

# JESUS IN THE HANDS OF A BARTHIAN

## RUDOLF BULTMANN'S JESUS IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF A CENTURY OF CRITICISM\*

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**M**R. PRESIDENT and Gentlemen of the Board of Trustees:

I wish to take this opportunity to express my gratitude for the honor which you have conferred upon me in elevating me to the Professorship of New Testament. Let me assure you that I am vividly aware of the unique privileges which this position affords, and that I am entering upon its labors with no small measure of enthusiasm. Nevertheless, as I reflect upon the demands which it places upon me, I confess a deep sense of inadequacy.

One factor in the situation that gives me considerable pause is the memory of the one whom I am called to succeed in this great work. Although fifteen months have passed since Dr. Machen found rest from his labors as minister and teacher of the New Testament, the sense of loss, like the sorrow at his departure, has not diminished. I am deeply conscious of the distinction which his presence here gave to the department of New Testament, as to the Seminary as a whole, both through his scholarly attainments and his illustrious success as a teacher. I can follow him only from afar. Nevertheless, my mind does not linger long with these thoughts before I am reminded that our sovereign God, who bestows diversity of gifts, both of kind and of measure, does not hold us responsible according to the standard of another's endowments.

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The final reason why my enthusiasm is tempered with trembling is found in the character of the responsibility that has fallen upon me. For the responsibility is to God Himself, and demands first of all faithfulness in the handling of His Word! Today, through the reading of the pledge required of professors in this institution, I dare say that you too have been impressed with the solemn character of this undertaking. Accordingly, that which occupies my mind today is less the exacting demands of true scholarship, however insistent they are, than the call for faithfulness to the Word of God. Not long ago a Calvinistic theologian in the Netherlands spoke aptly of the isolation in which the Reformed man finds himself today as he takes his stand upon the Bible as the Word of God, surrounded as he is by the mediating theology of experience on the one hand, and by the Barthian theology on the other.<sup>1</sup> In this country too we have become conscious of our isolation, but, in humble submission to the authority of God speaking in His Word, and in reliance upon the power of His Spirit, we can go forward in quiet confidence to seek to fulfill our God-appointed task.

I propose to speak to you on the theme: RUDOLF BULTMANN'S JESUS IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF A CENTURY OF CRITICISM. I shall be concerned to examine his approach to and estimate of the testimony of the gospels concerning Christ. To use the familiar modern formulation, my address will endeavor to set forth Bultmann's place in the history of the quest of the historical Jesus.

Lest it should appear that I have chosen a rather narrow theme for an inaugural address, in so far as I am restricting myself to the point of view of a single individual, let me say that the Professor of New Testament at the University of Marburg is not an isolated figure. Rudolf Bultmann's view of Jesus has peculiar significance because in him converge what appear to be the two most noteworthy developments in the study of the New Testament in the past two decades.

<sup>1</sup> Berkhouwer, G. C. in an address before the 26th General Conference of De Vereniging van Predikanten van de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland, reported in *Gereformeerd Theologisch Tijdschrift*, XXXVIII, 1937, pp. 535 ff.

One development is concerned with a distinctive approach to and treatment of the gospels regarded as sources for the knowledge of Christ, and the other comes to expression in a new estimate of the theological message of the New Testament, and of the figure of Jesus Christ in particular. Through a survey of the former, I shall seek to show how, especially as an advocate of *Formgeschichte*, or form-criticism, Bultmann has come to a position of thorough-going skepticism on the testimony of the gospels to the history of Christ. But alongside of this extreme historical skepticism there appears, particularly in his exposition of the message of Jesus, a positive theology, indeed, nothing less than the theology of crisis, the theology which is being hailed as the answer to modernism and even as a return to the Calvinistic theology of the Reformation.<sup>2</sup> The relation of the historical skepticism and the theological construction is in need of clarification. Whether or not my discussion aids in its clarification — if it be true that historic Christianity has looked upon the history of Christ as its very foundation — the consideration of this

<sup>2</sup> President John A. Mackay, for example, says: "It is Reformed theologians like Barth and Brunner who have smashed the presuppositions of theological modernism and rekindled faith in the Scriptures and historic Christianity", in *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin*, XXXI, November, 1937, p. 2.

In characterizing Bultmann's theological point of view as Barthian, I am far from wishing to imply that there are not noteworthy differences between him and Barth, much less that the details of this discussion of Bultmann's views are meant to apply without qualification to the crisis theologians in general. Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, I, 1, p. 421, indeed, criticizes Bultmann's *Jesus* for its neglect of the deeds of Jesus, as distinguished from His teaching, and evidently does not follow Bultmann in his extreme historical skepticism. The decisive issue, however, is not that of the extent of historical skepticism but of the evaluation of the history of Christ. Indifference to the history of Christ appears most pointedly on the background of radical skepticism but it may go hand in hand with a relatively high view of the trustworthiness of the gospel records. It will not do summarily to set Bultmann aside as "extreme" in the interest of classifying Barth as "conservative", for they are essentially in agreement on the all-determinative matter of the doctrine of God, including the philosophy of nature and of history. The very radicalness of Bultmann's approach may serve to clarify the relation of the crisis theology to historic Christianity.

theme clearly involves reflection upon the momentous issue of the very nature of Christianity.

Before proceeding to the discussion of Bultmann's application of form-criticism to the gospels and his interpretation of the teaching of Jesus, it will be necessary to note his place in the history of the criticism of the gospels themselves. In order to set this matter in perspective I shall first endeavor to sketch in a few broad strokes the history of modern criticism. Meanwhile the background for an understanding of Bultmann's work as form-critic and as theologian will have been provided, if only in meager outline.

## I

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND. ESTIMATE OF THE TESTIMONY OF THE GOSPELS.

For the purpose of this survey it is not necessary to turn back the pages of history beyond the thirties of the last century. The influence of the rationalism of the Enlightenment had begun to wane, but in its place came the idealistic philosophy of Hegel. Soon after Hegel's death in 1831, his philosophy inspired two notable reconstructions of the origin and early history of Christianity. These were the productions of Ferdinand Christian Baur and of David Friedrich Strauss.

Although Baur's chief writings and the period of the dominant influence of the famous Tübingen School fell in the following decades, it is exactly one hundred years ago that Baur, in an article on the origin of the episcopate, outlined his reinterpretation of early Christian history in terms of the Hegelian dialectic.<sup>3</sup> On this basis the gospels and other canonical writings were regarded as party documents, and were thought to reflect either an early period of hostility or a later period of compromise, with the result that the traditional views of their dates and origin were radically revised. While many of the conclusions of Baur and his followers are regarded today merely as historical curiosities, one may not

<sup>3</sup> "Ueber den Ursprung des Episcopats", in *Tübinger Zeitschrift für Theologie*, 1838, Heft 3, pp. 142 ff.

overlook the continued influence of their attack upon the unity of the New Testament by way of setting one part against another in incisive fashion. In this connection it is well to recall also that later criticism, while modifying decisively the Tübingen view of the synoptic gospels, generally accepted its judgment that John is quite untrustworthy as a source for the history of Christ.

My interest in this study centers more directly upon Strauss, pupil of Baur and eighteen years his junior, whose *Leben Jesu* appeared in 1835, when he was only twenty-seven. The reason for attaching greater significance to Strauss in this connection is that his monumental work is absorbed with the testimony of the gospels themselves, an approach which is most characteristic of our own times and, while open to serious criticism because of its neglect of the testimony of early tradition, serves to center attention most quickly upon the issues that are at stake. Because of the drastic character of his attack upon the testimony of the gospels, the work of Strauss was an immediate sensation, so much of a sensation, indeed, that, since he forthwith lost his position as *Repetent* at the famous *Stift* in Tübingen, it put an end to an academic career that had hardly begun.

The main thrust of the criticism of Strauss was directed against the miraculous elements in the gospels. On the basis of the consistent naturalism of the Hegelian philosophy, maintaining that "the absolute cause never disturbs the chain of secondary causes by single arbitrary acts of interposition",<sup>4</sup> he rejected in decisive fashion a great portion of the testimony of the gospels. Disdaining the highly subjective and arbitrary interpretations of the rationalists like Paulus along with the mediating approach of Schleiermacher, he developed his mythological theory to account for the origin of most of the contents of the gospels. The myths which made Jesus a supernatural figure were produced, according to Strauss, by the early church, not indeed as pious frauds nor as conscious fiction, but as the unconscious products of faith. In this process Strauss attributed decisive significance

<sup>4</sup> *Das Leben Jesu*, 4te Aufl., 1840, I, p. 100 (E. T., *The Life of Jesus*, 1846, I, p. 88).

to a subjective experience of the disciples in Galilee which led them to believe in the resurrection of Jesus, and to their application to Jesus of passages from the Old Testament which were interpreted messianically. Radical as Strauss was in his skepticism, it must not be forgotten that he affirmed the historicity of the messianic consciousness of Jesus, regarding that consciousness and its disclosure to the disciples as the necessary presuppositions of their belief in the resurrection. At this point, therefore, Strauss stopped short of the position enunciated by Bruno Bauer in 1840, not to speak now of the even more radical position represented by the latter's denial even of the historicity of Jesus in 1850.

Strauss, of course, did not regard his attack upon the testimony of the gospels as an attack upon religion or even upon Christianity. For on the basis of his idealistic philosophy he sharply separated religion and history. Religious ideas, he said, are real and have permanent validity quite apart from the changing and inadequate historical forms which they may assume. Consequently, while the idea of the God-man is the highest idea conceived by human thought, it is not dependent upon, and cannot be perfectly expressed in, its external representation in the history of Jesus. On this view, accordingly, no amount of historical skepticism can destroy the ideal or real elements of religion.

