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Bultmann and The Old Testament: His Approach and Interpretation

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This is the final installment of a two-part essay. Part One presented Bultmann's philosophical understanding of existence, his hermeneutical principles, his demythologization program and theological understanding of the New Testament. Part Two discusses Bultmann's approach to and understanding of the Old Testament.

PART TWO

BULTMANN claimed that the Old and New Testaments might be approached from two different perspectives and that the two Testaments might be dealt with as sources for the reconstruction of the religions of Israel and that of primitive Christianity.¹ From this viewpoint a religious and historical continuity between the two Testaments can be found when the latter are simply regarded as historical phenomena in the history of religion.² With the religionsgeschichtliche Schule Bultmann was willing to permit the consideration of the Old Testament as an historical source for one of the many religions of the ancient Near East and to regard the religion of Israel as a sector of the religions of mankind. Treated in this manner the Old Testament can properly be classified with and related to all other religions which espouse ethical monotheism.³ According to Bultmann this approach deals with Judaism from the outside and is proper for Judaism. To the descendants of Abraham, God manifested Himself through great leaders and prophets; men who from time to time were called by God to serve Him.⁴ For the Jews, the Old Testament constituted God's revelation to them. Judaism is within its rights in considering itself as having a history that contains manifestations of God's grace.⁵

For the Christians, the Old Testament has a different significance. When a Christian deals with the Old Testament in terms of Heilsgeschichte and when he considers the New Testament as a continuation of the history of the Old Testament, he is interpreting the Old Testament in a wrong manner, according to Bultmann. The New Testament believer who establishes a continuity between the two Testaments becomes guilty of treating the Old Testament as a "bygone age in the history of religion" and thereby proceeds to make his own religion into an objectified phenomenon which can be incorporated into an historical development that unfortunately will result in a relativism.⁶

In discussing Bultmann's understanding of the relationship of the Old Testament to the New, Kraeling has thus characterized the Marburg professor's position:

He first of all rejects certain ways of approaching the problem of the relation of the Old Testament to Christianity as outside of the pale of specifically theological interest. These other ways are legitimate in themselves on neutral or more or less anti-Christian standpoints, but must be ruled out where the discussion is truly theological. He even discards an approach that would ask in a detached manner whether the Old Testament has a significance for a faith that sees in Christ the revelation of God; this mode of questioning he asserts, is still an asking from the *outside*-in which one surveys everything from the historical perspective. Theological questioning can only be from *within*-from the vantage point of faith. Can the Old Testament Word of God be heard by me as intended for myself? That he says, is how the question must be formulated?⁷

Those who claim to be Christians and who accept the New Testament must approach the Old Testament from *within* the faith and ask: "What does the Old Testament mean for me, what does it mean for the Church?" Only the second approach has theological relevance for the Christian Church today.⁸

In the writings of Bultmann both methods of dealing with the Old Testament are found. While the trend of Bultmann's views would seem ostensibly to lead to a depreciation and disuse of the Old Testament by Christian people, he still insisted that the Old Testament is important for Christians by virtue of the fact that Occidental Christianity is the product of a mixture of ideas absorbed from the Old Testament and from Greek thought.⁹ He attributes importance to the Old Testament for Protestant religious education as may be seen from a reply by Bultmann to an evaluation of his position by Hannelis Schulte, a German religious educator, when the former asserted: "I can see that instruction in the Old Testament should begin with the history of Israel, and therefore should be carried out in such a way that the Old Testament is understood as an historical document."¹⁰

In his book, *Primitive Christianity in its Contemporary Setting* Bultmann has dealt in outline form with the history, religion, and theology of the Old Testament as background for primitive Christianity. Thus in the introduction of this book he wrote: "The Cradle of Primitive Christianity as an historical phenomenon was furnished by late Judaism, which in turn was a development from Hebrew religion as is evidenced in the Old Testament and its writings."¹¹ In setting forth his views on the Old Testament Bultmann has followed the conclusions obtained by the use of the historical-critical method as found in the writings of such scholars as Gunkel, Pedersen, Cook, Snaith, Rowley, Eichrodt, Simpson, Koehler, Hempel, Baudissin, Causee, Pfeiffer, Welch, Bousset and Hölscher.

I. *Bultmann's Interpretation of the Old Testament from the Outside: The Historical Perspective*

1. The Hebrew Philosophy of History

In his Gifford Lectures for 1955, *The Presence of Eternity*, Bultmann has set forth his understanding of the Hebrew philosophy of history. He claimed that the Hebrews entertained a different concept of history than did the Greeks. In pointing out the great difference between Hebrew and Greek historiography Bultmann asserted:

The main point, however, is that the experiences of men are understood as divine ordinances, as blessings or punishments of God, and their deeds as obedience or disobedience to the commandments of God. Israelite historiography is, therefore, not science in the Greek sense.¹²

For the Hebrew historian God was the creator and ruler of history who led history towards its goal. Because of this principle, history was articulated in periods or epochs, each of which has an importance for the whole structure of Old Testament history. Bultmann claimed that Israelite historiography had as its purpose to remind the people of the Old Testament of God's past deeds and of the people's conduct. "Therefore historiography is not a means of education for politicians but a sermon to the people. Looking back into the past means critically examining the past in order to warn the present."¹³

Bultmann accepted the Documentary Hypothesis with its four major documents, namely, the Jahwist, Elohist, Deuteronomistic and Priestly sources.¹⁴ He saw similarities between Herodotus and the Jahwistic document, especially in the manner in which the latter related events, which Bultmann considered "still largely a series of tales." He claimed that the Jahwist source has as its main central thought the national unity under the aegis of Judah. The beginning and end of historical events are connected by the Jahwist through divine promise. With the fall of the Davidic dynasty the Jahwist account is terminated, although the reader is left with the idea that in the future the Davidic throne will be established.

Like the Jahwist, the Elohist source portrays the history of Israel as a unity. The Elohist historian was motivated in his portrayal and evaluation of events by the principle obtained from the great prophets of the eighth and seventh centuries. In the Elohist tradition of the history of Israel there is a similarity with Herodotus in showing that the law of sequence of human wrongdoing and divine punishment controls the course of historical happenings. However, in distinction from the Greek historian, sin is portrayed as apostasy against Jahweh, as a violation of the command only to worship Jahweh. The destruction of Jerusalem and the fall of the Judean state mark the end of the Elohist narrative, but it does not end on a note of despair as hope is held out that the Davidic dynasty will not be exterminated.

In the Deuteronomistic redaction of Hebrew history, God is depicted as having chosen Israel and as ruling its history. The

prophets have influenced the Deuteronomistic interpretation which shows a "permanent cycle of apostasy to idolatry and the divine punishment of defeat and subjugation to foreign rulers, of conversion to God and deliverance."¹⁵ This history also ends with a promise of a future salvation contingent upon repentance by the people and obedience to God's will.

The Priestly narrative divides the past according to periods, the first of which began with Adam, Noah and Abraham, followed by the Mosaic period. The origin of the priestly legislation is depicted as dating back to the Mosaic period. According to Bultmann, the goal of the Priestly narrative, the latest of the four documents, is to show the return of the Jews from exile and the reconstruction of their community under law.

