the Parousia. The true solution of the problem lies in the thought of Paul and John, namely, as the idea that Christ is the ever present, or ever-becoming event (i.e. the eschatological event): the "now" gets its eschatological character by the encounter with Christ or with the Word which proclaims Him, because in this encounter with Him the world and its history comes to its end and the believer becomes free from the world in becoming a new creature'.³ We venture to suggest that this does not do justice to the New Testament understanding of time, or to its understanding of the Christ-event, or to its evaluation of the present age. We consider these three areas in turn.

Much recent discussion⁴ stresses that the New Testament view of time involves the recognition that futurity is *not* simply a phenomenon of existence but is also God's time, time and occasion for divine action: it is subject to the Lordship of Christ. This is far from saying that Christ is subject to the sovereignty of time as men are, knowing no other possibility of existence except one in which there is a past into which each present passes and a future which ever

¹ E.g. Kümmel, in *V.F.* 1947-8, pp. 75ff. and cf. Fuchs' answer in *Ev. T.* 1949, pp. 447ff.

² Cf. *History and Eschatology*, pp. 149ff.

³ 'History and Eschatology' in *N.T.S.* 1954, pp. 5f. cf. Conzelmann, in *Z.T.K.* LIV-LV, 1957-9, pp. 277ff.

⁴ Cf. esp. Cullmann, *Christ and Time*: Marsh, *Fulness of Time*: Minear in *S.J.T.* VI, 1953, pp. 337ff. Barth, *C.D.* III/2, pp. 437ff. Rust, in *T.T.* X, 1953,

anew becomes present: but it does mean that God, in his encounter with the world does not ignore man's time frame-work. God allows succession and chronology to be really involved, and so he creates a salvation-history. To be sure, the relation of past to present and of present to future with God and his salvation history is not simple: but the complexity is not such as to diminish the reality of past and future in salvation-history. 'What is past, so far from perishing, lives on in every new present, though the past-ness of the past, like the futurity of the future is not in the least impaired. The *kairoi* taken together stand under some decisive "beginning" (ἀρχή) where an "age" (αἰών) is inaugurated and move towards an "end" (ἔσχατον) where the content of the age is rounded off and established in its completeness or fulfilment as something eloquent of the glory of God'.¹

Secondly, the revelation of God in Jesus is regarded in the New Testament as informative and authoritative for past and future revelation. Not only is Israel's history understood by reference to him,² but creation and therefore the entire sweep of past history is illuminated by reference to him.³ Although Luke and Matthew tend to emphasise this backward reference more, Mark does not by any means altogether neglect it.⁴ Similarly the New Testament writers (in varying degrees) read off from this central Christ-event, a real future significance. The present relationship of the believer to Christ is 'in hope',⁵ hope not simply that the relationship will continue (through constant renewal of a divine encounter), but hope that the provisional nature of the relationship ('in faith') is *really only* provisional, being bounded by the awaited future revelation of Christ in glory. Without holding this event as an object of

pp. 327ff: Minear, in *Interpretation*, V, 1951, pp. 27ff. Dillistone, in *S.J.T.* VI, 1953, pp. 156ff.

¹ Whitehouse, in *Eschatology*, p. 74. Cf. similarly Barth, *C.D.* III/2, pp. 464f. 485f. On the whole question of the future aspects of salvation-history cf. further, Thurneysen, 'Christus und seine Zukunft', in *Zwischen den Zeiten*, 1931, pp. 18ff. Wright, in *Biblical Authority*, p. 224. Körner, in *Ev. T.* 1954, pp. 177ff. Wendland, *Die Eschatologie des Reiches Gottes bei Jesus*, pp. 27ff. 240ff. Althaus, *Letzten Dinge*, pp. 28ff. Künneth, *Theologie der Auferstehung*, pp. 218ff. Rich, *Die Bedeutung*, pp. 4ff. Delling, *Zeitverständnis*; Fuchs, in *Ev. T.* 1949, pp. 447f., etc.

² Cf. e.g. Acts 2, 14ff. 7, 2ff.

³ Cf. Col. 1, 16. Heb. 1, 2. Jn. 1, 1ff.

⁴ Cf. Mk. 1, 2f. Robinson, *Problem*, pp. 22ff.