Turning now to the latter half of the nineteenth century, I shall recall certain important developments which provided the immediate background for the developments of the present century. In general it may be observed that, as the critical conclusions of Baur proved to be untenable, a more sober criticism came to the fore, and that a new regard for the significance of history became evident as new philosophical and theological developments broke the spell of Hegelianism. My concern here is principally with the rise of the Liberal Theology and the emergence of the Marcan Hypothesis in their significance for the study of the life of Jesus. Christian Hermann Weisse, whose work on Gospel History appeared in 1838,<sup>5</sup> was a forerunner of the new approach to the study

<sup>5</sup> *Die evangelische Geschichte kritisch und philosophisch bearbeitet.*

of the life of Jesus both by his non-eschatological interpretation of the messianic consciousness and by his argument for the priority of Mark. However, it was not until the epochal second edition of Ritschl's *Die Entstehung der alt-katholische Kirche* appeared in 1857, and Holtzmann's *Die synoptischen Evangelien* in 1863, that the new movement really was under way.

The Marcan Hypothesis, which was developed especially by Holtzmann as an important aspect of the two-document theory of synoptic criticism, involved not merely the acceptance of Weisse's conclusion as to the priority of Mark, but also a distinctive judgment as to the general trustworthiness of this gospel. Mark was elevated to a place of high regard at the expense not only of John but of Matthew and Luke as well, the latter two being regarded as possessing little or no historical value independent of Mark, except where they were thought to depend upon a second source which came to be known as Q. Mark, in contrast to the other gospels, was thought to be based very definitely upon historical reminiscence, perhaps that of Peter himself.

On the basis of the outline of Mark the Liberals proceeded with great confidence to compose their Lives of Jesus. Of course, since these Lives presupposed a naturalistic philosophy of history, there were miracles and kindred elements to be laid aside. Another difficulty was found in the fact that Mark hardly provided enough material to satisfy some of the demands of modern biographical study which had come strongly under the influence of psychology and the evolutionary philosophy.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, with sovereign self-assurance, the Liberals felt equal to the task of separating the kernel from the husk, and of making "the historical Jesus" psychologically intelligible.

<sup>6</sup> Holtzmann, for example, not merely applied the concept of development to the external course of the life of Jesus, going so far as to distinguish seven stages in the Galilean ministry, but also supposed that he could trace the development of Jesus' self-consciousness from that of a prophet to that of Messiah. Cf. *Die synoptischen Evangelien*, pp. 479 ff.; *Lehrbuch der neutestamentlichen Theologie*, 2te Aufl., 1911, I, pp. 298 ff. Even Strauss forsook the Hegelian approach for the evolutionary in his *Das Leben Jesu für das deutsche Volk bearbeitet*, 1864 (E. T., *A New Life of Jesus*).

This concern to set forth the life of "the historical Jesus" involved more than a unique estimate of Mark. Factors more distinctly philosophical and theological affected the whole approach in important particulars. Neo-Kantianism had replaced Hegelianism, and with it came, especially through the theology of the Ritschlian School, a new conception of the relation between religion and history. Along with a fundamental theological agnosticism, which ruled out metaphysics and mysticism from religion, there developed a religious evaluation of the purely natural phenomena of history which came to be known as historicism. As a corollary of this new approach history came to be interpreted in terms of the influence of great personalities and heroic figures. In this fashion the history of religious personalities and heroes of faith came to be given the value of revelation. In general theocentric Christianity was naturalized as a religion of human experience.

The brilliant lectures which Harnack delivered at the University of Berlin during the winter semester, 1899-1900, published in English under the title, *What is Christianity?*, represent a classical expression of this Liberal point of view. Jesus is presented first and foremost as a great religious personality, whose message, to use Harnack's own words, "may be reduced to these two heads — God as the Father, and the human soul so ennobled that it can and does unite with him", a message which as it was realized in His own consciousness somehow became the basis of a call to "communicate this knowledge of God to others by word and deed".<sup>7</sup> In typically Liberal fashion Harnack, while affirming the historicity of the messianic consciousness, relegated it to the periphery of Jesus' estimate of Himself. It was not essential to Jesus so far as the consciousness of His relation to the Father was concerned. Rather it was merely a formal concept which He took over in order to make His sense of vocation intelligible in terms of the contemporary messianic hope, but which must have been uncongenial and even burdensome to Him. The

<sup>7</sup> *Das Wesen des Christentums*, pp. 41, 81 (E. T., pp. 63, 128).

difference between the orthodox view of the significance of the history of Christ and the Liberal conception of the influence of the historical Jesus received pointed expression in Harnack's distinction between the Easter message and the Easter faith. The Easter message, the message of the empty tomb and of the bodily resurrection is, according to Harnack, quite untrustworthy, but its rejection need not destroy the Easter faith, the faith that Jesus lives and that there is life eternal. This certainty of eternal life comes "by the vision of Jesus' life and death and by the feeling of his imperishable union with God".<sup>8</sup> Not His unique redemptive work by way of His death and resurrection, then, but the powerful impression of the personality of the historical Jesus is made the basis of the hope of eternal life.

The Liberal view of Christianity probably never received more fascinating or more influential formulation than in Harnack's lectures, and yet one of the severest and most significant attacks upon the Liberal position emerged in the very next year. I have in mind particularly the book of Wrede entitled *Das Messiasgeheimnis in den Evangelien* which appeared in 1901. This work, which Bultmann has called "the most important work in the field of gospel research in the generation now past",<sup>9</sup> introduced a point of view which has been particularly characteristic of this century. Indeed, Bultmann presupposes so fully the conclusions of Wrede, and goes forward so deliberately in his spirit, that it is convenient to join the consideration of Bultmann's approach to the gospels with that of Wrede.

The main concern of Wrede's book is to attack the Liberal view of Mark. The conclusion that Mark is far superior to the other gospels Wrede regarded as quite mistaken. Mark, he held, is essentially a theological construction rather than history, and is only relatively superior even to John. It is evident that a new approach to the study of history came into play here. The extremes of the psychological study of the

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103; cf. pp. 101 ff. (E. T., p. 163; cf. pp. 160 ff.).

<sup>9</sup> *Die Erforschung der synoptischen Evangelien*, 2te Aufl., 1930, pp. 10 f. (E. T. in *Form Criticism*, by F. C. Grant, p. 22).

life of Christ were exposed by Wrede, who declared that the science concerned with the life of Jesus had become ill with psychological supposition, which he went on to characterize as a kind of historical guessing. He protested vigorously against the method which in arbitrary fashion picks and chooses within an historical tradition instead of viewing the tradition as a whole. His approach, in other words, represented a strong protest against the manner in which men were wont confidently to regard their own modern views as the kernel and all else as the husk.

In the place of the interpretation of the life of Jesus in terms of psychology, there came to be substituted the sociological approach which has been distinctive of the study of history in the twentieth century.<sup>10</sup> Individual personalities retire into the background, and society is made the starting-point of investigation. Now we begin to hear of *Gemeinde-theologie*, *Gemeindedogmatik*, *Gemeindebildung*, and less and less of the formative influence of Jesus and His disciples. The approach of Wrede received strong confirmation from Wellhausen in his studies on the synoptic gospels, and Bultmann, expressing his hearty approval, credits Wellhausen with the establishment of the principle that "a literary work or a fragment of tradition is a primary source for the historical situation out of which it arose, and is only a secondary source for the historical details concerning which it gives information".<sup>11</sup>

Bultmann not only shares Wrede's opinion that the gospels are not to be taken seriously as historical records of the life of

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Schmidt, K. L., "Die Stellung der Evangelien in der allgemeinen Literaturgeschichte", in *Eucharisterion*, 1923, II, pp. 50-134, especially 89 ff. Schmidt says, p. 76: "Das Evangelium ist von Haus aus nicht Hochliteratur, sondern Kleinliteratur, nicht individuelle Schriftstellerleistung, sondern Volksbuch, nicht Biographie, sondern Kultlegende". See also Cullmann, "Les récentes Études sur la formation de la tradition évangélique", in *Revue d'Histoire et de Philosophie religieuse*, 1925, p. 573; Dibelius, "Jesus in Contemporary German Theology" in *The Journal of Religion*, XI, 1931, pp. 182 ff.

<sup>11</sup> "The New Approach to the Synoptic Problem" in *The Journal of Religion*, VI, 1926, p. 341.

Christ, but goes beyond him in the development of the view which interprets them primarily as sources for our knowledge of early church history. Indeed, he holds that the gospels are so far removed from the historical Jesus that they do not even reflect primarily the attitude toward Jesus of the primitive Palestinian church, but rather the theology of the Hellenistic communities. Bultmann describes the gospels as expansions of the Hellenistic preaching of Christ, which, he holds, was the earliest preaching to set forth Christ as a cult-deity whose death and resurrection are the basis of salvation. The gospels then are expanded cult legends, and their message is that of the Christ-myth. Mark created the gospel type; in Matthew and Luke the mythical side is developed still further as, for example, by the birth narratives, although they also contain more of historical tradition, especially in the records of the teaching of Jesus. John is distinctive in that the mythological construction has completely conquered the historical tradition.<sup>12</sup>

Enough has been said to indicate how on the Wrede-Bultmann view of the gospels they cease to be witnesses to the history of Christ. For the clarification of this approach it is necessary to enquire as to the basis of their judgment. One cannot read very much either of Wrede or of Bultmann without discovering that their historical skepticism with respect to the gospel records is bound up decisively with their negative judgment on the historicity of the messianic consciousness. While both Wrede and Bultmann intimate that they are inclined to doubt its historicity, and actually seem as a matter of course to refer to the creative activity of the early church those elements of the gospel tradition which reflect the disclosure or recognition of the messiahship, actually they define their position with respect to this matter as that of agnosticism. Bultmann, for example, declares that we cannot even make out whether Jesus regarded Himself as the Messiah, and he goes on to say that, if there is darkness on this point, since the conception of messiahship must have

<sup>12</sup> *Die Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition*, 2te Aufl., 1931, pp. 362 ff.

determined decisively the whole being of one who regarded himself as the Messiah, it follows that we can have no knowledge of the historical personality of Jesus at all.<sup>13</sup>

But there is obviously more at work here than this radically negative attitude towards the historicity of the messianic consciousness, decisive as this factor is in their judgment upon the gospels. For, in treating of the testimony of the gospels, one is not concerned with a messiahship in the abstract, but rather with a concrete manifestation in history. One might affirm the historicity of the messianic consciousness in the abstract, and yet hold that the portrait of the Messiah which is drawn in the gospels is far from being true to historical fact. The negative character of the view under consideration appears, indeed, in its true perspective only when it is observed that the Messiah of the gospels is regarded as obviously unhistorical in view of the thoroughly supernatural character of His person. In modern criticism generally the "historical" Jesus is synonymous with a merely human Jesus, but the distinctiveness of the new view over against the Liberal constructions lies in its clear apprehension of the fact that the gospels consistently present Him as one who cannot be explained in terms of human categories.