2. *Old Testament History from Abraham to the Time of Christ.*

Genesis, chapters 1-11 seem to be considered as *Urgeschichte* in harmony with current Old Testament critical scholarship. Accordingly Bultmann began his history of the Old Testament with Abraham. For the Israelites the Old Testament, God's revelation in history, was bound to their particular history. In writing about God's action in Old Testament times, Bultmann asserted:

What God has done unto the patriarchs, what he has done unto the people when he summoned Moses, led the people out of Egypt, guided them into the Holy Land, he has done even now to each person, since this history is not past history but present, ever reactualized in the present generation of the people.¹⁶

From this quotation it would appear that the historical events in the Old Testament times are depicted as actually transpiring. The same inference may be made from the following statement by Bultmann: "Jesus cannot be remembered like Abraham or Moses, nor can his cross be remembered like the crossing of the Red Sea or the giving of the Law at Sinai."¹⁷ It was Jahweh, the God of Moses who made Israel what it was, Bultmann contends. The part played by Jahweh in the history of the Israelite nation was stated by Bultmann as follows:

It was he who brought the nation out of Egypt and made his covenant with it at Mount Sinai. It was he who led it through the wilderness and gave it the land—the land which is now their heritage, the land of their fathers. These fathers are not the dim figures of a distant past, but abiding witnesses of the nation's history.¹⁸

The worship of Jahweh was a mighty factor in the history of the nation. "The bond of unity was the worship of Jahweh. He was the God of the nation. Israel's wars were his wars, Israel's glory his glory. The land belonged to him, the land which Israel had conquered, though he gave it to the nation for a heritage."¹⁹ God

dealt with Israel as a corporate entity, and not as with individuals. The covenant was inaugurated by sacrifice and perpetuated through the cultus.

When Israel entered Canaan there was danger of influence by the Canaanite religion with its belief that God was tied to the land. In the Canaanite religion the gods were worshipped as the powers of fertility, the forces operating in nature. The prophets fought this idea and contended that God was not tied to the land but to the nation. Because the nation was the product of history, Israel was always concerned with loyalty to that history. Jahweh reminded the Israelites that the past was not to be understood as the story of man's exploits and achievements but was the gift of God! (Deut. 8:17f.). The emergence of the nation from Egypt was a result of Jahweh's actions and thus the nation was constituted by the mighty acts of God.

The passover festival, the feast of weeks, the feast of tabernacles, originally feasts of a pastoral and agricultural people, were transformed by Israel into historical commemorations. Bultmann claimed that these festivals represent the people's sense of history and became monuments in redemptive history. However, eventually the cultus lost much of its former magical association.

Israel's election did not rest on its own merits (Deut. 9:4-5) but was due to God who ruled its history. Since the divine election of Israel was unmotivated and free, it was necessary that the nation continually be faithful to the cultus of Jahweh. Besides faithfulness in the performance of the cultic acts, the prophets emphasized the need for obedience to the Law of Jahweh. When Israel came to Canaan, it settled down as a nation of agriculturalists. There it came into contact with urban cultures which eventually turned Israel into a national state, surrounded by small and great nations of the Fertile Crescent. Israel's religion was influenced by foreign cults whose religious practices were adopted by the Jews. A decline in moral standards and social sins then began to abound.

The prophets of the Old Testament raised their voices against the foreign cults and also deplored the attendant decline in moral standards. Bultmann is critical of the efforts of the prophets when he wrote:

Unfortunately, however, the prophets combined their preaching of social righteousness with a protest against all political and economic progress as such. They called for a return to a golden age of the past, to the simple life before the State began. They depicted that age as a time when the holy people were faithful to the covenant and lived at peace with God—a Utopian requirement in view of the actual course of history; Israel was so small that she was unable to pursue an independent policy of her own, especially after the schism between the northern and southern kingdoms.²⁰

With the establishment of the monarchy, the old tribal structure was replaced by a new organization in the provinces. The army became composed of professional warriors. A new aristocracy of bureaucratic men and officers came into existence. Jahweh was made the head of the state and a temple was built for him according to Canaanite custom. Jerusalem, Bethel and Samaria saw the erection of national shrines. The old communal village life declined as a result of the distribution of wealth. Corruption affected society so that injustice and violence often prevailed. In order to advance the welfare of their respective kingdoms, the kings of Judah and Israel made treaties with other nations.

The prophets voiced their disapproval of the new institutions and their moral consequences. Unfortunately, the prophets failed to perceive the problem of the state, whose kings were not in a position to follow the ideals of the prophets. To insure the strength of the state, the kings had to enter into foreign alliances.²¹ Bultmann claimed that the prophets undermined the state:

When they sought to uphold the sovereignty of God by denying the right of the State to administer justice, and insisting that judicial functions should be placed into the hands of the priestly caste, they were undermining the very foundations of the State.²²

When Israel lost its independence at the time of the exile, the utopian ideals of the prophets nevertheless lived on. The old aristocratic order of patriarchs was supplanted by the rule of the priestly caste. Israel was organized on an hierarchial basis with the high priest as its head. With the decree of liberation by Cyrus, the returned exiles set up a Jewish state. Ezra (444 B.C.) established the Church State which derived its cohesion from the tradition of the past. Postexilic Israel looked back to the old days when it had been independent under David. The rite of circumcision and the observance of the Sabbath were stressed. The people hoped for the restoration of the Davidic kingdom which, however, was never realized. The full realization of the Davidic ideal was projected into the mythical future. "The genuine idea of God as a God who has to come was abandoned, and with it the conception of God as the Lord of history. In the eschatological hope, history was expected to come to an end. By its anticipation of the eschatological future Israel lost its historical moorings."²³

After the time of the Exile, Israel lost her independence as a state. From 587 B.C. onward, Israel lived under foreign rule, first under the Persians until 350 B.C. During the Persian rule the Jews organized themselves as a theocratic state. During the Greek period, i.e., under the Ptolemaic rule, the Jews continued to enjoy freedom. However, during the time of the Seleucids, the situation changed for the Jews in Judea. Antiochus IV (175-164 B.C.) forcibly tried to Hellenize the Jews, which resulted in the Maccabean revolt. Under the Hasmonean kings Judah was able to

achieve independence until Pompey entered Jerusalem in 63 B.C. and set up Roman rule. Herod the Great reigned as a puppet king under the Romans from 37 B.C. to 4 B.C. After his death his kingdom was divided among his grandsons. Judea proper was under the hegemony of Archelaus (4 B.C.-A.D. 6) until the rule of the Roman procurators. Two Jewish revolts, one in 66-70 A.D. and the other in 132 A.D., resulted in the final destruction of the Jewish nation.

3. *The Theology and Religious Ideas of the Old Testament*

Bultmann held that the Jewish doctrine of creation was not a speculative cosmogony but a confession of faith. God is the Creator, the source of all life from of old and for all time.²⁴ Like other Semitic deities, Jahweh the God of Israel, began as a tribal god. Israelite thought was not monotheistic from the beginning; before monotheism, henotheism and monolatry had preceded it. When Israel became a state circa 1500 B.C., Jahweh then became the God of the Israelite nation. Polytheism posed a problem for the Israelites when they came into contact with other Near Eastern nations. The prophets emphasized the fact that Jahweh was a "jealous God," who would not permit the worship of other gods. To this Jahweh, the writer of Deutero-Isaiah attributed the creation of the world. Creation myths lie behind the creation accounts in Genesis 1 and 2.²⁵

Jahweh was conceived of as a Being transcending the world, whose transcendence received classic expression in the *creatio ex nihilo*, "a notion utterly inconceivable to the Greek mind, though a logical development from the premises of Biblical thought (Jub. 12:4; 2 Macc. 7:28.)."²⁶ The world is the sphere of God's sovereignty and the stage where man works out his destiny. The Israelites did not think of Jahweh as God of the world in their earliest writings but this was a concept first conceived by the prophets. Jahweh was thought of essentially as righteous will demanding of men righteousness. Through observation of their own history, men in the Old Testament came to recognize that God's sovereignty extended over other nations.

