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A table of contents for *Canadian Journal of Theology* can be found here:

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# Evangelism, Mythology, and Bultmann

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DEMYTHOLOGISING<sup>1</sup> is with us as the topic of the day for New Testament scholars, theologians and apologists. And there can be no avoiding it by any whose work is that of evangelism, for the questions it raises relate to every attempt to preach the Gospel.

The term is practically synonymous with the name of Rudolf Bultmann, Professor Emeritus of Marburg, whose essay *Neues Testament und Mythologie* (New Testament and Mythology) in 1943<sup>2</sup> precipitated a discussion which has spread from Germany to all parts of the world where Christianity is taken seriously, and which is as yet far from concluded.<sup>3</sup>

That essay is in two parts, the first of which sets the problem by pointing to the unacceptability to modern man of much of the thought-form of the New Testament writers, and by contending that an existentialist interpretation of its mythology (that is, a grasping of the understanding of human existence which its myths are endeavouring to express) is the only solution which will preserve the essence of the kerygma. The second part of the essay gives the Christian interpretation of Being,<sup>4</sup> stating that the life of faith is one of radical self-commitment to God, and then goes on to assert the significance of God's act in Christ, which makes the decision to self-commitment possible, and which cannot be known apart from this decision.

Before we proceed further, we need to look at some of the terms which have arisen in this discussion.

There is, first, the term "Demythologising" itself. It is a translation of the German *Entmythologisierung*—a word which, so far as I can ascertain,

1. This is the usual translation of the German *Entmythologisierung*, though the no less cacophonous "demythologisation" and "demythification" are also found.

2. This was not Bultmann's first approach along this line. Julius Schniewind (*Kerygma and Myth*, p. 59) speaks of "Die Frage der natürlichen Offenbarung" as "Bultmann's first essay on the subject", while Helmut Thielicke (*Kerygma and Myth*, p. 138) and Oscar Cullmann (*Christ and Time*, p. 30) refer to the volume (*Offenbarung und Heilsgeschehen*) in which that essay appears. D. M. Baillie (*God Was in Christ*, second edition, p. 212) says that "as far back as 1927, Emil Brunner discussed Bultmann's attempt to interpret myth in existential terms."

3. At first, because of the circumstances which then prevailed, the discussion was restricted to Germany, but there it had reached quite large proportions by the end of the War, and five volumes of essays (all bearing the title *Kerygma und Mythos*), published in Hamburg by Herbert Reich and edited by H. W. Bartsch, appeared between 1948 and 1955. Much of the first volume of these (including Bultmann's initial essay) has been made available in an English translation (*Kerygma and Myth*, edited by H. W. Bartsch, translated by Reginald H. Fuller, London: S.P.C.K., 1953).

4. This word represents the German *Dasein* ("being-there") which is one of the many technical terms used by Martin Heidegger. It refers to the way of existence which is peculiar to man. It is translated variously as "Being," "human Being," and "human life." (See Translator's Preface to *Kerygma and Myth*, p. xi.)

Bultmann himself has coined, and which denotes the activity of removing mythology.<sup>5</sup> By "mythology" Bultmann means "the use of imagery to express the other worldly in terms of this world and the divine in terms of human life," as, for instance, when "divine transcendence is expressed as spatial distance."<sup>6</sup> His program of Demythologising is one of interpreting the mythological element in the message of the New Testament in such a way as will, without subtracting from that message in any way, make it understandable by modern man; and it is Bultmann's conviction that this can only be done by an existentialist interpretation.

The term "existentialist" refers to a movement, expressing itself in various ways, which concentrates attention upon the existence of things as they are in themselves, and not just upon thought of them, and in particular upon the existence of men as individuals. What Bultmann wants to do in his existentialist interpretation of the New Testament is remove all in it that is not expressive, in terms understandable by men today, of an experience which can be repeated in their own lives.