Wrede says, for example, that the theological character of the messianic secret becomes wholly clear only when we ask how Mark regarded the object of secrecy, and that the briefest, and for us the most important, answer to this question is that it is conceived in a thoroughly supernatural fashion.<sup>14</sup> In other words, the fully "theological", that is, unhistorical, character of Mark's presentation of the Messiah appears not only in the fact that Jesus does not appear to seek to disclose the messiahship openly, but also in that the messiahship is conceived in such transcendent fashion that it can become known only by way of revelation. In view of Bultmann's hearty approval of Wrede's argument, one hardly need point out his agreement with Wrede in this matter. His fundamentally antisupernaturalistic approach will appear in other ways as this discussion proceeds.

<sup>13</sup> *Jesus*, 1926, pp. 12 f.

<sup>14</sup> *Das Messiasgeheimnis*, pp. 71 ff.; cf. pp. 32, 47, 48.

## II

FORMGESCHICHTE. EFFORT TO RECOVER HISTORICAL  
TRADITION BEHIND THE GOSPELS.

If then the position of Wrede and Bultmann involves the judgment that the gospels cannot be taken seriously as witnesses to the history of Christ, being, rather, direct witnesses only to the history of early Christianity, it is but a short step to the conclusion that the historicity of Christ cannot be substantiated at all. Yet Wrede and Bultmann do not take this step. Although their skepticism exceeds that of Strauss, as their negative conclusion on the messianic consciousness recalls, they stop short of the conclusion of Bruno Bauer and the more recent representatives of the mythical school. Reflecting on the denial by the latter of the historicity of Jesus, Bultmann declares (too lightly on his own premises) that this position is not worth refutation.<sup>15</sup> It appears then, in spite of the strong reaction of Wrede and Bultmann against the Liberal method of criticism, that they are still on Liberal ground in the judgment that there is a primary stratum of history embedded in the gospels which it is the business of criticism to recover. So Wrede, although he protested in an effective manner against the arbitrary separation of the kernel from the husk which was characteristic of the Liberal approach, and even maintained that Paul was the second founder of Christianity, nevertheless confidently asserted that Jesus' whole concern was with "an ethical imperative born out of the highest religious individualism".<sup>16</sup> And Bultmann frankly asserts that the kernel must be separated from the husk.<sup>17</sup> It is exactly at this point however that Bultmann's advance upon Wrede comes into view. For he maintains that now at long last objective criteria have been discovered whereby the later strata of the gospel tradition may be eliminated and the primary stratum of historical

<sup>15</sup> *Jesus*, p. 16.

<sup>16</sup> *Ueber Aufgabe und Methode der sogenannten Neutestamentliche Theologie*, 1897, p. 67; *Paulus*, 1904, p. 104 (E. T., *Paul*, 1908, p. 179).

<sup>17</sup> "Jesus und Paulus", in *Jesus Christus im Zeugnis der Heiligen Schrift und der Kirche*, 1936, p. 72.

fact may be recovered. These objective criteria are thought to be provided by the method known as form-criticism.

Before Bultmann's distinctive interpretation of this supposed primary stratum is considered, it is imperative to examine the process by which it has been reached, and test its supposed objectivity. It will not be possible, of course, to present here a very thorough exposition of *Formgeschichte* nor to criticize it in any really adequate fashion. But I shall aim to deal with its presuppositions, principles, and application only in so far as is necessary to clarify Bultmann's approach to the history of Jesus.<sup>18</sup>

In the remarkable development of the application of this method to the study of the gospels which followed the war, Bultmann has had a prominent place. His greatest work — *Die Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition* — belongs to that small group of writings devoted to this subject which, appearing practically simultaneously, at once arrested the attention of students of the New Testament. Along with Martin Dibelius he has been a leading expositor and defender of the method, and no one has approached him in the thoroughness with which he has applied it to the study of the synoptic gospels.

Its sudden appearance after the war gives it the appearance of novelty, but it is hardly a "wonder child" for there is much in the preceding developments that accounts for its origin. It is not necessary to trace here, as Fascher has done, the history of criticism which has explained the agreement of the gospels as due to the influence of oral tradition, or has set up stylistic and other formal criteria as the basis of historical judgments. The most important consideration here is that form-criticism is not so much an independent method of criticism as a special approach within the broader method

<sup>18</sup> Bultmann's exposition of *Formgeschichte* is found in the books and article dealing with the synoptic gospels which have been mentioned and in the article "Evangelien, gattungsgeschichtlich" in *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, 2te Aufl., II, coll. 418 ff. Notable criticisms of the method are found in Fascher, *Die formgeschichtliche Methode*, 1924; Köhler, *Das formgeschichtliche Problem des Neuen Testaments*, 1927; Easton, *The Gospel before the Gospels*, 1928; Taylor, *The Formation of the Gospel Tradition*, 1933; Grosheide, *Hermeneutiek*, 1929.

known as the *religionsgeschichtliche Methode*. Bultmann's treatment of the contents of the synoptic gospels is essentially an application of the method which Hermann Gunkel applied to Genesis in his epochal commentary which was first published in 1901.<sup>19</sup> The high claims of the method must be judged in the light of its *religionsgeschichtliche* presuppositions.

Some of the implications of these presuppositions will appear as I proceed to examine critically the essential elements of form-criticism particularly as they appear in Bultmann's writings. In its effort to recover the primary stratum of the gospel tradition, this method proceeds in three distinct stages: a preliminary stage in which the stories and sayings are isolated from their contexts in the gospels, a second in which the isolated units are subjected to internal criticism with a view to the recovery of their supposed original form in the oral tradition, and a final stage in which, through the application of external criticism, units that supposedly reflect situations that arose after the death of Jesus are eliminated as anachronistic. Those that remain after this process of reduction and elimination are received as authentic witnesses to the purpose of Jesus.

The preliminary requirement is that the gospel material be broken up into small units by setting aside the framework in which they are found in the gospels. This requirement is

<sup>19</sup> In Gunkel's commentary there appeared the very features that characterize the current study of the gospels: acceptance of the principal conclusions of the literary criticism of the previous generation; classification and evaluation of contents according to form; rejection of the stories as history, with the implication that the "authors" were not responsible historians but mere collectors and editors. Gunkel's influence upon the whole development was also very marked in the series of studies known as *Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments*, 1903 ff., which, in association first with Bousset and later with Bultmann, he sponsored and edited, and through the little book, *Zum religionsgeschichtlichen Verständnis des Neuen Testaments*, 1903. A detail which confirms the continuity of development from Gunkel to Bultmann is found in the latter's appeal, *Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition*, p. 310, in support of his interpretation of the account of the appearance of the risen Lord to Cleopas and his companion as legendary, to Gunkel's statement that this narrative of the appearance of deity might, so far as its style is concerned, have appeared in Genesis.

widely regarded as having been fulfilled by Karl Ludwig Schmidt in his influential book, *Der Rahmen der Geschichte Jesu*, which appeared in 1919. On the basis of a detailed examination of the chronological and topographical references in the gospels, he concluded not only that they do not offer a satisfactory basis for reconstructing the course of the life of Jesus but even inferred that these data, with the exception of the framework of the passion narratives, are almost exclusively the inventions of Mark and the other evangelists. Bultmann presupposes this study of Schmidt, and even goes beyond him in his skepticism as to the reliability of the evangelists' references to time and place. Bultmann holds, for example, that the passion narratives too must be broken up, and that they presuppose nothing more than an old, very brief, report of the arrest, judgment by the Sanhedrin and by Pilate, the removal to the cross, and the crucifixion and death.<sup>20</sup>

The Liberals, it will be recalled, took the order of events in Mark as providing a trustworthy outline of the life of the historical Jesus, and composed their biographical studies accordingly. In so far as Schmidt has shown that the materials in Mark are often loosely joined and that the interest in chronology is not very marked, he has offered an important criticism of the Liberal Jesus. And, in entire agreement with this observation, Schmidt has shown more fully in another significant study on the place of the gospels in the general history of literature that the gospels are not formal historical or biographical studies, written in imitation of literary models, but are essentially non-literary in character and have in view a popular audience.<sup>21</sup> However, these observations of Schmidt as to the popular character of the gospels are hardly to be regarded as new discoveries. Professor W. P. Armstrong, in his inaugural address of nearly thirty-five years ago, concluded on the basis of a survey of the witness of the gospels that they "are manifestly not intended to be biographies or

<sup>20</sup> *Geschichte usw.*, pp. 301 f.; cf. 347 ff.