For the Hebrews, knowledge of God was differently conceived of than it was by the Greeks. The latter believed that God could be apprehended by reason and that proofs for His existence could be formulated. "Knowledge of God has nothing to do with God's metaphysical nature. It means to know his *will*."²⁷ In the Old Testament, truth is not primarily propositional knowledge "but that which is valid and demands recognition, that which can be trusted."²⁸ Wisdom is not an abstract science but consists of practical morality. The basic principle of Israelite wisdom is enshrined in the statement: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." God cares for the world which he has made (Psalm 147:8f). The people of the Old Testament realized that nature is beyond man's control. "To this extent suffering and death

present no problem, and sickness or natural disasters never evoke questions which might lead to the working out of a theodicy or throw doubt on the existence of God."²⁹ Suffering can be explained as punishment from God. But why do the wicked prosper? The wisdom literature answers that in the end the wicked will suffer and the righteous prosper (Prov. 24:19f.; Ps. 37:9-11). Ecclesiastes recommends resignation as the answer to the problem of suffering and concludes that the best thing to do is to submit uncomplainingly to the will of God. The wisdom of God surpasses all human understanding. Often the problem of suffering is bound up with the nation. The suffering of the nation must be borne in the same way as that of the individual, namely, by meekly bowing before the will of God.

4. *The Anthropology of the Old Testament*

In the Old Testament man is composed of flesh and soul which are not opposed to each other in a dualistic sense. "The soul does not belong intrinsically to a higher world, here imprisoned in a material body. Instead, the soul is the energy which gives life to the flesh. Its seat is generally in the blood, though it is sometimes equated with the divine breath."³⁰ Life like flesh is mortal and ceases to exist after death. The concept of the immortality of the soul is foreign to the Old Testament; it is an idea taken over from the Greek world into Hellenistic Judaism.³¹ The doctrine of the resurrection found in a few late passages in the Old Testament was adopted from the Iranian religion. As a rule the Old Testament confines life to this earth, although it taught that the departed lived in a shadowy existence in Sheol. The idea of a resurrection is to be found only toward the end of the Old Testament in Isaiah 24-27 and in Daniel.³²

A man's greatest gift is to have a long and happy life. The Old Testament devotees did not distinguish between natural and spiritual life. "Life is never described as good or bad in a moral sense. To live does not mean to live in any particular way."³³

From a study of the ethical vocabulary of the Old Testament it would seem that Hebrew thought does not depict an ideal conception of man. Men are to meet their obligations to society by upright and responsible conduct. Evil is portrayed as opposition to the will of God. Sin must be either punished or forgiven. The Old Testament does not distinguish between social justice and personal morality. The ethical concepts are addressed to the corporate nation rather than to the individual. Sound principles must be followed if society is to flourish. Most of the ordinances are negative, as for instance, in the Decalogue.

Jahweh as King was the patron of justice, who demanded righteousness and justice. But this was protested by the prophets who claimed that God demands only righteousness and justice, not the performance of the cultus. (Amos 5:21-24; Hos. 6:6; Is. 1:11-15). The prophets, however, did not succeed in removing

the cultus. "The outcome of their work was its centralization at Jerusalem, which brought to an end the Canaanite vegetation rites and the corruption of the worship of Jahweh. And in addition to this there was an attempt to discover a unity between the cultus and the judicial and moral law."³⁴ The latter prophets changed the cultus into a demonstration of obedience to God and used it as an effective symbol of Israel's separation from the surrounding nations.

Sin is disobedience against God; it is rebellion against lawfully constituted authority. Jahweh is a jealous God who will not permit anyone to have the honor that belongs to Him. In the Old Testament sin is not only ostentation but self will; it is ingratitude to God. Since sin involves guilt, it necessitates atonement. God punishes men by sending misfortune, sickness or premature death. A way of atonement, however, has been provided by Jahweh through the sacrificial system. At first the ceremonial rites were associated with magic but later they were reinterpreted "as symbols of man's obedience, and the more sin is interpreted in terms of moral guilt, the more do the ceremonies of atonement come to be regarded as an institution of the forgiving grace of God. Man knows he is thrown back upon God's forgiveness."³⁵

5. *Theological Development since the Exile*

One of the significant developments of the Exile was the adoption of synagogues by Judaism which sponsored a non-sacrificial worship. The synagogue services began and ended with prayer and with the reading of Scripture. This resulted in binding Judaism to its past history. As a nation the Jews developed a strong sense of history and election. Bultmann believes there was an unfortunate development in postexilic Judaism. Due to Israel's loyalty to a book it became tied to its past history. "God was no longer really the God of history, and therefore always the God who was about to come. He was no longer a vital factor in the present: his revelation lay in the past. History was likewise brought to a stand still."³⁶ The leaders of the nation were teachers that expounded the Scriptures but not men of social action. Israel cut herself off from the outside world and thus removed herself from the stream of history. She looked for redemption in the future, but it was not to be a real historical event but a fantastic expectation that all history would end for good.

Not only did the Jews cut themselves adrift from history but their God was also removed by them from participation in history. Jahweh no longer seemed to reveal Himself in history. A new concept of God's transcendence originated in the two centuries before the birth of Christ. A doctrine of His omnipotence and universal judgment was then developed. From then on the idea of God's transcendence was conceived in metaphysical terms. "He was a superior cosmic power, spacially distant and ontologically distinct from all wordly phenomena."³⁷ Apocalyptic writings

presented fantastic pictures of God's cosmic rule, attended by hosts of angels and the blinding glory of heaven.

God's purpose now embraced not only Israel but all mankind. All people would one day be required to appear before Jahweh, the Judge of all the earth. The true worship of God was confined to Judaism, which was interested in making converts for Judaism. Proselytes were required to join the Jewish community. In doing this, Bultmann claimed, Israel again cut herself off from a common history with other nations.

Another adverse development, according to Bultmann, in post-exilic Judaism was its attitude toward the Book, which no longer was regarded primarily as an historical record of God's dealings with mankind but as a book of divine Law. The focal point of worship became the preaching and hearing of sermons which were supposed to regulate life. This change had two different consequences, according to Bultmann. "First, it meant that the whole life was dominated by religion. Religion was not confined to a special sphere of its own, as distinct from daily life. On the other hand, however, life was alienated from history, which is the natural sphere to which it belongs."³⁸ The Jews lost sight of their social responsibilities and although the Law inculcated morality, there developed a special emphasis on ritualism.

The Law, which went back to the time of Moses, was not capable of undergoing any further development. Since it was God's Law, it was binding for all time. Many new circumstances arose in Judaism that were not covered in the Mosaic Law so that the scribes had to provide new laws to meet new conditions. This led to discussions among the rabbis and to the formation of various schools of thought, the outstanding ones being those of the Sadducees and Pharisees, each of which took certain distinctive positions on theological matters.

II. Bultmann's Interpretation and Understanding of the Old Testament from Within—from the Vantage Point of Faith³⁹

Bultmann maintained that there is a basic difference between Christianity and Judaism. The New Testament and the Early Church, as well as the Church in subsequent centuries, had a wrong conception of what was truly involved in New Testament religion. Stripped of all false notions, the New Testament does not primarily repeat the teachings of Jesus but above all, it proclaims the person of Christ and ties the relationship between God and man to Christ's person.⁴⁰ If Christ's message is stressed then the New Testament would only contain Law, which belongs to the Old Testament. According to Bultmann, that which is specifically Christian is the fact that in Jesus Christ the revelation of God has taken place. Without this emphasis, the religion of the New Testament would be nothing but "a refined Judaism or humanism."