We shall need to note also the distinction which has been made in some German scholarly writings between two words which both find translation in English as "history": the words *Historie* and the much more common *Geschichte*. *Historie* means the study of past events with a view to discovering, in an objective, detached manner, what actually happened. *Geschichte*, on the other hand, means the study of past events in such a way that the discovery of what actually happened calls for a decision on our part. Corresponding to this distinction there are two adjectives: *historisch*, meaning "that which can be established by the historian's criticism of the past," and *geschichtlich*, meaning "that which, although occurring in past history, has a vital, existential reference to our life to-day."<sup>7</sup> Macquarrie observes this distinction by translating *historisch* as "objective-historical" and *geschichtlich* as "existential-historical";<sup>8</sup> and this is the way in which we shall ourselves distinguish the concepts they denote.

With this small piece of clarification of language behind us, we are the better able to appreciate the importance for the work of evangelism of what Bultmann has to say. The discussion which he has initiated has helped us to see that the events of redemption, or the happenings in which they originate, can be spoken of in three ways.<sup>9</sup>

(i) They may be spoken of, first, in an objective-historical (*historisch*) way, as events which took place on our earth and within our time-series, and

5. One German scholar whom I consulted stated that an English equivalent would be "debunking"!

6. *Kerygma and Myth*, p. 10n.

7. Fuller, in the Translator's Preface to *Kerygma and Myth*, p. xii.

8. John Macquarrie, *An Existentialist Theology* (London: S.C.M., 1955) pp. 166, 171. Fuller translates them as, respectively, "historical" or "past historical" and "historic" (Translator's Preface to *Kerygma and Myth*, p. xii).

9. Ian Henderson notes these on pp. 18-19, 41-42, of *Myth in the New Testament* (London: S.C.M., 1952); and John Macquarrie on pp. 166-171 of *An Existentialist Theology*.

which can be subjected to investigation by the historian in the same way as can countless other events of the past. That Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea and that he was crucified under Pontius Pilate are on the same level—so far as their status as events is concerned; we are not here discussing whether they enjoy the same degree of evidence to establish them—as, say, the birth of Alexander or the death of Nelson.

It is Bultmann's conviction that this objective-historical way of speaking is of little or no value in the preaching of the Gospel. For there is in this way of speaking no declaration of an event of redemption. As Gogarten puts it, the word *kerygma* means the proclamation or announcement of a herald, and a herald is not the same thing as a reporter. His proclamation is not, or at any rate not primarily, intended to be a kind of report about something that has happened; rather is it "a kind of declaration of the sender's will, addressed to and intended for the particular person to whom the herald is sent."<sup>10</sup> This factor is absent when the objective-historical way of speaking is employed.

(ii) The events of redemption, or the happenings in which they originate, may be spoken of, secondly, in what Bultmann calls a "mythological" (*mythologisch*) way, as events which did in fact take place on our earth and within our time-series, but which were marked by features showing them to be different from the countless other events of the past. That the birth of Jesus at Bethlehem was the Word becoming flesh and that angels appeared to tell shepherds of the unusual significance of this birth, that the death of Jesus on Calvary was the offering up of the Son of God for the sins of the world and that there was darkness over all the land from the sixth hour to the ninth hour: these have the status of objective-historical events, in the sense that there are documents which record that they took place, but the very manner of their recording shows that they are thought of as *not* on the same level as the birth of Alexander and the death of Nelson.

It is Bultmann's conviction that this mythological way of speaking is only a hindrance to the preaching of the Gospel. For what is then being demanded is acceptance of a cosmology which modern man knows to be obsolete, and of an imagery which he does not recognize as a faithful expression of what he experiences, or can experience.

(iii) In the third place, these things may be spoken of in an existential-historical (*geschichtlich*) way, as events which take place here and now in my experience. The Word becoming flesh and the Son of God offering Himself are recognized as events of redemption, not because Jesus was born at Bethlehem and was crucified on Calvary, nor because I am impressed by the unusual nature of these happenings, but because they enter into the situation in which I am here and now, and set before me a present possibility.