<sup>21</sup> See note 10.

to furnish us with a scientific life of Jesus. They are rather witnesses to the life and work of Jesus, chiefly during His public ministry".<sup>22</sup>

While therefore one may recognize elements of merit in Schmidt's approach, it is necessary to oppose the particular form it assumes when it identifies lack of concern for scientific historical form with indifference to historical fact. It by no means follows from the popular form of the gospels that the evangelists were not particularly concerned to limit their materials to what had actually happened. Support for this supposed indifference to history is often sought in the eschatological outlook of the early Christians which is thought to have centered their attention only upon the future. Aside from the one-sidedness with which this theory is usually formulated, it is open to the serious objection that it misconceives the mutual relations of history and eschatology. For it was the history of Christ that made the disciples concerned with His return, and the significance of His return was understood only in the light of the estimate of His historical mission. I Thessalonians, for example, reflects the early interest in eschatology, but it is significant that the Christ whose coming was awaited from heaven was the Jesus whose death and resurrection constituted Him as Saviour from the wrath to come.<sup>23</sup>

Moreover, the criticism of the framework of the gospels involves an approach to the question of the relations of the gospels which is very unsatisfactory. Form-criticism has again directed attention to the fact that the gospels presuppose a period of oral teaching and preaching, first on the part of Jesus and afterward on the part of his disciples, but the new method has failed lamentably to estimate the decisive significance of this fact. Fascher pointed out that this recognition of the period of oral transmission is irreconcilable with the old point of view in synoptic criticism which tended to

<sup>22</sup> "The Witness of the Gospels", in *The Princeton Theological Review*, II, 1904, p. 47.

<sup>23</sup> I Thess. 1:9 f.; 2:15; 4:14; 5:9.

multiply hypothetical documents in the interest of reaching the earliest witnesses to the life of Christ.<sup>24</sup> But the form-critics generally are still so enamoured of the view which reduces the evangelists Matthew and Luke to mere editors of documents that little or no effort is made to estimate their position in the stream of oral transmission. If, instead of being mere editors of Mark and other written sources, Matthew and Luke themselves were active agents in the oral transmission of the Christian message, their differences from Mark may be at least partially accounted for as due to the variety within the oral tradition, and this variety, in turn, may be traced to the variety in the instruction and acts of Jesus. The variety in the teaching ministry of Jesus has recently been recognized in a salutary manner by Burton Scott Easton, a Liberal critic of form-criticism. Reflecting upon the widespread and constant activity of Jesus, he remarks that "we must think of hundreds of instructions delivered in dozens of places. So there must have been an almost infinite repetition of material".<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, Scott observes that, while many of the sayings and parables would have been repeated in the same form, other sayings and parables would have received different form and different grouping on different occasions.<sup>26</sup> Failing to learn the lessons which should have been learned through reflection upon the fact of the early oral transmission of the gospel materials, the form-critics continue to follow the old method of setting gospel over against gospel and account over against account. A sound historical judgment on the diversity within the ministry of Jesus is essential to the interpretation of the contents of the gospels in their mutual relations. The harmony of the gospels

<sup>24</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 4 ff., 232 f. Grobel, *Formgeschichte und Synoptische Quellenanalyse*, 1937, pp. 23 f., also calls attention to the sharp differences between the approach of the old source criticism and that of *Formgeschichte*. Grosheide, "The Synoptic Problem", in *The Evangelical Quarterly*, III, 1931, pp. 57 ff. and Greijdanus, "De Boeken van het Nieuwe Testament", in *Bijbelsch Handboek*, II, 1935, pp. 95 ff. have recently demanded that the factor of oral tradition be taken seriously in dealing with the origin of the synoptic gospels.

<sup>25</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 39.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 122 f.

does not depend ultimately upon one's ability to arrange all of their contents in orderly succession in a synopsis, but rather upon the unity which they possess as trustworthy witnesses to Christ. On this view the several gospels do not present diverse frameworks for the life of Christ, but each is a witness to certain aspects of the single historical framework of Christ's life which has not been completely preserved. Instead therefore of talk of shattering the framework of the life of Christ, there is need of a recognition of the limits of historical study.<sup>27</sup>

The second stage of the form-critical process is concerned with the internal criticism of the isolated units of tradition. If the evangelists are conceived of as writers who manipulated the tradition of the life of Christ in the interest of their own theological preconceptions, and assembled the separate stories and sayings into a chronological and topographical framework largely of their own invention, it would indeed be a matter for surprise if these units were thought of as having themselves escaped manipulation. As a matter of fact the form-critic claims that he has in his hands the necessary tests for the discovery and elimination of editorial accretions as well as such modifications as had arisen before the stories and sayings reached the hands of the editors. Lest we should suppose that Bultmann is unaware of the boldness of his self-appointed task of tracing the history of the synoptic tradition from the point of its origin to that of its inclusion in the gospels, he admits at the very start that this is a very difficult task and ought to proceed with great caution.<sup>28</sup> Having disarmed us in this fashion, he proceeds confidently to his goal.

The confidence with which he operates is bound up with his acceptance of certain supposedly well-established laws of style which are thought to apply to the development of tradition. In part they may be learned by observing the

<sup>27</sup> For a criticism of certain details of Schmidt's argument cf. Dodd, "The Framework of the Gospel Narrative", in *The Expository Times*, XLIII, 1932, pp. 396 ff. See also Burkitt, *Jesus Christ*, 1932, pp. 69 ff.

<sup>28</sup> *Erforschung usw.*, p. 15; "The New Approach to the Synoptic Problem", p. 344.

manner in which Matthew and Luke are thought to expand upon Mark, and the apocryphal gospels upon the canonical gospels; they may also be learned by taking note of the style of popular literature in the Jewish and Hellenistic world. In accordance with these laws, it is maintained that the various types of traditional discourse, whether parables, apothegms, legends, or the like, are marked by a stereotyped form which permits one to test whether any type has been altered. Each unit is thought of as being complete in itself, rounded off stylistically, self-explanatory, and brief, expressing in simple fashion a single idea or event. The presence of specific details, like the names of the individuals involved in any narrative, is taken as a sign of secondary development. Accordingly, the very elements which by their vividness and concreteness and specific character have often been thought to confirm authenticity are on this approach regarded as evidences of free handling and corruption of the tradition. And since each unit must be complete in itself, any element which intimates a connection with any other saying or event or with a larger historical background is eliminated. The result is that the traditionally primary requirement of exegesis that a text be interpreted in the light of its context appears to be abandoned for the principle that its first task is to trim away the context in order that the text may appear in all of its perspicuity!

One or two examples chosen from Bultmann may serve to illustrate the manner in which formal criteria are made the basis of important inferences. The parables generally are thought to be far simpler than the evangelists supposed, and their interpretations, as in Mark 4, for example, are thought to have come from a time when their original perspicuous meaning had been forgotten. In this connection the style of the rabbinical parables is set up as a standard for the modification of their form in the gospels. Other parables which contain predictive elements are judged to have been allegorized in the process of transmission. So Mark 2:19 is declared to be properly parabolic in its declaration that the sons of the bridechamber are not able to fast while the bridegroom is with them. Yet when in the next verse Mark reports that Jesus adds, "But the days shall come when the bridegroom

shall be taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day", Bultmann declares that this is an allegorical addition.<sup>29</sup>

Another illustration of a rather different kind is found in Bultmann's elimination of Mark 16:7.<sup>30</sup> This verse, which tells of the command of the angel to the women to remind the disciples of Jesus' prediction that He would precede them into Galilee, is rejected by Bultmann as not belonging to the story of the empty tomb. Verse 8, which describes the women's flight from the tomb, and contains the report that they told nothing to anyone, is said to follow properly upon verse 6. On this view the reference to the women's silence was meant to account for the (alleged) fact that the story remained unknown for a long time. In other words, Bultmann believes that the report of the empty tomb originated long after the death of Jesus, and the silence of the women referred to in verse 8 was meant to cover up its late origin. Indeed, Bultmann does not seek to rest his judgment concerning verse 7 wholly on its inclusion in the story of the empty tomb. He admits that there is an historical factor too. This verse is secondary also, he affirms, because it presupposes the disciples' presence in Jerusalem on Easter Sunday which is in conflict with the Galilean Hypothesis which he believes to be well-established. I shall have occasion in a later connection to comment upon the strength of the support which Bultmann finds for this hypothesis. Here let me note further only the conclusion of Bultmann that Mark 16:7 (like Mark 14:28) represents an artificial effort of the evangelist, who has suppressed the flight of the disciples to Galilee, to get the disciples to Galilee in accordance with the oldest tradition!

Even this very brief survey of the manner in which Bultmann applies formal criteria in the internal criticism of the separate stories and sayings indicates that the new method of criticism is hardly less open to the charge of being subjective and arbitrary in its effort to eliminate supposedly late strata of tradition than was the old Liberal approach.

<sup>29</sup> *Erforschung usw.*, pp. 25 f. Jülicher's important work, *Die Gleichnisse Jesu*, has been of great influence in this connection.

<sup>30</sup> *Geschichte usw.*, pp. 308 ff.

Wrede's incisive attack upon the current literary criticism for its over-refinements and divisiveness, the boldness with which it affirmed that a writer could not have said this but could have said that, has apparently been forgotten by his disciple.<sup>31</sup> The radical criticism of today does not serve nearly so well as that of a generation ago to clarify the issues that are at stake, and therefore Bultmann's approach must be judged, in comparison with that of Wrede, to represent retrogression rather than progress.