For the person who stands within the New Testament, the Old Testament to have theological relevance must be interpreted

existentially. The questions with which the New Testament believer approaches the Older Covenant are: What meaning do its happenings and events have for my personal existence? What message does it have for the Church now? To treat the Old Testament in terms of trying to establish how its events relate to world history is not to deal with it in a genuinely historical manner. To be meaningful the Old Testament must be interpreted in terms of the question of *what* basic possibility it presents for an understanding of human existence (*Daseinsverständnis*). It is essential to enter into dialogue with the Old Testament to see how the experiences of Old Testament men may reveal what is truly involved in human existence.⁴¹

In the opinion of Bultmann, a Christian does not take the Old Testament seriously if he investigates it in order to see what men said twenty centuries ago. He only correctly deals with the Old Covenant when he asks: What message does its books have for my existence? While many Christians in the course of the centuries have misunderstood the Old Testament, Bultmann believed that Paul and Luther grasped the understanding of existence in the Old Testament which they set forth in terms of the antithesis between "law and gospel."⁴²

When the Old Testament is properly evaluated from the existentialist viewpoint, it will be apparent, as it was to Luther, that the Old Testament is Law. When the New Testament believer asks the question as to what the relationship of the Old Testament is to the New, he perceives that the Old Testament sets forth the Law as an expression of God's demands upon him, while as a sinner he is under grace in the New Testament. The constant demands made by the Old Testament aid the Christian to understand the true meaning of the Gospel. This therefore means that the Old Testament is a presupposition for the New. According to Bultmann, it is essential for the New Testament man to *stand under* the Old Testament. *Under* the new order, represented by the New Testament, the Christian believer stands under the grace of God which is willing to accept him even though he is a sinner. Furthermore, Bultmann affirms that while it is true that the Christian is free from the Law and is under the Spirit, he still needs the Law of the Old Testament. Why is this necessary? "But faith, as the possibility of Christian existence ever to be grasped anew, is a reality only by constantly overcoming the old existence under the Law."⁴³

If the Old Testament is necessary as a constant presupposition for the New, does the former maintain its specifically Old Testament character? This Bultmann negates. That portion of the Old Testament legislation that was cultic or ritualistic in character, only had value for a particular epoch of Hebrew history. The ethical demands of the Old Testament are valid and are still in force, not because they are found in the Old Testament as an authoritative inspired book, but because they emanate from basic relationships of human beings with each other. The Law is found outside of the

Jewish Scriptures as Paul asserts in Romans 1:32 that without the benefit of Old Testament instruction the Gentiles know what God demands of them. According to Romans 2:14f., Bultmann avers, the Word of God is written in their hearts.⁴⁴

Although Bultmann affirms that the Gospel presupposes the Law, the Old Testament is not the only source for becoming acquainted with the Law, and thus not identified only with the Decalogue and other legislative formulations in the Old Testament. Without the use of the Old Testament men everywhere are capable of becoming aware of their nothingness and to come to a sense of humility or despair. Everywhere men believe that by self-discipline and by keeping the moral demands they can attain authentic self-hood.⁴⁵

Bultmann believed that in the Old Testament the Decalogue as well as the ethical demands as expressed by the prophets were some of the best statements of ethical requirements in the world and therefore the Old Testament was a useful instrument with which to bring home to man that he is subject to God's demands. But strictly speaking, it must be realized that the Law of the Old Testament was not meant for Christians but was addressed to a particular people, the Jews.⁴⁶ The Law is a part of their living history. The reason why in our day we regard the Law of the Old Testament as coming from God is due to the fact that out of the history of which we have come the Old Testament has played an important part.

Bultmann contends that men are subject to many different influences and that in the present situation a number of possibilities for the understanding of the self are to be found. In endeavoring to understand his existence properly, the Christian needs also to consider the Old Testament's view of existence. The Old Testament portrayal of human existence is different than that which comes from the Greeks. Every idealistic or utilitarian demand is rejected. The Old Testament does not depict some ideal of excellence to be striven after, but it sets forth the demand that in obedience to God the neighbor be served in the constant awareness of a sense of inadequacy and guilt.⁴⁷ To understand the Old Testament's concept of man one must realize that man is believed to have been created by a higher power and as a creature is delivered to the Lord of the world. History is not to be understood as the result of human activity but of God's power and direction. Thus Bultmann wrote: "But rather he (i.e. man) finds himself put by the divine will in a particular place in the stream of temporal occurrence which for him holds the possibility of either judgment or grace depending on whether he acts in obedience to what God requires of him."⁴⁸

The Old Testament understanding of existence is the same as that found in the New Testament but is radically different from that in Greek literature which presents an idealistic view. Between these two views a choice must be made. Only as the Christian has a critical dialogue with the Old Testament will he be able effectively

to grasp what the true significance of the Old Testament is for Christianity.⁴⁹

Bultmann's insistence on the existentialist interpretation of Old Testament materials might lead to some erroneous conclusions as to the value of the Old Testament for Christianity. The old belief that the Old Testament is a revelation of God or His Word for the Christian Church is a faulty conception. Bultmann does not think that in Christian preaching it is proper to refer to the Old Testament as the revelation of God, as has been done heretofore.⁵⁰ The statement that the concept of existence is the same in both Testaments might lead to the conclusion that both are a part of the revelation of God to the world and as such to be followed by Christian people.

Since Bultmann holds that faith, righteousness and grace, sin and forgiveness, are basically the same, wherein then does the difference between the Old and New Testaments lie? What new contribution does the New Testament make in comparison with the Old?

As already shown, Bultmann described this difference as being that between Law and Gospel. But just as living under grace presupposes the Law, so in the Old Testament which is Law, there is also to be found simultaneously an existence under grace.⁵¹ It was by an act of grace that God established the possibility of a relationship between Himself and man; it was an act of grace that prompted God to give Israel His law and committed to them a specific assignment, which was to be realized in the course of its historical existence. God is portrayed by an act of grace as forgiving the sins of His people. Despite the fact that Israel proved unfaithful time after time, God was willing to show mercy and to forgive their sins.⁵² It is possible for Christians to use passages in the Psalter and in the prophetic writings that ask for forgiveness and that offer God's grace. Bultmann holds that inasmuch as the grace of God for the sinner is spoken of in the Old Testament, it must be recognized that the Gospel is evident in the Old Testament, although there are many places where the Gospel is not found in its purity.⁵³ Often the radicality between sin and grace is not brought out as it should have been. Not all Old Testament passages show that their authors have grasped the radicality of God's grace. This grace has been truly apprehended when the individual waits on God and finds help and boasting only of Him. Many of the Old Testament saints received God's grace and forgiveness in their vicissitudes, and when they did not experience them, they however looked forward to them. From this hopeful outlook, Bultmann claimed the beginnings of eschatology are to be found.⁵⁴

Bultmann averred that insofar as Old Testament writers had the proper understanding of God and of sin and grace, their faith may be considered as hope. Over against this faith, the New Testament then appears as the faith which has fulfillment. The great difference between the Old Testament and the New is to be

found in the truth "that in Jesus Christ God has performed the eschatological deed hoped for, that in Christ he has forgiven sin, has called the New Israel, has bestowed his Spirit."⁵⁵ Through Christ God reconciled the world to himself. That is God's eschatological deed. Bultmann in this connection rejects the deity of Christ and states that faith is not found in believing in Christ. Thus he asserted: "There is not alongside of God another divine person . . . nor does the Christian faith give assent to metaphysical speculations about the deity of Christ and his natures. Rather, faith is nothing else but faith in God's deed in Christ."⁵⁶

In the light of God's eschatological deed in Christ, what then is the difference between the Old and New Testaments? In the New Testament God's grace must be understood radically, and when this is done it follows that forgiveness is not merely tied to the changing fortunes of life of an individual or of a collective group. God's grace, which is pure forgiveness, produces men, strong and new. This means that judgment has taken place; the new era has been inaugurated, all concepts about future events are eliminated. God's grace and forgiveness are made available through the proclaimed Word. Jesus is the Word that has come to lighten the world (John 1:1f.).⁵⁷