It is Bultmann's conviction that this existential-historical way of speaking

10. Friedrich Gogarten: *Demythologizing and History*, E. T. by Neville Horton Smith (London: S.C.M., 1955), pp. 68–9.

is the only one which does justice to the nature of the events of redemption, and that this is therefore the way in which the Gospel is to be preached.

Clearly it is important for the evangelist to know in which of these three ways he is to speak of the happenings recorded in the Bible; and we shall go on to deal with this question by noting what advantages follow if we adopt the point of view espoused by the Demythologisers.

(i) One advantage of this way of looking at things is that our preaching of the Gospel does not obscure the fact that the New Testament bears the marks of its own age and culture. Because it is the understanding of existence disclosed in the New Testament, and not its particular manner of describing it, which is our concern, we can say quite frankly in our preaching of the Gospel that the framework of thought used by the Biblical writers is different from ours, and that ours is demonstrably a more accurate one.<sup>11</sup> Thus to see the New Testament in its own age and culture enables us ourselves to see, and to have in mind when we are seeking to win others for Christ, just where lies the "offence" which properly is inseparable from the Gospel. When we appreciate that many things recorded in the New Testament are part of a framework of thought commonly accepted in the first century, we see that any difficulty which our contemporaries have in accepting these things cannot be the *skandalon* of which the New Testament speaks. The real *skandalon* of the Gospel, Bultmann says, is never the unintelligibility of any given concept; it lies in the revelation itself.<sup>12</sup>

(ii) A second point in favour of this way of looking at things is that it enables us to preach the Gospel without suffering any qualms concerning what scholarship says of the Bible. There is no boundary, self-determined or determined by ecclesiastical authority, beyond which one may not go. Investigation of the documents can proceed without any fear that radical conclusions concerning authorship or historicity will lead to a denial of important doctrines of the faith. For all such investigation, on this view, can touch only the objective-historical; it cannot affect the existential-historical, which is known only in my experience here and now.

(iii) It may be said in favour of the view espoused by the school of Demythologising, thirdly, that it justifies us in giving consistent expression to a practice in which we all engage to some extent. Who has not, in his preaching from the Book of Jonah, suggested that it is not absolutely

11. Part of this view's attraction at this point lies in the fact that, while pointing to the inaccuracies of the first-century framework of thought, and its inadequacy as a medium for the communication of the Gospel today, it does not insist upon our declaring that framework of thought to be entirely without value. This is one of the differences of this view from liberalism with which, at this particular point, it seems to have a good deal in common; the liberal theologians declared the mythological framework in which the New Testament sets the kerygma to be of no value at all, and indeed to have been from the beginning a factor leading to distortion of the Gospel message. The Demythologisers, on the other hand, say that, though no longer acceptable, it has had its value and (if it be rightly interpreted) it still has its value.

12. *Kerygma and Myth*, p. 91. He warns against "confounding the stumbling-block of mythological language with the real *skandalon* of the cross, the exegetical problem with that of faith" (*ibid.*, p. 109).

necessary to believe that a man did in fact spend three days in the belly of a great fish in order to apprehend the truth which the writer of the book wished to drive home? Who has not, in preaching on the Ascension, suggested that it is not absolutely necessary to believe that Jesus did in fact, by some species of levitation, move perpendicularly from the earth, in order to apprehend the truth that Christ now reigns with the Father? These and other things we have all said, and in saying them have been far from imagining that we were robbing the Bible of its message, or depriving the events of redemption of their historicity or their uniqueness. We have on the contrary been of the firm opinion that we were making the essential message of the Bible more intelligible. The view of Bultmann and his fellows has the advantage of showing why we may remove things from the Bible in this way without detracting from its message. Where it may differ from what we have been doing is that, whereas we have more readily applied such a method to the Old Testament than to the New, and have been led to it largely by factors external to the Bible, we are now called upon to apply it to every aspect of the New Testament, and to do so because of demands within the Christian faith itself.