The central point at issue is the validity of the laws of transmission which have been appealed to, and, on the assumption of their validity in general, that of their applicability to the contents of the gospels. It is apparent at once that the view of the uniformity of the laws of development as here conceived is a corollary of the sociological conception of history. This point is expressed by Schmidt, in connection with his statement that popular tradition has its own laws of style, in the following words: "Style is not an aesthetic fad but a sociological fact".<sup>32</sup> But this view of history is quite untenable in its effort to confine the varied and complex manifestations of life within the limits of rigid evolutionary laws. In its reaction from the bald individualism of the Liberal point of view, it has gone to the extreme where it does not even seriously raise the question whether historic individuals standing in a concrete situation may not have been responsible for creating new forms of expression or adapting old ones. One must challenge therefore the assumption that tradition develops in such inflexible fashion that one can define the precise limits of the original form of a saying or narrative.

The view is very patently at fault when its conclusions as to the development of folk lore and sagas are invoked for the elucidation of the origin and early development of Christianity. For it immediately proceeds to beg the question which is at issue between the positions of thoroughgoing skepticism and historic Christianity. One can rule out the decisive

<sup>31</sup> *Ueber Aufgabe und Methode usw.*, pp. 26 ff.

<sup>32</sup> "Formgeschichte", in *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, 2te Aufl., II, col. 639.

determination of the form of the tradition by what Jesus Himself did and taught only by arriving beforehand at the conclusion that Jesus never existed, or that He was so much a child of His time that one only needs to understand His environment to tell what He could have done and said, and what He could not have done and said. Fascher is right, therefore, in observing that the laws of popular tradition are not applicable to a sphere where the matter outweighs the form, as in his further conclusion that for Bultmann the decisive factors are not formal considerations but his own historical judgments.<sup>33</sup> Far from basing his skepticism with respect to the history of Christ on a more general historical agnosticism, he grounds it specifically in his unlimited confidence in his ability, on the basis of his knowledge of the times in which Christ lived and his other historical knowledge, to decide what was possible for Christ and what was not possible.

The final stage of the *formgeschichtliche* process is the most decisive one. Although the consequences of the internal criticism of the units of tradition are serious, it is only when the third step is taken that the testimony of the gospels to Christ is reduced in wholesale fashion, and it is only then that the method is seen in all of its radical implications. The observation that the method sets up the revolutionary hermeneutical principle that the context in which a text appears must first be set aside needs to be qualified here in an important particular. After all there can be no interpretation without relation to a context. What the form-critic is concerned with above all is the substitution of a new historical context which, on the assumption that all or most of the contents of the gospels cannot be accepted as testimony to the life of Christ, will account for the origin and character of these contents. Obviously, this calls for a reconstruction of the origin and early history of Christianity, and it is especially in this stage that the *religionsgeschichtliche Methode* comes into play. The reconstruction might conceivably develop along more radical or less radical lines, but however mild the reconstruction might be, nothing shows more unmistakably

<sup>33</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 206 f.

how thoroughly the conclusions reached by the form-critical method are bound up with historical judgments. I am not urging against the form-critics the objection that they combine criticism of the content with criticism of the form but only that they claim to have found in the study of the form of the material of tradition objective criteria for separating the unhistorical from the historical.

Bultmann's reconstruction of the history of early Christianity is not mildly radical. He presupposes the correctness, at least in its main outline, of the view of early Christianity presented in Bousset's famous work, *Kyrios Christos*. Bousset's view has been the subject of so much discussion and criticism since it was first published twenty-five years ago that I need reflect upon it only in its bearing upon the subject under discussion.<sup>34</sup> It was distinctive of Bousset's effort to account for the origin and development of Christianity on thoroughly naturalistic presuppositions that he separated Paul from Jesus by two sharply-delineated stages of development, namely, Palestinian Christianity and Hellenistic Christianity, and it is exactly this characteristic that makes the hypothesis so useful to the form critic. For clearly only a theory which breaks up early Christian history into highly distinctive segments can provide a basis for the discovery of distinctive strata in the gospel tradition. Just as the antitheses set up by the Tübingen School provided a construction of history on the basis of which new dates were assigned to the writings of the New Testament, so Bousset's construction offers Bultmann a new scheme by which the material which the gospels refer to the life of Christ in the days of His flesh is assigned to new situations whether in the primitive church at Jerusalem or in Hellenistic churches.

This sharp distinction between Palestinian and Hellenistic Christianity, which is so indispensable to Bultmann as a

<sup>34</sup> For important discussions and criticisms of Bousset's view see especially Vos, "The Kyrios Christos Controversy", in *The Princeton Theological Review*, XV, 1917, pp. 21 ff.; the same author, *The Self-Disclosure of Jesus*, 1926, pp. 117 ff.; Machen, *The Origin of Paul's Religion*, 1921, pp. 295 ff.; von Dobschütz, "Kyrios 'Iesous'", in *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*, XXX, 1931, Heft 2.

form-critic, is based not only upon violent and arbitrary handling of the evidence of the writings of the New Testament, but also upon many bold assumptions as to the place of Christianity in the religious world of the time. Bultmann, I believe, weakens this thesis in no small measure in his admission that not very much is known about the relation of the Palestinian world of thought to that of its wider environment. Furthermore, he virtually gives up the position which isolates Judaism from the religious world about it, and isolates Hellenism from Judaism, when, on the one hand, he maintains that Palestinian Judaism may have been influenced by oriental mysticism in important particulars, and, on the other hand, calls attention to the importance of a Hellenism that had come under the influence of Judaism.<sup>35</sup> One cannot both include Judaism within the sweep of religious syncretism and isolate it in any clear-cut fashion. Nevertheless, Bultmann makes the sharp distinction between the Palestinian world and the Greek world, and between Palestinian Christianity and Hellenistic Christianity, the basis for rejecting the authenticity of a great body of the material of the gospel tradition.

Accepting Bousset's characterization of Hellenistic Christianity as a religion of the cult, in the center of which stood Jesus Christ as the Lord who communicated His heavenly powers in the worship and sacraments of the community, Bultmann proceeds to eliminate, first of all, all that reflects this point of view. His view now joins to the judgment that the gospels themselves were edited from the point of view of the faith of the Hellenistic communities the further judgment that much of the material in the gospels originated outside of the Palestinian scene.<sup>36</sup> In this Hellenistic stratum Bultmann includes particularly those elements which view Jesus as the divine Saviour — the birth narratives, most of the miracle stories, the resurrection narratives in their present form, and most of His sayings about Himself, including Mark 10:45, Luke 19:10, and Matthew 11:27. The supper sayings he

<sup>35</sup> *Geschichte usw.*, p. 330; *Erforschung usw.*, pp. 8 ff.; "The New Approach to the Synoptic Problem", pp. 361 f.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. *Geschichte usw.*, pp. 333 f.; *Jesus*, pp. 195 ff.

regards as liturgical formulations from the Hellenistic celebration of the Eucharist. It appears then that the very stories about Jesus and the teachings of Jesus which most clearly present Him as Saviour and Lord are judged to have originated at the farthest possible remove from the historic scene in which Jesus lived and moved.

Significant as Bultmann's separation of the supposedly Hellenistic stratum from the gospel tradition is, it is only when he sets up an antithesis within the Palestinian tradition between Jesus and the Palestinian community that his skepticism comes to its sharpest expression. In a word it may be said that while his conception of Hellenistic Christianity serves as a criterion to eliminate some of the teachings of Jesus and most of the historical narratives, his view of the primitive Palestinian church is decisive in the rejection of the rest of the history and nearly all of the teaching. Like Bousset, Bultmann regards the piety of the early church as distinctly eschatological — it did not worship Christ as present Lord but lived in the expectation of His return as Son of Man on the clouds. Its life moved wholly within the limits of Jewish piety, but through its messianic belief had come into conflict with the Jewish leaders. In this situation its needs were many: polemic, apologetic, missionary, disciplinary. On the basis of this conception of the early church Bultmann feels free to judge that all of the material in the gospels that reflects its distinctive view of Jesus, and may be explained as having originated to meet the needs of the early church, is to be explained as the product of the community. I shall not endeavor to set forth in detail how on these principles the contents of the gospels are reduced until only a few sayings are left to be assigned to the primary stratum of tradition. However, since this process obviously presupposes his negative judgment on the messianic consciousness, as well as the view that Jesus cannot have planned for the establishment of the church, there is probably no passage which serves so well to illustrate his method as his treatment of the confession of Peter and Peter's place in the church of Christ as recorded by Matthew.

Briefly stated the narrative of Peter's confession and the response of Jesus are regarded by Bultmann as a story that

in its original form described an appearance of the risen Christ to Peter.<sup>37</sup> Wellhausen had expressed the same judgment with respect to the narrative of the transfiguration after Wrede had found in it the key to his interpretation of the messiahship in Mark, and Bultmann feels that his own observations on the earlier scene in Matthew represent an important confirmation of Wrede's hypothesis. Bultmann maintains the Galilean Hypothesis in the extreme form that does not allow belief in the messianic consciousness as the psychological presupposition for the subjective experiences of the disciples, but, on the contrary, makes their belief in Jesus as the Messiah dependent upon a subjective experience of Peter in Galilee.<sup>38</sup> In the face of the complete absence of evidence for this hypothesis, Bultmann is forced to conclude that legends have practically covered over the original, fundamental, and decisive experience which, according to the hypothesis, Peter had. Nevertheless, he confidently affirms his belief that there was such an original experience on the basis of Peter's prominent place in the transfiguration narrative, and in the narrative which centers in Peter's confession!<sup>39</sup> In this scene from Matthew 16 Bultmann everywhere finds evidence of the creative influence of the Palestinian church which is conscious that its belief in the messiahship is the mark which distinguishes it from the Jewish people, and here gives its testimony to its belief that its messianic faith has taken its rise from Peter's Easter experience. Nothing could show more strikingly than Bultmann's treatment of Peter's confession how radically the early church is thought to have transformed fact into fiction in the interest of finding support for its Christology in the teaching of Jesus.