If his interpretation about the uniqueness of the Christ event is correct and is granted, Bultmann claimed it follows that the grace of the New Testament is different from the grace of God in the Old Testament. In the latter the grace of God is tied to the destinies of the Hebrew nation. According to the Old Testament conception, because the Jew was a member of the nation he shared in the grace shown in the past history which continues on into the present. Likewise, the Hebrew of the future, as a member of the nation, will share in the grace once given. But this does not pertain to the situation in the New Testament where the grace of God is not tied to an historical event.⁵⁸ The act of God in Christ is not an historical event as was the passage through the Red Sea or the making of the covenant at Mt. Sinai. Christ is not to be thought of as Moses or Abraham. The forgiving grace of God is not to be associated with an historical event but is to be found in the proclaimed Word in which Jesus is present.⁵⁹ God's grace is not to be found in statements in the New Testament on the basis of which the conclusion is reached that God is gracious, but God's grace comes directly through the proclaimed Word.⁶⁰ This furthermore means that the church cannot be conceived of as a sociological entity with a history like other associations of men. The Church is created through the Word of God's forgiveness in Christ and is the community of those who accept the message in faith. Because Christ is the end of the old aeon, the final word that God has spoken and still speaks, Bultmann called, the association of believers, an eschatological congregation, one that stands at the end of history.⁶¹

In the light of the uniqueness of the New Testament faith,

the Old Testament cannot be considered as God's revelation as it was for the Jews. Historical events that had meaning for Israel and were the Word of God to them, do not have that significance for the Christian.⁶² To reflect on such historical events as, for example, the Exodus, the giving of the Law at Sinai, or the building of the Solomonic temple, has value inasmuch as they have had influence on the Christian civilization of Europe. However, Bultmann contended that the events of Greek history, such as the death of the Spartans at Thermopylae or of Socrates' drinking the hemlock cup are just as valuable for Christians as are the historical events of the Old Testament.⁶³ Any person or group of persons that grapples with history shows the modern Christian what the possibilities are for human existence.

After rejecting the history of the Old Testament as a means of revelation for the Christian faith, Bultmann asks whether the Old Testament completely disassociated from its history can be a revelation for Christian faith. Some Christians would like to consider the Old Testament as being preliminary and as having a restricted value, claiming that in the New Testament God has spoken in a clearer and fuller fashion. But when this position is taken, it merely means that the Church would find in the Old Testament that which it knows from the revelation in the New.⁶⁴

This was the method followed by the New Testament and primitive Christianity which considered everything that had gone before in the Old Testament as preliminary and taught that in the events of Christ's life and in the establishment of the Christian Church, the Old Testament has found its fulfillment as well as a deeper meaning. Early Christianity employed the Scripture-proof text method, according to which many passages in the Old Testament were interpreted as prophecies that found their fulfillment in Christ.⁶⁵ In his essay "Prophecy and Fulfillment" Bultmann has set forth how this was done in the New Testament and asserts that this was only possible by the employment of an allegorical exegesis. Passages that were looked upon as prophecies were often no prophecies at all, or at best, only reflect expressions of hope for the future. Bultmann cited numerous examples from the New Testament where Old Testament passages are quoted and said to be fulfilled in Christ.⁶⁶ He accuses the New Testament writers of reading from or into these texts what they already knew. Thus he wrote: "If one follows their intention one is obliged to say that the Old Testament becomes clear as prophecy as a result of fulfillment. But what would be the point of such proceeding on the part of God?"⁶⁷ The incorrectness of this procedure has been shown by modern critical scholarship. The reasons Christians did this was for polemical reasons against the Jews and for apologetical purposes in dealing with the Gentiles.⁶⁸ Emphasis upon the antiquity of many Old Testament prophecies, interpreted messianically, was motivated by the desire to strengthen the salvation event in Christ. However, this was a grave mistake in Bultmann's opinion, because it was an

attempt to attain security for faith and so tried to lessen the real stumbling block, the offense of the cross of Christ, which cannot be overcome by objective proofs.

The traditional formula of prophecy and fulfillment of the New Testament writers and of the Early Church Fathers is completely wrong as is also Von Hofmann's view as expressed in his book *Weissagung und Erfüllung* (Prophecy and Fulfillment). According to Von Hofmann, the words of the Old Testament were not prophetic, but the history of Israel was, to which the Old Testament testifies. Thus for Von Hofmann prophecy is not prediction of coming events for whose realization the world had to wait. No, prophecy is history itself insofar as history was a movement leading to a goal and bore within itself a goal as prophecy or promise. Fulfilled history is to be understood as prophecy; through fulfillment the significance of history has become clear. Since Christ is the goal of history, history is prophecy of Christ and not just the history of the Old Testament, of the covenant people of God, but of the history of the world. Thus Von Hofmann, as quoted by Bultmann, asserted:

If it is true that all things, great and small, serve to bring about the unification of the world under its head, Christ, then there is absolutely nothing in the history of the world in which something divine does not dwell, and so nothing which must necessarily remain foreign to prophecy.⁶⁹

Bultmann claimed that Von Hofmann's understanding of prophecy actually amounts to sponsoring a philosophy of history that has been influenced by Hegel. Because it has been determined by the Hegelian concept, so Bultmann averred, Von Hofmann's interpretation has its limitations, and Israel's history, of which Christ is the goal, is theologically irrelevant. According to the New Testament, Bultmann claims that Christ is the end of salvation history, "not in the sense that he signifies the goal of historical development, but because he is the eschatological end. Can Old Testament history perhaps be legitimately understood as prophecy on this basis?"⁷⁰

In both of his major essays dealing with the interpretation of the Old Testament, Bultmann emphasized the discontinuity of the Old and New Testaments. In "Prophecy and Fulfillment" he examined the concepts of "the covenant," "the kingdom of God," and "the people of God." After analyzing all three ideas, he reached the conclusion that they cannot be realized in history; all three prove to be an impossible basis for an historical development and so cannot be transformed into reality within history.⁷¹ The people of God in the Old Testament conceived of themselves as a covenant people living under Jahweh's rule, as a real entity in the Near Eastern world. This, according to Bultmann, no longer holds, for in the New Testament there is no sociological historical entity but an eschatologized community. Between the Old Testament community and the New Testament church there is no direct con-

nection. In writing about the New Testament community, Bultmann said: "The community is not a people as a historical entity within the world . . . The new covenant is a radically eschatological dimension, that is, a dimension outside of the world, and to belong to it takes its members out of the world . . . The rule of God and so of Christ . . . is eschatological and supramundane in its entirety; and the man who has part in it is, as it were, already taken out of the world . . . The people of God is no longer an empirical historical entity—it does not exist as a people requiring institutional ordinance for its organization."⁷² In his book, *The Presence of Eternity* Bultmann again sets forth the eschatological difference between the Old and New Testament conceptions: "*The New Covenant* is not grounded on an event of the history of the people as was the Old Covenant . . . *The new people of God* has no real history, for it is the community of the end-time, an eschatological phenomenon."⁷³ It is clear from these assertions that Bultmann breaks all revelational continuity between the Old Testament and the New.