(iv) It is a fourth commendable feature of this view, and another factor which should incline those engaged in the work of evangelism to embrace it, that its concern with existence demands that the Gospel be preached to modern man in his own situation, and in a way which shows it to be relevant to the things which concern him every day of his life. Probably we preachers are more to blame than we commonly realize for the incidence of "Sunday-only" religion, in that we have endeavoured to elicit from men and women an experience which we have expounded in an esoteric jargon, so that they are little to be blamed if they assume, either that such an experience is not and never can be theirs, or that it is an experience only to be enjoyed within the walls of a Church or when one is in a certain select company. If, however, we take to heart what the Demythologisers are striving to have us appreciate, we simply must proclaim the Gospel in a way that means something to men and women as they are now. Otherwise, Bultmann and his colleagues tell us, we are not really preaching the Gospel at all.

(v) What I have now said by way of commendation of this view has underlined the fact that it bears directly on a problem to which evangelists can hardly give too much attention, namely, the problem of communication—a problem which does not stop with the actual business, or technique, of communicating, but which involves the even more vital task of making plain what is to be communicated. And we may conclude this recital of things which commend the program of Demythologising to the evangelist by saying that it compels us to consider what things really are essential to the Gospel wherein we stand and which we seek to proclaim.

All this suggests that Bultmann and his colleagues have put before us something of great value, and that the acceptance of their point of view will enable the work of evangelism to proceed much less haltingly than it has of late. But before it is decided that we should speak of the events of

redemption only in an existential-historical way, I should like to draw attention to some factors which cause me to treat the proposal with caution.

(i) A first point at which Bultmann's proposal for Demythologising needs to be treated with caution is its failure to understand the nature of the existential-historical. I agree with the contention that the reciting of events in an objective-historical way is not a preaching of the Gospel. And I am also in agreement when it is said that argument on the mythological plane cannot suffice to bring a person to the point of appreciating the significance for his own existence of the events of redemption. My disagreement is with the implication that the existential-historical is somehow independent of these other two, because it seems to me that our apprehension of the existential-historical involves some acceptance of both the objective-historical and the mythological. And I consider that the work of evangelism demands recognition of this fact. An attempt to expound this point would involve more space than is here available, and my criticism on historiographical grounds must be left thus baldly stated. Something of its implications will appear, however, in what follows.

(ii) A second weakness is the tendency to set up what the modern man will accept as a criterion for determining what is essential to the Gospel. Let me make it plain that what I am criticising is a "tendency." I have already expressed appreciation of the concern which Bultmann shows for the problem of communication and the insistence upon our speaking to modern man in his own situation. These things I regard as very good things, and I do not wish to detract from their virtue. What I find unsatisfactory in Bultmann's presentation is his too great readiness to remove, without any real consideration of the reasons which may be brought forward for its retention, anything which modern man would find it difficult to accept. Bultmann says that a man's view of the world is already determined for him by his place in history, and that it can only be changed "when he is faced by a new set of facts so compelling as to make his previous view of the world untenable."<sup>13</sup> The point of my criticism is that a changed view of the world may be just what is necessary before a man can appreciate what the Gospel is about. And it may be that this changed view of the world will have to find a place for what modern man rejects as mythological! It does not follow as readily as Bultmann seems to imagine that if modern man finds the Gospel unintelligible, those who are proclaiming it have confounded it with mythological elements that are not essential to it. John McIntyre points out that we should expect any statement of the truth concerning Jesus Christ to exhibit something of the same mystery as His Person. "Any demythologisation which goes on the assumption that the divine can be separated from the human in the kerygma or in our restatements of it for our generation is committed to a denial of the Incarnation." If, in its human-ness, the Word is crucified at the hands of logical positivism, or of any attitude of modern man, then that is the price of incarnation—and of relevance.<sup>14</sup>

13. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

14. *Canadian Journal of Theology*, 2 (1956), p. 89.

It is, I repeat, a tendency in the application of a principle that I find unsatisfactory rather than the principle itself. A truly existential approach does not tell man *how* he is to exist, it simply tells him to *exist*; and the soundness of regarding as essential in the Gospel only what is relevant to man's situation cannot be denied. The point is that modern man does not necessarily understand aright what his situation is.