<sup>37</sup> "Die Frage nach dem messianische Bewusstsein Jesu und das Petrus-Bekenntnis", in *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*, XIX, 1920, pp. 165 ff.; *Geschichte usw.*, pp. 275 ff. An important survey of the modern discussion of this pericope is found in Linton, *Das Problem der Urkirche in der neueren Forschung*, 1932, pp. 157 ff.

<sup>38</sup> In view of the fact that this form of the Galilean Hypothesis shares with the common Liberal form the view that the original "Easter experience" was altogether subjective in character, it does not appear that its advocates are in a good position to disclaim all interest in psychological explanations.

<sup>39</sup> *Geschichte usw.*, pp. 314 (cf. n. 1); 332.

But how is Bultmann so sure that this narrative, which Matthew presents as describing what took place before the last journey to Jerusalem, actually originated in the early church after the death of Jesus? There is much here that Bultmann finds incredible as descriptive of the lifetime of Jesus: the discussion as to who Jesus is that is presupposed, the esoteric character of Peter's knowledge, the distinctiveness of the circle of disciples from the rest of the Jews. And everywhere Bultmann finds the situation of the Palestinian church reflected. The confidence with reference to the future of the church is said to reflect the eschatological consciousness of the Palestinian community as it awaited the end. The provision for binding and loosing owes its origin to the need which developed for disciplinary ordinances. The prominence of Peter is in view of the rôle which he played in the primitive church, and the benediction which follows upon Peter's confession in Matthew 16:17 expresses the church's grateful recollection of the fundamental significance which Peter's vision of Christ had for the establishment of the church in its distinctive messianic belief.

Once again it appears how completely the new method of criticism has come under the influence of the sociological approach to history. Everything turns so much around the question whether tradition originated in Hellenistic communities or in the Palestinian that the question is hardly put seriously whether the content and form of the gospel tradition may not have been decisively determined by the impact of the person and message of Jesus upon the historical situation in which He lived. The early church, moreover, is conceived of in a fashion that practically isolates it not only from the life of Christ but even from those who had been in intimate association with Him. It is allowed that Peter was mainly responsible for the messianic faith, but even then Peter is separated from his own historical association with Jesus, and in general no account is taken of the way in which those who had been in association with Jesus would have decisively determined, by their preaching and teaching, the content and form of the tradition. This construction, accordingly, does not allow at all for continuity through the influence of the eyewitnesses of Jesus' life. On this point Vincent Taylor

has aptly said: "If the form-critics are right the disciples must have been translated to heaven immediately after the resurrection".<sup>40</sup> It becomes evident that Bultmann is struggling with the question how Christianity as belief in a transcendent Messiah and divine Saviour can be accounted for on the supposition that Jesus was a mere man. When he maintains the historicity of Jesus and recognizes him as a great teacher, and yet cuts off Christianity from Christ's history by a wall of ignorance or indifference, he fails miserably to answer this question. Only the supernatural Christ of the gospels can account for the origin of supernatural Christianity.

### III

#### THE MESSAGE OF JESUS. RELATION TO HISTORICAL SKEPTICISM.

Finally, I turn to a brief consideration of Bultmann's conception of Jesus, in which I shall seek to show how his positive theological estimate of the message of Jesus is bound up with his historical skepticism. Although the gospels are thought not to give any direct information concerning Christ, and His life and personality are judged to be past recovery, nevertheless there remain, after the process of form criticism has reached its goal, certain elements which are distinctive from Jewish piety, and cannot be explained as originating from specifically Christian motives. This earliest stratum, which consists of a few sayings, is to be referred according to overwhelming probability, Bultmann says, to Jesus Himself, although he goes on to say that he has no quarrel with any who may wish to take "Jesus" as an abbreviated designation for the historical phenomenon.<sup>41</sup> While then Bultmann's absorption with the community does not land him in absolute skepticism, he is anxious that we shall not suppose that he is unhappy that the historical remnants are so meager. He is not the least bit uncomfortable in his radical skepticism. Indeed, he expresses his amusement at the suggestions that

<sup>40</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 41.

<sup>41</sup> *Erforschung usw.*, pp. 32 f.; *Jesus*, pp. 12 ff.

in his discomfort he has become busy in his book, *Jesus*, saving something out of the general conflagration, or has taken his flight to Barth and Gogarten for the same reason. So far as he is concerned he is quite ready, he says, to let the whole structure burn down quietly, since ultimately what are burned are the fanciful pictures of the *Leben-Jesu-Theologie*, or what he is pleased to call *ὁ Χριστὸς κατὰ σάρκα*, a matter concerning which, he declares, he has no curiosity at all.<sup>42</sup>

The earliest stratum tells, according to Bultmann, of what Jesus willed, and this knowledge he considers far more important than the lost knowledge of Jesus' life and personality. What Jesus willed may be learned from a few sayings which by their originality and self-consistency approve themselves as making up the message of Jesus. His little book on Jesus is devoted almost exclusively to the exposition of this message of Jesus, and it is with this exposition that I shall be principally concerned here. Naturally, this is not a message concerned with Jesus Himself; it is not the good news of His coming as the Messiah. It allows us to infer with respect to Jesus, since it is distinctly eschatological and ethical, only that He was a prophet and rabbi. Now, however, in spite of this radical criticism, a measure of sympathy is evoked by what appears to be a definitely theocentric point of view, for Bultmann sums up the proclamation of Jesus under the three heads: the coming of the rule of God, the will of God, and God as the Remote and the Near. In other words, there seems to be a return to the Calvinistic perspective by way of insistence upon the sovereignty of God, the requirement of obedience to His will, and the need of the sinner for His grace. That this appearance does not correspond with reality will become evident as I proceed briefly to examine these three divisions in turn.

It is not surprising that Bultmann begins by speaking of Jesus' proclamation of the coming of the rule of God, for he holds, in common with the interpretation of the gospels which came into vogue particularly through the influence of

<sup>42</sup> "Zur Frage der Christologie", in *Glauben und Verstehen*, Gesammelte Aufsätze, 1933, pp. 100 f.

Albert Schweitzer, that the most distinctive and original strain in the gospels is the eschatological. The words, "Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand", express Jesus' consciousness of the imminence of the great hour of crisis and decision. This kingdom, Bultmann tells us, is not a relative or gradual transformation of things as they are, but is supernatural, miraculous, "wholly other", wholly future.<sup>43</sup> So as man is confronted with it, it calls for repentance and obedience. This interpretation of the kingdom, in so far as it stands in opposition to the Liberal naturalizing and humanizing interpretation is refreshing, but before one concludes that there is a return here to sober exegesis of the gospels, certain clarifying statements of Bultmann must be noted. That Bultmann does not understand the qualifications of the kingdom as supernatural, miraculous, and the like, in the sense that these terms ordinarily have is apparent when, for example, he says: "The future kingdom of God is not something which shall come in the course of time . . ." <sup>44</sup> The kingdom of God, he maintains, is not a condition or possession or state which is realized in history or as the goal of history. It is not a future something which can ever become a present something; the future deliverance by God never arrives as a state of rest and salvation. Its significance is that it remains future and confronts man as the last hour, compelling him to face the great either-or of life.<sup>45</sup>

A remarkable feature of this exposition of the kingdom remains to be mentioned. Bultmann admits that Jesus Himself must have expected a violent eschatological drama, including the coming of the Son of Man, resurrection of the dead, judgment, and the end of the world. But such events are to be interpreted as "contemporary mythology" along with the conception of Satan fighting against the hosts of the Lord. Jesus shared these notions with His contemporaries; they are the outward expression for His real meaning.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>43</sup> *Jesus*, pp. 36 ff.: "etwas Wunderbares", "eine übernatürliche, übergeschichtliche Grösse".

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 49 ff., 40.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 38, 53 f.

"The real significance of the 'Kingdom of God' for the message of Jesus", Bultmann concludes, "lies in any case not in the dramatic events associated with its coming . . . It does not interest Jesus at all as a condition, but rather as the transcendent event, which signifies for man the great either-or, which compels man to decision".<sup>47</sup> It is perfectly clear then that Bultmann's interpretation of the kingdom as future and miraculous by no means involves departure from the naturalistic interpretation of history which is largely responsible for his historical skepticism.

Two particularly vulnerable points in Bultmann's construction of the eschatological message of Jesus may be noted. The first concerns its authenticity, the second its interpretation. On his own premises how can he be sure that the message of the coming of the kingdom belonged to the earliest stratum of tradition? If that is most unmistakably authentic which cannot be explained as expressing the point of view of the early church, and if it was exactly the eschatological outlook that controlled the piety of the Palestinian community, why does not Bultmann associate these eschatological ideas with the messianic faith of the early church? If the piety of the early church was messianic to the core, if it believed that its acknowledgement of Jesus as the messianic Son of Man constituted it as the holy remnant of Israel, living in the last days before His parousia, as Bultmann seems to maintain, it is not clear why Jesus must be held responsible for the message of the imminent coming of the kingdom of God and not for the identification of Himself with the Son of Man.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>48</sup> Bultmann accepts as historical a few sayings concerning the Son of Man where he thinks Jesus distinguishes between Himself and the Son of Man as, for example, in Mark 8:38 and Luke 12:8. Cf. "Reich-Gottes und Menschensohn", in *Theologische Rundschau*, 1937, pp. 20 f., 25 f.; *The New Approach to the Synoptic Problem*, p. 359. But this involves not merely the rejection of most of the references to the Son of Man, on quite inadequate grounds, as, for example, the predications of suffering, death and resurrection as *vaticinia ex eventu*, but also demands a highly unsatisfactory interpretation of the passages which are appealed to. For, while the passages express a contrast between the present and the future, and possibly imply also a contrast between a present state of humiliation and

It is especially against Bultmann's interpretation of the eschatological message that earnest protest must be made. I mention first the fact that Bultmann follows Schweitzer in his one-sided interpretation of the kingdom as only future, as for example when he translates Luke 17:21 ("The kingdom of God is in your midst") with future reference by the interpolation of the phrase "mit einem Schlage", that is, "suddenly".<sup>49</sup> Another objection is to the fact that, following Wellhausen, he unjustifiably refers Mark 13 to the influence of Jewish apocalyptic upon the early church, such elimination of reflection upon the details of the future being significant for Bultmann's denial that the kingdom is conceived of by Jesus as coming to future realization.<sup>50</sup> However unfounded these conclusions are, for pure arbitrariness they do not approach the indefensible process by which he concludes that certain elements of Jesus' teaching are merely contemporary mythology, shared by Jesus with his contemporaries, *but do not express his real interest*. One recalls the criticism of the Liberal approach to the gospels for its arbitrary separation of the kernel from the husk by a rationalizing and modernizing exegesis, and wonders whether there is not here another instance of the mote and the beam. For Bultmann's rejection of what Jesus said in favor of His "real interest" is not less modernizing and arbitrary than the Liberal criticism.