⁵ Cf. e.g. Rom. 5, 2, 8, 24. Eph. 1, 18.

hope, the full significance of the Christ-event has not been drawn.¹

Thirdly, is it not true to say that what the New Testament regards as characteristic of the present epoch is not simply that in it men are 'brought face to face with the last things in crucial decision'²—the aspect Bultmann is so anxious to emphasise—but that man is for the moment given time and occasion for a response of free decision to the *Eschaton*, inasmuch as it encounters him as yet only in a mystery, veiled? He, the *Eschatos*, invites men to participate in a real past and to anticipate a real future consummation. Hence each present encounter with Christ has a reference backwards and one forwards, by which the present is qualified. Demythologized eschatology appears to lead to a docetic view of time, to a docetic view of the work of Christ, and therefore to a docetic view of the present.³ The faith which witnesses to us in the New Testament, and without which the Christ-event would remain unknown to us, presents us with other objective historical events on the same level as that central one and in fact posited by it: it recognises that the 'decisive action wrought by God within history at a particular centre in some sense accompanies history and bears decisively on all the process of historical connexions by which the cosmos moves to its consummation.'⁴

The faith which the New Testament seeks from us is not simply an openness to encounter but commitment to certain divine events in history and their significance. In this commitment is given the will to acknowledge that the events, being divine events for man's salvation, have an objective, independent status and meaning quite apart from man. That is to say, the Cross did not acquire its saving significance only at the moment when later the disciples began to believe that it held such meaning and possibility for them; but, rather, in the economy of God, the Cross held that significance in the relationship of God to the world both before and independently of the disciples' faith. The New Testament writers are surely not

¹ Cf. Schniewind, in *Kerygma*, p. 81f. *Nachgelassene Reden*, pp. 38ff.

² Whitehouse, in *Eschatology*, p. 70.

³ Wright, in *Biblical Authority*, p. 224. arguing that the Christian cannot set aside the Biblical view of time, says, 'without it one has no means of interpreting the meaning of history, other than as the secular order in which he lives provides it, and he must live without hope in the future which will redeem the present by the power of the God who is the directing Lord of time.'

⁴ Whitehouse, in *Eschatology*, p. 70.

concerned only to confess their own faith and so to arouse ours, but to relate the events, centring on Jesus and reaching backwards and forwards throughout the whole sweep of history, on the basis of which the present is what it is and faith is made possible.

Bultmann undoubtedly emphasises matters of considerable import. His programme is prompted by an evangelical motive.¹ The present time *is* a period of opportunity calling forth faith—as a dialectic between self and self-abandonment in commitment. This is demanded by the preaching of God's encounter with man in Jesus Christ. Without such commitment to the gospel, the historical life and death of Jesus can never appear more than the tragic story of a good man. Doubtless, too, there *is* a pastoral requirement to proclaim all this in language which our contemporaries can understand, and it may well be that some to-day will understand the language of existentialist philosophy and that this terminology can be used for apologetic purposes.

At the same time, Bultmann 'in his eagerness to tear away the mythological coverings which hide the truth'² appears to give insufficient emphasis to a further dialectic which faith must notice, namely the dialectic between the 'now' of faith and the 'not yet' of hope, between the 'now' of 'seeing through a glass, darkly' and the 'then' of 'seeing face to face' (I Cor. 13, 12). It is the very dialectic in which faith is itself caught up, which is to be replaced one day by the certainty of fulfilment and possession, a certainty towards which faith, because of its dialectical nature, strains forward in constant hope.

Further, in his desire to present the significance of the gospel in a contemporary form,³ Bultmann appears to abandon what is, surely, the conviction of the New Testament writers, namely that the gospel calls men to the decision not only to authentic existence understood and appropriated in 'existentiell' moments of life, but to acknowledge the sovereign saving acts which God has accomplished in the historical life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Therefore, however ontic faith must be, it is in the first place, noetic: a confession of the truth of the situation which has arisen through the salvation-history of God in Christ 'reconciling the world unto himself'.

¹ Cf. in *Kerygma*, p. 3.

² Woods, *Theological Explanation*, p. 209.

³ Cf. *Essays*, pp. 236 ff.

Commitment to the particularity of God's work in history in the person of Jesus Christ involves recognition of a real salvation-history which is directly related to Christ,¹ so that past and future outreaches, even the beginning and end themselves, centre upon him. The phenomenon of faith itself authenticates the hope of a future unambiguous revelation of the End, for such hope is inescapably bound up in the recognition that the End has occurred in a particular (and therefore equivocal, ambiguous) historical event. Hope, and particularly hope in the Parousia of Jesus Christ, is presupposed by faith.

¹ So that Cullmann, for instance, speaks of this salvation-history as the 'Christ-line' (*Time*, pp. 107ff.).