(iii) A third point at which the proposal for Demythologising needs to be treated with caution is the understanding of modern man which it discloses. What we have put before us, as the norm of that to which our preaching of the Gospel should be directed, is something which it is difficult to recognise as representative of the men and women about us—except, perhaps, a small minority.<sup>15</sup> Allan Barr remarks pertinently that there is a lack of proportion when an existentialist like Bultmann places emphasis on the scientific *Weltanschauung* of the man who has a wireless set, while he says nothing about what the man listens to.<sup>16</sup> Certainly most of the programs available to him (the type of which is almost entirely determined by public demand) do not seem to be directed at the sort of person whom Bultmann is anxious to satisfy.

Is modern man so averse to myth? Apart from the place allowed still, in this twentieth century, to non-transcendent myths,<sup>17</sup> there appears to be a general readiness to allow a place for the "other worldly" to enter into "this world," as is evidenced by such varied activities as the publication of columns which profess to give advice on the basis of astrology, the conviction that certain lottery-ticket agents are "luckier" than others, the readiness of political leaders to ask that prayers for rain be offered, the visits of thousands to healing shrines and the contemporary interest (not peculiar to ministers) in the therapeutic value of religion, in the physical sphere as well as the mental. And is there much likelihood of the sort of thing which Bultmann would put in the place of mythology finding acceptance? "If the Bible is remote from the thinking of men today, an existential analytic is even more remote," writes John Macquarrie. "Heidegger's work is difficult enough for anyone with a training in philosophy, and to the man in the street it must seem like a book sealed with seven seals. Yet a demythologised Bible, in which everything was translated into existential statements, could scarcely be less difficult." "Compare," he goes on, "the two statements, that man in his being is compounded of possibility and facticity, and that man was formed of the dust of the ground and into his nostrils was breathed the breath of life. We could certainly agree that to the trained mind the first of these statements is more exact than the second. But to the ordinary man of

15. Austin Farrer suggests about one man in five thousand, and adds: "but these, no doubt, are the leaven that leavens the lump, and many or few, they ought to be catered for" (*Kerygma and Myth*, p. 24).

16. *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 8 (1955), p. 82.

17. For instance, the Nazi myths of blood and soil. Both Ian Henderson (*Myth in the New Testament*, p. 54) and John Macquarrie (*An Existentialist Theology*, p. 167) criticise Bultmann for not including this type in his definition of "mythology," but this sort of mythology is simply not his concern.



the twentieth century the first statement would be unintelligible. He might misunderstand the second statement by taking it literally, but there is a reasonable chance that its relatively simple symbolism would still convey to his mind the intended meaning, without his having to master existentialist terminology. It would certainly seem far easier to convey the meaning to him by explaining the symbolic language of the Bible than by replacing that language by a new and more difficult way of speaking."<sup>18</sup> It could perhaps be argued that, to express the existential significance of the Biblical message, there is no need to use exclusively the language of the existentialist philosophers, but it has not yet been shown what other terminology we could employ in the program of Demythologising; and it is still the case that the understanding of modern man which Bultmann discloses should lead us to treat his proposal with caution.

(iv) It will have been recognized by now, I think, that my criticisms of this program follow the line of suggesting that it displays the defects of its virtues; it carries things too far. It is this same fault, in respect of the very activity which has given the movement its name, to which I refer in my last two points of criticism. The elaboration of these will serve as the epitome of all that I have to say.