The second head under which the proclamation of Jesus is viewed is the will of God.<sup>51</sup> Bultmann is inclined to recognize the authenticity of sayings like the antitheses of Matthew 5, introduced by the words, "But I say unto you", and the

a future state of glory, they clearly rule out any contrast in dignity between Jesus who speaks in the first person and the Son of Man. To find such a contrast is to make the greater subject to the lesser, for the eschatological acknowledgement or rejection of men is made to depend upon their relation to Jesus, who, on Bultmann's view, was merely a prophet and rabbi even in His own estimation. It is noteworthy that in these passages Jesus makes eternal destiny to depend on their attitude towards Him, and they are therefore among the most important witnesses to His transcendent messianic consciousness.

<sup>49</sup> *Jesus*, p. 39; cf. *Geschichte usw.*, pp. 24, 128.

<sup>50</sup> *Geschichte usw.*, p. 129; "The New Approach to the Synoptic Problem", p. 358.

<sup>51</sup> *Jesus*, pp. 55-122.

sayings concerning almsgiving, prayer and fasting in Matthew 6 — in short, all sayings which are in conflict with the prevailing legalism. The legalism which Bultmann sets over against the teaching of Jesus is not confined to Judaism, for he believes that the early church did not understand these sayings of Jesus, being itself legalistic in its tendency. Consequently, the origin of much of the ethical teaching which the evangelists attribute to Jesus must be sought in the early church. With some confidence, however, he holds that some sayings may be referred to Jesus, or at least to the influence of His spirit in the early church.<sup>52</sup>

I shall not attempt a critical exposition of Bultmann's conception of the ethics of Jesus, however illuminating that might be for the general estimate of his theology. It is necessary to limit my observations here to a single aspect of the subject which may clarify the central question of the significance of the history of Christ, namely, the place which is assigned to the authority of God. In view of Bultmann's general skepticism and indifference to the person of Christ, one can expect very little that is distinctively Christian at this point. Nevertheless, there is much in his exposition that gives exactly the opposite impression. His sharp polemic against idealistic or humanitarian ethics for placing the norm of conduct in man rather than in God appears to place him on solid ground. Furthermore, he insists that ethics is concerned with obedience to God's authority, a radical and complete obedience to God's will. In so far as the will of God determines our conduct towards others, it may be designated as the commandment of love. "In love", he says, "man's soul does not attain to an infinite value nor does he receive thereby a share in the essence of God; but love is simply the requirement of obedience, and shows how this obedience can and ought to be practised in the concrete life-situation in which man is united with man".<sup>53</sup> As requiring obedience to God's commandments, the ethics of Jesus appear to be theocentric in character, but, to avoid a premature judgment, it is necessary to enquire where, according to Bultmann, the

<sup>52</sup> *Erforschung usw.*, pp. 31 f.; "The New Approach etc", p. 357.

<sup>53</sup> *Jesus*, p. 104; cf. pp. 102 ff.

commandments of God are to be learned. Through this enquiry as to the content of the will of God his precise meaning may remain somewhat obscure, but fortunately he does not leave us in any doubt as to what he does not understand by it.

First of all, the will of God is not to be identified with the Scriptures as the rule of faith and practice. This conclusion is not surprising in view of his radical criticism of the gospels. It also agrees fully with his typically *religionsgeschichtliche* view of the Old Testament as a source for the reconstruction of the religion of Israel and of the New Testament as a source for the understanding of early Christianity.<sup>54</sup> Most of the appeals to the Old Testament have been placed in the mouth of Jesus by the evangelists; they represent not the attitude of Jesus but that of the early church which, in the exigencies created by its controversies with the Jews, sought to defend its beliefs and practices in this fashion. Yet Bultmann maintains that as a matter of course Jesus must have accepted the authority of the Old Testament! This apparent contradiction he seeks to resolve by a distinction between absolute authority and formal authority. The Jews received the Old Testament as a formal authority, Bultmann holds, but it was distinctive of Jesus' attitude towards the Old Testament that He interpreted it in the interest of separating the essential from the non-essential. This estimate of Jesus' attitude towards the formal authority of the Old Testament is not especially new, indeed, it is characteristically Liberal; but the judgment that the absolute authority of the Scriptures is not impaired by the denial of their formal authority could be made, I suppose, only by a representative of the theology of paradox. At any rate it is clear that Bultmann interprets obedience to the will of God as implying the right to determine for one's self what the content of His will is on any particular occasion.

Bultmann's point of view becomes somewhat clearer, and is marked off more pointedly from the Liberal view, when he considers the authority of God's commandments in relation

<sup>54</sup> Cf. "Die Bedeutung des Alten Testaments für den christlichen Glauben", in *Glauben und Verstehen*, pp. 313 ff.

to Jesus' ethical message. We are not to suppose that the formal authority of the Old Testament is set aside in the interest of setting up the formal authority of Jesus' own teaching. He tells us that we are not to do anything because Jesus commanded it any more than because the Bible commands it. Obedience to God, he says, is not conceived radically if authority is appealed to in this fashion. There is no external authority for determining what God's will is; the content of any command is a matter of indifference. Man must ultimately decide for himself what is demanded in any given situation.<sup>55</sup>

The conclusion is at hand that the will of God in Bultmann's language has nothing to do with the historical revelation of God, and once again his historical skepticism is shown not to embarrass his theology simply because his theology moves in a sphere of thought into which history cannot gain admittance. In insisting upon the contemporaneity of revelation as opposed to the historical character of the revelation of the Bible,<sup>56</sup> Bultmann takes his stand with mysticism rather than with historic Christianity. This judgment is not contradicted in the least by the fact that Bultmann constantly polemicizes against mysticism, for he has in view a mysticism which interprets religion solely in terms of inner contemplation and union with the divine, not mysticism in its fundamental antipathy to historical revelation and historical redemption.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Cf. *Jesus*, pp. 82-92, 73: "Was Gottes Wille ist, wird also nicht von einer äusseren Autorität gesagt, so dass der Inhalt des Gebotenen gleichgültig wäre, sondern es wird dem Menschen zugetraut und zugemutet, selbst zu sehen, was von ihm gefordert ist."

<sup>56</sup> "Zur Frage der Christologie", in *Glauben und Verstehen*, p. 89: "In der alten Orthodoxie ist Offenbarung die 'übernatürliche' Lehre, durch ihren merkwürdigen Ursprung als Offenbarung qualifiziert, aber im übrigen eine Lehre, die wie anderes Wissen verwahrt und weitergegeben werden kann. Der Begriff der Offenbarung ist also um das ihm wesentliche Moment der Gegenwärtigkeit beraubt."

<sup>57</sup> At this point it is well to consider Bultmann's conception of the relation of the eschatological elements in Jesus' message to the ethical. Cf. *Jesus*, pp. 11 ff. Bultmann rightly criticizes all views which seek to solve the problem by the denial of the historicity of one or of the other element as well as the solution of Schweitzer, but he himself finds unity at the

After his exposition of Jesus' proclamation concerning the rule and will of God, Bultmann seems to point even more emphatically to the theocentric character of Jesus' message in the formulation: the proclamation of God as the Remote and Near.<sup>58</sup> The question arises as one ponders the rule and will of God how man who has rejected God's claim and is disobedient to His will can acknowledge God as his own God and obey Him. The answer given is that the remote God must also be recognized as near, that is, the Judge who condemns man as a sinner must be recognized as coming graciously to him with a word of forgiveness. Does Bultmann mean to say that the divine Creator and Judge is also the divine Saviour of men? Many of his expressions taken in isolation might seem to point to that conclusion, and they explain in part how many have come to acclaim the theological movement of which he is a representative as a return to the God of Calvin, the God of sovereign grace. It is to the credit of Bultmann that he does not leave us in uncertainty as to his meaning.

That he does not really maintain the transcendence of God, in spite of the characterization of God as the Wholly Other and the Remote, appears from his conception of the relation of God to nature. In this connection he is wont to speak of God as pre-eminently the creating Will, and in a manner that is reminiscent of Calvinism makes much of the creation concept. However, it soon becomes evident that Bultmann does not mean to affirm the Scriptural doctrine of creation, nor even the doctrine that the created world is completely dependent upon God. In speaking of dependence upon the creator he has in mind a distinctly religious relationship only, religious in the sense which presupposes the sin of man. There is, in other words, no account taken of the fall as involving a radical change in man's relation to God. By

expense of "de-eschatologizing" the eschatological message, and so virtually removes the problem by identifying the two elements. "Indem also die Botschaft vom Kommen der Gottesherrschaft wie vom Willen Gottes den Menschen hinweisen auf sein Jetzt als letzte Stunde im Sinne der Stunde der Entscheidung, bilden beide eine Einheit, ja sie fordern einander gegenseitig" (p. 121).