In Part I of his essay, "Prophecy and Fulfillment" Bultmann does not regard the Old Testament too highly. Its history is said to be filled with contradictions which pervade the self-consciousness and the hope of Israel. The meaning of the Old Testament is negative. The great mistake of the Old Testament is that it failed to eschatologize its great major theological concepts. The rule of God described in the Old Testament cannot be realized in history. "But we find the contradiction in the fact that God and the activity are not conceived of in the radically transcendent and eschatological sense."⁷⁴ But strangely, the miscarriage of history actually amounts to a promise. Old Testament history is said to be a "miscarriage of history." The history of the Old Testament is a failure because of its character as law, which reveals man's contradictions and thus forces a Christian to Christ. Even though the Old Testament is a failure, it thereby may be considered a preparation for the Gospel.⁷⁵

Bultmann insisted that if the Christian Church feels it needs to use the Old Testament in preaching, the latter must not be interpreted against its original sense, as critical-historical research claims the church of the past has done by the employment of the allegorical method.⁷⁶

While the Marburg sage strictly speaking denies the true revelatory character of the Old Testament, he was willing to permit the latter, to serve as God's Word in an intermediate fashion. Although the Old Testament has words not spoken for Christians nor addressed to them, it is possible for New Testament believers to find reflected a picture of their own existential problems and thus see the Old Testament as a Word of Christ addressed to their needs. In this sense it is possible to denominate the Old Testament "prophecy," and the New Testament as "fulfillment."⁷⁷

However, it is not absolutely necessary to use the Old Testament in the manner just described, for the New Testament has a number of books which utilize the Old Testament very sparingly

and some not at all. This means the Old Testament can be ignored in Christian preaching and teaching. Bultmann concluded his essay, "The Significance of the Old Testament for the Christian Faith" by asserting that if the Old Testament is to be used in Christian preaching, then two precautions will have to be observed; first, the allegorical method, which robs the Old Testament of its original meaning with its exclusive pertinence to Hebrew history, must be avoided. Second, the materials of the Old Testament should only be used to the extent that they help a Christian to grasp the meaning of human existence."⁷⁸

III. *An Evaluation of Bultmann's Approach to and Understanding of the Old Testament*

In assessing Bultmann's views of the Old Testament, it will be necessary to examine the historic background from which he has come and see what influences have affected his philosophical and religious beliefs. In the introduction to his book, *Primitive Christianity in Its Contemporary Setting*, Bultmann stated that despite its predominance of Old Testament and Jewish background, primitive Christianity was an amalgam of ideas from many sources, including Gnosticism, Hellenism and paganism.⁷⁹ An analagous comparison might also be made about Bultmann's understanding and interpretation of the Old Testament which likewise are the result of philosophical and theological views derived from liberalism, dialectical theology and existentialism. Many different streams of thought have contributed to Bultmann's Old Testament positions which often appear to be contradictory. Günther Bornkamm claims that Bultmann's theological work has its roots in historical critical research and in the so-called dialectical theology, especially as reflected in the writings of Karl Barth and Gogarten.⁸⁰ Bultmann agreed with Bornkamm's evaluation of his theological position and added: "In fact, I have seen and still see it as my task to bind into a unity the intentions at work in that tradition and this movement."⁸¹

Bultmann rejected the traditional conception of historical Protestantism that God has made available to mankind in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, oracles of truth. With the advent of scientific historical criticism, the traditional Christian conception of divine revelation (as found in the various confessional statements of historic Protestantism) was rejected. Since divine truths could not be found in propositional assertions, revealed in a Book, liberal Protestantism of the nineteenth century endeavored to ground theological truth in the religious consciousness, an idea especially proposed by Schleiermacher.⁸² The importance of Jesus consisted in this that He had made known to mankind a new concept of religion, viz., that in his feelings man possessed a new kind of God-consciousness. In Christ the new God-awareness reached its perfection.

For Schleiermacher and those who accepted this interpretation of religion, the Old Testament was unimportant as mediating

God's revelation. At best the Old Testament could only serve as a propaedeutic to the Christian faith.⁸³ The Old Testament merely shows how man through an evolutionary method developed the God-consciousness concept. Other religions, besides that found in the Old Testament, have records of spiritual experience that exhibited God-consciousness that reached its climax in Christianity. The religionsgeschichtliche school proposed that all non-Christian religions, Gentile or Jewish, be investigated by scientifically comparing them and asking to what degree they contributed to the new God-awareness, the outstanding characteristic of the Christian faith.⁸⁴

From this vantage point, the religion of the Old Testament only had value for the liberals in helping man become aware of his God-consciousness. Other religions contained just as valid teachings about human existence as does the Old Testament. The history of the New Testament is as much connected with the Greeks as with the Hebrews. Athens and Rome are just as holy as Jerusalem is for Christians. According to liberal Protestantism of the nineteenth century the Old Testament is not a real revelation for the Christian faith. Jesus, in whom the God-consciousness reached its culmination, was a Jew and so He naturally expressed Himself in Jewish forms. The New Testament also contains expressions derived from Hellenism and paganism. To arrive at the real religion of Jesus, liberals contended that the message had to be stripped of its first-century accoutrements. The chaff had to be separated from the wheat, or to use twentieth century jargon, the eschatological kerygma required demythologization.⁸⁵

According to Richardson, the roots of this type of thinking are to be found in the positivistic understanding of history as developed in the eighteenth century.⁸⁶ Lessing based the truths of religion on reason and could not find the locus of revelation in history. In the following century the foundation for religious truth was based upon religious experience. During that century the Jesus of history was pursued with great diligence, but as time went on He became more elusive until in the twentieth complete historical skepticism came to be the controlling thought of the day and the real message of Christianity was to be located in the existential encounter.

Richardson asserted that "no new discovery is claimed for the observation that Bultmann's theology is a logical development from nineteenth century Liberal Protestant ways of thinking. The point has often been made hitherto."⁸⁷ Karl Barth in his *Kirchliche Dogmatik* spoke of the fact that Bultmann was influenced by W. Hermann and ultimately by Ritschl and Schleiermacher.⁸⁸ Paul Althaus was convinced that Ritschl's value judgments had returned in new dress in Bultmann's use of the phrase "the significance for man."⁸⁹

A number of scholars have stated that Bultmann's position leads to a disparagement of the Old Testament.⁹⁰ Thus Kraeling wrote: "In spite of the statements already noted pointing in the conservative direction, his main line of argument is negative in its consequence. The value of the Old Testament lies in the sphere

of the intellect-in the insight it gives into existence, but what insight we really need we can have without it."⁹¹ Richardson opined that Bultmann's low view of the Old Testament can be traced to the latter's inheritance from Hermann and Ritschl. For Ritschl the Old Testament at best was a propaedeutic for the understanding of the religious ideas of the New Testament. In the later editions of his writings Ritschl went so far as to deny all revelation of the Old Testament and limited revelation to ideas found in Christ.⁹²

Hermann, the disciple of Ritschl, was even stronger in his denial that the Old Testament was to be placed on the same plane of revelation as the New. It was Hermann's contention that the Church had erred in placing the Old Testament side by side with Christ instead of keeping Christ apart and above all. In Christ alone all that which is true meets and has its most perfect expression. Thus Hermann wrote: "We cannot even transplant ourselves into the religious life of a pious Israelite with a complete understanding. For the facts which acted on him as the revelation of God have for us this power no longer."⁹³ Hermann went so far as to represent Christ as standing apart from the Old Testament, of occupying a position of isolation. For Ritschl and his school, according to Lichtenberger, "the only proper religious authority is the person, the word, and the work of Christ, as the testimony of the first Christian community has made us to know them."⁹⁴ Not the entire New Testament contains God's revelation but only that part that helps Christians to see their awareness of salvation in Christ. It would, however, be erroneous, according to Ritschl, to look for the revelation in Christ in his "substance" or "nature," to seek for Him through the communication of metaphysical truths that emphasize His deity or describe His relationship to the First and Third Persons of the Trinity.