According to Bultmann's own statements, the Demythologising which he is anxious to have carried through must be a complete one. "We cannot save the kerygma by selecting some of its features and subtracting others, and thus reduce the amount of mythology in it."<sup>19</sup> "The mythical view of the world must be accepted or rejected in its entirety."<sup>20</sup> "The degree of elaboration in any given piece of mythology is irrelevant for its classification as mythology."<sup>21</sup>

We may here observe a distinction to which Ian Henderson draws attention. "There is the interpretation whose completion enables us to dispense with the text interpreted. Thus, once a code message has been accurately deciphered there is no need to keep the original text for any other than record purposes. On the other hand there is the kind of interpretation which, however successfully carried out, is no substitute for the original. A sermon or a commentary on one of Shakespeare's plays may be ever so good. But no one—least of all the preacher or the commentator—will maintain that from now on it is immaterial if all the copies of the Biblical text or the play are destroyed." Henderson goes on to say, and I think he is right, that all the indications are that Bultmann intends the first—that "every myth in the Bible must be interpreted *without remainder* into statements which describe the narrator's understanding of his own existence."<sup>22</sup> What I want

18. *An Existentialist Theology*, p. 176.

19. *Kerygma and Myth*, p. 9.

20. *Ibid.*

21. *Ibid.*, p. 102; see also p. 109.

22. *Myth in the New Testament*, p. 31. Cf. the distinction which Allan D. Galloway makes between "the derivative symbols in which an act of faith is expressed and the archetypal symbol to which an act of faith traces its origin" (*Scottish Journal of Theology*, 10 [1957], p. 364).

to point out now is that a complete removal of mythology is not possible. Then I shall suggest that it is not in any case desirable.

(a) It is doubtful that we can dispense altogether with mythological terms even in discussion on the purely human plane. It is interesting to remember that Heidegger, whose philosophy, including his terminology, underlies so much that Bultmann has to say, makes use of a classical myth to elucidate the concept of care (*Sorge*) as that which unifies the three fundamental characters of inauthentic existence (possibility, facticity and fallenness). John Macquarrie aptly asks: "Is it merely by accident that at this critical juncture of his work, when he is concerned to put forward a comprehensive concept that will interpret the meaning of man's everyday existence, Heidegger has resort to a myth? Or is this a tacit acknowledgement that in the communication of the kind of knowledge which we call existential, the myth has its own indispensable function?"<sup>23</sup>

(b) Certainly, as I see it, there can be no avoidance of mythological language when God is to be spoken about. Bultmann admits, in his reply to Schniewind,<sup>24</sup> that "there are certain concepts which are fundamentally mythological, and with which we shall never be able to dispense—e.g. the idea of transcendence."<sup>25</sup> I cannot agree with him that "in such cases, however, the original mythological meaning has been lost, and they have become mere metaphors or ciphers."<sup>26</sup> Even as "mere metaphors or ciphers," they relate to concepts which are an attempt by human minds to comprehend that which ultimately is beyond their comprehension; unless we are content to leave them as completely incomprehensible (and therefore irrelevant to the understanding of human existence) we must either recognise these concepts or terms as themselves mythological, or explain their meaning in other terms which even more obviously fall into the same category.

(c) We cannot, in our preaching of the Gospel, carry out the complete Demythologising for which Bultmann seems to be calling because we cannot ultimately distinguish the "mythological" and the "existential-historical." Bultmann's desire to separate the two arises from two things. One is his objection to the line of thinking which tries to use the mythological as a basis from which to argue to the existential-historical: the line which would contend that the unusual character of certain happenings proves that they may serve as the basis for, or are themselves, the events of redemption. The other is his conviction that, since the mythological does not prove the existential-historical, there is no point in retaining it.<sup>27</sup> Actually, those whom Bultmann is attacking at this point make the same mistake as Bultmann himself—that of trying to separate two things that cannot be separated. Bultmann wants to separate them because he thinks that the mythological is a hindrance to the existential-historical. Those whom he is attacking want

23. *An Existentialist Theology*, p. 113; see also p. 175.

24. For Schniewind's criticisms on this score, see *Kerygma and Myth*, pp. 48-54.

25. *Kerygma and Myth*, p. 103.

26. *Ibid.*

27. Cf. Ian Henderson, *Myth in the New Testament*, p. 48.

to separate them because they think that the mythological is understandable and convincing without the existential-historical. As against Bultmann my point is that any person's experience of the existential-historical involves him inevitably in acceptance of what is characterised by Bultmann as mythological; as against his opponents, it is that if a person is not enjoying experience of the existential-historical, no amount of arguing on the mythological plane can be sufficient to prove it. In each case, it is not appreciated that an ultimate separation of the mythological and the existential-historical is not possible.