<sup>58</sup> *Jesus*, pp. 123-200.

identifying man's dependence upon God as a creature with man's separateness from God as a sinner, in one blow both the Christian doctrine of creation and the Christian doctrine of sin are emptied of their specific meaning.

His view of God's relation to the world comes to striking expression in his conception of miracle. The uniformity of nature, he maintains, excludes the possibility of miracle (*Mirakel*) in the sense of that which is above nature or contrary to nature. Yet he affirms that belief in God and belief in miracle (*Wunder*) are the same. If miracle is defined he declares as "an act of the divine will outside of my control", it serves to express the paradox that the remote God is near.<sup>59</sup> To talk about miracle (*Wunder*) is to talk about self, that is, that God becomes visible in my life by way of revelation of His grace. Accordingly Bultmann is as hostile to the thought of a Christian *Weltanschauung* which would allow for real miracles in history as he is to a Christian philosophy of history which allows for actual historical revelation.<sup>60</sup> When one has to do with nature, then, there can be no talk of revelation, for then revelation would cease to be momentary and direct.

To all of this the reply must be given that, if God is truly sovereign, nature must be dependent upon His will, and His disclosures concerning the meaning of nature, and the accomplishment of His purposes, by natural means or by supernatural means, must be received as a witness to His rule over all things.

Bultmann's conception of transcendence appears in its clearest light when he relates the remoteness of God to His nearness, His sovereignty to His grace. In thinking of God as the Wholly Other, we are not to think of His transcendence as ontological, Bultmann warns. God is not a higher nature.<sup>61</sup> The distinctive feature of Jesus' teaching about God, he tells us, is that He always saw the remoteness of God in unity

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 158 ff.; cf. "Zur Frage des Wunders", in *Glauben und Verstehen*, pp. 214-228.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. "Zur Frage des Wunders", p. 228: "Der christliche Gottesglaube ist keine Weltanschauung, sondern wird immer im Augenblick gewonnen, und er spricht: 'Herr, Ich glaube; hilf meinem Unglauben' (Mark. 9, 24)".

<sup>61</sup> Cf. *Jesus*, pp. 138 ff.

with His nearness. We must accept the paradox that the remote, future God is at the same time, precisely because He is the remote, future God, also the God of the present.<sup>62</sup> The remoteness of God is only His remoteness from the sinner. God's nearness is only His nearness when He comes to man to claim Him, offering the grace of forgiveness, and only as man fails to hear God's demand, does he himself transform God's nearness into remoteness.<sup>63</sup> In this fashion Bultmann thinks that both sin and grace are conceived radically, for man grasps God at once both as the Wholly Other and as the God who judges and forgives in the present. God therefore does not deal with man as possessing a corrupt nature but only as disobedient and remote from Him through His denial of the claim of God. God comes to man as he is and man as he is acknowledges God. Man is quite free and able to respond to the demands of God. It does not surprise us that on this pelagianizing view of sin Bultmann denies the need of the change of man's nature and of redemption by the death and resurrection of Christ.<sup>64</sup>

Again it is evident that Bultmann does not really maintain the sovereignty of God. If God's transcendence is always in unity with His nearness, His grace becomes a corollary of His sovereignty. But then grace is no longer grace since it is no longer free, and all real possibility of grace is gone since God is no longer sovereign.

A question that arises as one considers this exposition of the message of Jesus on the background of the radical skepticism concerning His person is exactly what place is left for Jesus in the determination of a man's relation to God. The answer of Bultmann is plain. Jesus was the bearer of the word, the message which confronts man with God. He has no other significance, and so, on this view, He is not in the

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 147: "es kann sich nur darum handeln, die Paradoxie zu begreifen, dass der ferne, zukünftige Gott zugleich, ja gerade *indem* er der ferne, zukünftige ist, auch der Gott der Gegenwart ist".

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 179 f.: "Die Ferne Gottes für den Menschen hat den gleichen Ursprung wie den Nähe Gottes, nämlich den, dass der Mensch Gott gehört, dass Gott seinen Anspruch auf ihn erhebt. Indem der Mensch diesen Anspruch überhört, macht er selbst aus der Nähe Gottes die Ferne".

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 181 ff., 195 ff.

least indispensable today. For the validity and authority of His message are not acquired from His proclamation of it.

Bultmann here easily outdoes the Liberals. Although Harnack described the gospel as Jesus proclaimed it as having to do only with the Father and not with the Son, yet on the Liberal view the life of Jesus through His realization of His message was looked upon as the real foundation of Christianity. For Bultmann the gospel as Jesus proclaimed it has to do only with the God who is Remote and Near and not with the Son, and that is taken seriously to mean that the history and personality of Jesus are of no concern whatever. On this view Jesus is not the founder of historic Christianity and the religion which is attached to His message is a Christless religion.<sup>65</sup>

The point does not have to be labored that the theological point of view I have been considering is not Calvinism. I think I need not prove that this is not Christianity. For Bultmann's differences from Calvinism are not of the kind that have come to expression within the Christianity of the evangelical creeds; his views of the world, of history, of revelation, of salvation are "wholly other"; his God is not the sovereign Creator, Ruler, Saviour whom the Bible reveals.

<sup>65</sup> In "Jesus und Paulus" (see note 17) and in "Die Bedeutung des geschichtlichen Jesus für die Theologie des Paulus", in *Glauben und Verstehen*, pp. 188-213, Bultmann compares the teaching of Jesus with that of Paul, and finds them in essential agreement on their view of God, the world, and eschatology. He seems to hold that the principal difference is that Jesus looked to the future for the coming of the rule of God while Paul looked back upon decisive events as having ushered in the new world. These discussions are worthy of separate consideration and criticism. However, I cannot refrain from protesting against the arbitrary, modernizing exegesis which allows him to set aside Paul's redemptive interpretation of the cross and resurrection of Christ as theological and mythological in the interest of recovering the fundamental ideas behind the contemporaneous forms of expression. By way of the interpretation that "der Glaube an Kreuz und Auferstehung ist deshalb nicht die Annahme von unvernünftig-mythologischen Lehren, sondern er ist zuerst die Beugung unter Gottes Gericht, der Verzicht auf alles Rühmen", ("Jesus und Paulus", p. 87), Bultmann makes Paul mean virtually the same thing as his reconstructed Jesus. To say the least Bultmann has ceased to be a historian when he seeks to find the kernel of the theology of crisis beneath the "husk" of Paul's doctrine of historical redemption.

Indeed, Bultmann would be the last to claim the Genevan reformer or any other spokesman for orthodoxy as his spiritual father. Instead, as his theological essays indicate clearly, he is conscious of standing in the stream of modern theology, a theology specifically that has been emerging from the Liberal theology of the nineteenth century, not through a return to orthodoxy or a fusion with orthodoxy, but by way of correction and modification of the old Liberalism in the light of new philosophical and historical principles.<sup>66</sup> It is a point of view which seems to be concerned above all to separate religion from everything that might connect it with this present world-order; it seeks to sever Christianity from its roots in creation and history, and herein has a definite affinity with second century Gnosticism. The antithesis between the Easter message and the Easter faith is applied more seriously and consistently than by the Liberals. For although he does not accept the fact of creation, the historicity of the miracles of Christ, revelation and redemption in any objective sense, nor the consummation of history through Christ's return, and is sure that as facts they could have no significance for faith, he nevertheless affirms creation, miracle, revelation, salvation, and eschatology in setting forth the doctrine of God. As he relates these concepts to religion they are, therefore, merely ideological.

That Christianity stands or falls with the historicity of certain foundational events was preeminently the message which Dr. Machen proclaimed to this generation. Not that he advocated a lowest common denominator or an attenuated Christianity. He was an apologist not for a reduced

<sup>66</sup> Cf. especially the essays in *Glauben und Verstehen* where his consistent opposition to orthodoxy and his affinity with the theology of crisis come to clear expression. The opening sentence from the first essay, entitled "Die liberale Theologie und die jüngste theologische Bewegung", p. 1, reads as follows: "In der Polemik der jüngsten theologischen Bewegung, die wesentlich durch die Namen Barth und Gogarten bezeichnet ist, gegen die sogenannte liberale Theologie handelt es sich nicht um Abfall von der eigenen Vergangenheit, sondern um Auseinandersetzung mit ihr; nicht um Erneuerung der Orthodoxie, sondern um Besinnung auf die Konsequenzen, die sich aus der durch die liberale Theologie bestimmten Situation ergeben". Bultmann's affinity with Herrmann is also noteworthy. For his estimate of Herrmann's point of view, see especially pp. 106 f.

Christianity but for the Christianity of the whole Bible, Christianity in all of its fulness, uniqueness, and intolerance of compromise with human systems of thought. But no one surpassed him, I think, in his awareness of the fact that Christianity, and not merely certain older formulations of Christianity, was at stake in the modern attack upon its historical foundations; and no one has been quite so unwearied and effective in giving expression to the exclusiveness of Christianity as a religion of redemption that is both supernatural and historical. To the exposition and defense of this Christianity he gave his life,— as we well may. I shall conclude by recalling a few pertinent words from his pen: “All the ideas of Christianity might be discovered in some other religion, yet there would be in that other religion no Christianity. For Christianity depends, not upon a complex of ideas, but upon the narration of an event. Without that event, the world, in the Christian view, is altogether dark, and humanity is lost under the guilt of sin. There can be no salvation by the discovery of eternal truth, for eternal truth brings naught but despair, because of sin. But a new face has been put upon life by the blessed thing that God did when He offered up His only begotten Son”.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> *Christianity and Liberalism*, 1923, p. 70.