Many of the distinctive views of Bultmann on the Old and New Testaments have parallels in the thought of the school of Ritschlianism. Richardson claimed that "Bultmann's view on the significance of the Old Testament is entirely in character with his neo-Ritschlian interpretation of the New."⁹⁵ There are many statements as reflected in Bultmann's interpretation of the Old Testament that could be traced to Ritschl's and Hermann's influence.⁹⁶

Since Bultmann's publication of the *Römerbrief* (1919) Bultmann became involved in the dialectical theology, whose traditions he claimed to have carried out up to the present.⁹⁷ Bornkamm averred that the fundamental principles of the dialectical theology have been utilized by Bultmann and have never lost their validity for the Marburg sage and have in fact been further developed in his work.⁹⁸ The dialectical theology is characterized by the use of the paradox.⁹⁹ Bultmann utilized the paradoxical principle in his writings. There are a number of contradictory positions taken by him in his portrayal of the relationship of the two Testaments to each other, which can best be understood in the light of this principle. It appears to the essayist that Bultmann is resorting to paradox when

he conceived of the Old Testament as pure Law when compared with the New, but when the former is considered apart from the New he admitted that the Old Testament contains both Law and Gospel. Another contradictory position is evident when the events of the Old Testament are looked upon as sources for the history of the religion of Israel, but when a Christian uses the same Testament the historical events lose their historical meaning and have value only as they show man how to live existentially. A paradox is also apparent when Bultmann speaks of the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai, the exodus from Egypt, the entry of Israel into Canaan, the building of the Solomonic temple as true happenings, but in the New Testament which purports to be a continuation of the history of the forefathers, the historical events of the life of Christ and the biographical materials relating to the apostles are removed from the realm of history. The same observation holds true relative to the concepts of "the covenant," "the people of God," and "the kingdom of God," all acknowledged by Bultmann as historical realities. However, when these entities are referred to in the New Testament their historicity is denied and they are placed in a suprahistorical realm and are eschatologized. The paradoxical principle seems to be employed when the Old Testament is considered to be a revelation from God when used by Jewish people, but when the same body of sacred literature is utilized by Christians it ceases to be divine revelation. Bultmann classified the teachings of Christ with Law and allied them with the teachings of the prophets, but when the name of Christ is used in proclaiming the so-called eschatological deed in Christ, then the Gospel of grace is made available. By means of these paradoxes Bultmann has established a discontinuity between the Old and New Testaments.

The teachings of the two Testaments are viewed by Bultmann through the spectacles of existential philosophy.¹⁰⁰ In dealing with the Old Testament from *within*—the only proper method for understanding the literature of the Old Covenant—this is done by Bultmann according to existentialist categories. In his theological exegesis, one of the current systems of philosophy has been employed to determine the meaning of Scripture. Bultmann has attempted a new rapprochement between theology and philosophy.

Some theologians in the Christian Church are suspicious of the place assigned by the Marburg professor to existentialist philosophy. It was Barth who claimed that Bultmann had been responsible for bringing theology back to an Egyptian bondage, in which philosophy determines what the Holy Spirit is allowed to say.¹⁰¹ From the viewpoint of historical Protestant hermeneutics and the hermeneutics of the Lutheran Confessions, Barth is correct when he charged that the truth of Christianity (which also includes the Old Testament) is perverted and distorted when it is welded to a system of philosophy, in this case existentialism. Heidegger's scheme helps to determine the meaning Bultmann elicits from a

Biblical text. Bultmann claimed that the Old Testament only has theological relevance as it is dealt with existentially.

Philosophers themselves have been critical of the school of philosophy chosen by Bultmann. Jaspers, sometimes classified as an existentialist, has faulted Bultmann for his dependence on one singular philosopher—Heidegger—and for basing his views on one book only, *Sein und Zeit*. Jaspers asked the significant question whether a demythologized version of Christianity must not result in another form of human philosophy.¹⁰² According to Richardson, Bultmann's adoption of an existentialist theology was "a genuinely evangelical attempt to escape from the negative and skeptical consequences of his fundamentally positivistic Gospel-criticism, even though it is achieved at the expense of divorcing the kerygma of the Church from any possible sources of it in the life and teaching of Jesus."¹⁰³ If existentialism is found to be a faulty philosophy, Bultmann's interpretation of both the Old and New Testaments is consequently inadequate.^{103a}

One of the problems for many theologians and historians in Bultmann's system is his understanding of the relation of theology to history. Historic Christianity, whether of the Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox or Protestant variety has always considered the Judaeo-Christian faith as an historical religion. The religion of the Old and New Testaments has always found its center not in a code of laws nor in a world view but in a series of historical events that achieved their fulfillment in the life of Christ.¹⁰⁴ As has already been shown in Part I of this essay, Bultmann does not ascribe factuality to the narratives of the Gospels. One of his admirers, Macquarrie, recognized this when he wrote: "Now Bultmann, as we have seen, leaves very little in the way of factual objective history to the gospel narrative. What history there was, he tells us, has been transformed into myth, so that we can no longer get at the history. He himself transforms the myth into its existential significance and brings the 'salvation history' into the present, that is to say, into the historical existence of the believer who here and now dies and rises with Christ."¹⁰⁵

Bultmann will not admit the fact that the theology of the New Testament as a whole is based primarily upon Jesus' own interpretation of His mission and person in the light of His understanding of the Old Testament.¹⁰⁶ Because of Bultmann's unique interpretation of historiography, it seems that historical events themselves are not significant. He falls far short of doing justice to the historical dimensions of the Biblical revelation.¹⁰⁷ In the light of his existentialism, historical events only have meaning as they help the individual solve the problems of human existence. Bultmann's concept of "prophecy and fulfillment" becomes an impossibility because in his scheme,¹⁰⁸ the fulfillment of that self-revelation of God that occurred in history is transferred into "the timeless category of personal self-understanding."¹⁰⁹

The Old Testament cannot be a true revelation of God for the Marburg sage because he does not accept the fact that God directly revealed Himself to men like Abraham, Moses, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and many others in the course of Biblical history and communicated to them His will and teachings. The New Testament statement of Peter: "Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" is completely rejected. Bultmann has stated that the Old Testament was unnecessary for the Christian. The continuing value of the Old Testament is clearly set forth by Paul: "For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that by steadfastness and encouragement we might have hope" (R.S.V. Rom. 15:4).

Just as Bultmann has demythologized John and Paul and turned the Pauline theology upside down,¹¹⁰ so he has likewise proceeded in a cavalier manner to belittle Old Testament truths. His view of the Ceremonial Law of the Old Testament is extremely low. While it is true that the Ceremonial Law was no longer binding upon Christians after the death of Christ on Calvary, Bultmann failed to appreciate the Biblical truth that the Ceremonial Law was a part of God's economy during the days of the Old Covenant to prepare men for the revelation of the significance of Jesus' work for man's salvation. The Israelite did not distinguish between Moral and Ceremonial Law because the Law of God was of one fabric. All laws were binding upon the chosen people because they had been given by God. Influenced by a wrong understanding of the nature of the Old Testament, Bultmann wrote disparagingly of various aspects of Old Testament teachings. Vischer pointed out in his evaluation of Bultmann's position that the cultic demands were "an essential part of the understanding of human existence" in the Old Testament.¹¹¹ The Epistle of the Hebrews which stresses the superiority of Christ in relation to the institutions and teachings of the Old Testament shows how the tabernacle, the Levitical priesthood and the sacrificial system were preparatory and that in Jesus of Nazareth their typical significance was fulfilled. The cultic demands are described in the Pentateuch as originating with Jahweh and are not ascribed to human origin.