(d) We must say, again, that a complete Demythologising is not possible because we lack any criterion which would enable us to do what this program asks us to do. What is assumed throughout the Demythologising view is that the New Testament's presentation of the Gospel is a mixture of the kerygmatic essential and the mythological non-essential, and that we are in a position to distinguish the two. In fact, we have no sure criterion for doing so, and Bultmann and his supporters have not done much to provide us with one. As one writer puts it: "At worst, their *regula fidei* is the *kerygma* minus what conflicts with the *Weltanschauung* of 'modern man'; at best, it is that within the *kerygma* which is patient of existentialist interpretation."<sup>28</sup> In the more homely language of another, they have thrown out the kerygmatic baby with the mythological bath water.<sup>29</sup>

(v) (a) A complete Demythologising of the New Testament is not desirable because, as we have already seen, the result of such a Demythologising, according to the program presented to us, is a Gospel no more intelligible to the modern man than the "mythological" presentation of the Bible itself. (b) It is not desirable, again, because of its suggestion that we arrive at revelation (or, an understanding of the events of redemption) as the result of our interpretation of a set of observable data, instead of being brought to it by an interpretation of the data which is given along with the observation of them. There is involved here what John McIntyre calls "the final challenge put to dogmatic theology by the demythologisation controversy: are we sufficiently sure ourselves of the 'givenness of Revelation', of its factuality over against the theoretical quality which some of its expositors would assign to it, to be able to defend it in face of all attempts to reduce it to something less than itself?"<sup>30</sup>

I have been showing, in these last criticisms of the Demythologising view, that a complete removal of mythology from the New Testament is neither possible nor desirable. Now I must point out that Bultmann himself does not regard a complete Demythologising as necessary or desirable either. There is a point beyond which he will not go, and Macquarrie aptly applies to Bultmann a remark which Tillich made about Barth: that his greatness shows itself in his steadfast refusal to follow out his own ideas to the bitter

28. John McIntyre, in *Canadian Journal of Theology*, 2 (1956), p. 87.

29. I am unable to trace this statement to its source. Compare a somewhat similar statement by John Macquarrie (*An Existentialist Theology*, p. 96).

30. *Canadian Journal of Theology*, vol. 2 (1956), p. 91.

end.<sup>31</sup> If, then, a complete Demythologising is not possible, and in any case not desirable, and if even Bultmann himself does not attempt it, we have to ask what the program of Demythologising does in fact achieve.

What that program tries to do is what the Church has been attempting to do all down the ages. There has been, at each point, the need to show how certain happenings in the past are relevant for people in the present. And at each point the Church has sought to do this in terms understandable by the people to whom it preached—recognising, as it did so, that it was itself a child of its own day, and not possessed of a wisdom sufficient for it to determine finally that its presentation of the Gospel was without any admixture of error. It is the chief virtue of Bultmann and his Demythologising, and of the resultant controversy, that it has made us face up anew to this same urgent and perennial task in the mid-twentieth century. In its bringing forward of certain questions—What is myth? What is existence? What is history? and so on—it compels us to ask whether we really know the Gospel we preach, and whether we are really doing all that we can to present what is absolutely essential in it.

Some words of Bultmann himself may be quoted: "If the challenge of Demythologising was first raised by the conflict between the mythological cosmology of the Bible and the modern scientific world view, it at once became evident that the restatement of mythology is a requirement of faith itself. . . . Starting as it does from the modern world view, and challenging the Biblical mythology and the traditional proclamation of the Church, this new kind of criticism is performing for faith the supreme service of recalling it to a radical consideration of its nature."<sup>32</sup> Whether or not we agree with the answers he gives, Bultmann and his supporters, together with his critics, are making us ask the right questions.

31. *An Existentialist Theology*, p. 243.

32. *Kerygma and Myth*, p. 210.