While Bultmann held the moral requirements of the Old Testament in higher esteem than the cultic, he failed to recognize the true character of the Moral Law as given by God. The normative character of the moral requirements as set forth in the Old Testament Scriptures was not acknowledged by Bultmann. The origin of the Moral Law did not spring out of human relationships. Regarding the Moral Law, Bultmann held that man can know "by nature what the Law demands" and that he can comprehend the moral demands "arising out of the relation to his fellowman which he must acknowledge in his conscience."¹¹² This would assume that conscience dictates right actions to people. However, conscience is not an infallible guide; conscience can only function in terms of a norm. If the norm is wrong, then conscience will

direct the individual to do wrong. It is a well established fact that conscience does not give the same advice to people faced with identical moral problems. The Old Testament does not portray the Moral Law as arising from some form of human relationship or coming out of its concrete historical form, but ascribes the origin of the Moral Law to God. Jahweh originally placed the Moral Law into man's heart at creation but it became dulled as a result of the fall into sin. The Moral Law written by Jahweh on two tablets of stone on Mt. Sinai and delivered to Moses was incorporated by him in the Pentateuch. Vischer correctly faulted Bultmann for claiming that "thou shalt" simply sprang out of human relationships and not out of the I AM (Ex. 3:14).¹¹³

Paul and Luther have been cited by Bultmann in support of his Law/Gospel dialectic, according to which the Old Testament is Law and the New Testament, Gospel. However, this interpretation of Paul and Luther is not warranted by the facts. Both Law and Gospel are found by them in the Old and New Testaments. Paul certainly believed that the Gospel was in the Old Testament. He taught that Abraham received the Messianic promise in the statement: "In thee shall all nations be blessed" (Galatians 3:8). In Romans 4 Paul argued that the doctrine of justification by faith was not a new doctrine that he was advocating but that it was found in the Old Testament, dating back to Abraham. Both Abraham and David were justified by faith apart from the works of the Law. The writings of Luther are replete with statements to the effect that Christ alone gives salvation to all men, that all passages of Scripture must be understood in harmony with this basic teaching.¹¹⁴ Bornkamm claimed that Luther found both Law and Gospel in the Old Testament just as the Reformer found Law and Gospel in the New Testament. For Luther, the promises of coming redemption which are found in the Old Testament are not Law but Gospel.¹¹⁵ On the other hand, the commands and directions for right living found in the New Testament are not Gospel but Law. The true position regarding the relationship of Law to Gospel in the two Testaments might be said to be: in the Old Testament the Law pre-dominates and in the New Testament the Gospel is more prominent. "For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (John 1:17). If the Old Testament were entirely Law, then Bultmann would be correct in his assertion: "Hence, it can be only for *pedagogical reasons* that the Christian Church uses the Old Testament to make man conscious of standing under God's demand."¹¹⁶ Braaten seriously questioned Bultmann's Law/Gospel dialectic as an exclusive valid hermeneutical principle for interpreting the Old Testament.¹¹⁷ The Formula of Concord claimed that from the very beginning of God's church in the Old Testament, Law and Gospel were distinguished. "Since the beginning of the world these two proclamations have continually been set forth side by side in the church of God with the proper distinction."¹¹⁸

From the viewpoint of Luther and the Lutheran Confessions

it must be said that Bultmann fails to appreciate the Christocentricity of the canonical Scriptures. For Bultmann the historical Jesus is of no particular concern. It is in the kerygma that Christ is known, that is, not historically but existentially. Christ as the Word is important and through the proclamation of the Word, forgiveness is bestowed. In the preaching activity of the Church the Word has revelatory authority. Like Kaehler, Bultmann delivered "the historical" Jesus to the form critics and instead emphasized the "Jesus of faith." Künneth has well described the meaning of Christ in the Bultmannian system: "For Bultmann the name of Jesus Christ represents not a personal living reality of God's saving revelation in the sphere of history but merely a concept, an ideogram, a symbol or a principle for the event of contemporary preaching."¹¹⁹

Jesus, before as well as after His resurrection, taught that He was foretold in the Old Testament Scriptures. To the Jews of His day, Jesus said: "You search the scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness of me," (RSV, John 5:39) "If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote of me" (RSV, John 5:46). On Easter afternoon Jesus said to Cleophas and his friend: "O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory? And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself" (RSV, Luke 24:25-27).

The sermons of Peter, Stephen and Paul in Acts all assume the continuity of the Old Testament into the New.¹²⁰ The apostolic testimony in Acts is unanimous in asserting that there were prophecies in the Old Testament Scriptures that predicted Christ's suffering, death and subsequent glory. Both Peter and Paul held that apart from Christ there is no salvation. The great events of the New Testament were foreseen and foretold by the inspired writers of the Old Testament.¹²¹

From the viewpoint of historical Protestantism and that of the Lutheran Confessions, Bultmann has broken the unity of the Bible by making unnecessary the canon of the Old Testament. Concerning the importance of the Old Testament canon for Christian theology, Ernst G. Wright wrote:

To understand the meaning of Christ requires attention to the Christian *canon* of Scripture, for the Church' doctrines of both canon and Trinity place the person of Christ within a context of divine activity in history. The meaning and mode of this divine action is the central content of the canon of Scripture through which God is revealed as *our* God and in the form by which he would be known as our God.¹²²

Braaten concluded his discussion of Bultmann's views on the Old Testament by asserting: "And thus the overarching unity of the Bible as medium of divine revelation is broken."¹²³ The Epitome of the Formula of Concord begins with the assertion:

We believe, teach, and confess that the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments are the only rule and norm according to which all doctrines and teachers alike must be appraised and judged, as it is written in Ps. 119:15, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light to my path."¹²⁴

The evaluation in the preceding pages has concerned itself primarily with Bultmann's understanding of the Old Testament from what he calls *within*. It is here especially that the radicality of Bultmann's position has been evident. Due to the limitations of space, the essayist has not evaluated Bultmann's understanding from what the latter termed the *outside*—the viewpoint of the school of comparative religions. Sandmel¹²⁵ and Albright¹²⁶ are two critical scholars who have challenged aspects of Bultmann's understanding of Old Testament history and religion. The essayist believes that the influence of Gunkel and Wellhausen are evident in Bultmann's interpretation of the Old Testament, and therefore the latter's views share the weaknesses that modern scholarship has detected in Wellhausianism.¹²⁷

Summary

Henderson, in his sympathetic study of Rudolf Bultmann, has noted that in the latter's thought there is a "fundamental paradox and tension." Bultmann wants to be both evangelist and historian. "As an evangelist, he is constrained to proclaim the action of God. As an historian he cannot accept it as a causal factor in the scheme of things."¹²⁸ The Marburg sage's Old Testament understanding is likewise characterized by paradoxes and tensions. His existentialism, allied with his views on revelation, history and demythologization do not allow a Christian to find the God of our Lord Jesus Christ in the Old Testament. St. Paul asserted to his associate, Timothy, about the Old Testament Scripture that they were able to "make him wise unto salvation through faith which was in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:15). The necessity for belief in Christ's redemptive work, effected by His death on the cross and certified by His bodily resurrection, are unessential for Bultmann. This rejection strikes a deadly blow at the heart of the Gospel.

In the opinion of the Scandinavian scholar Lönning, Bultmann by his existentialism has initiated a third major assault on traditional Christianity and thus perpetuated the attacks begun earlier by rationalism and liberalism.¹²⁹ Bultmann's approach to and interpretation of the Old Testament, evaluated in terms of the criteria of historical Protestant hermeneutics and of those of the Lutheran Confessions, are deficient and erroneous. While Bultmann's position may not be quite as radical as that of Marcion in the second century, it cannot but have a negative effect on the attitude toward the Old Testament by those who follow the Marburg sage.

FOOTNOTES

1. Rudolf Bultmann, "The Significance of the Old Testament for the Christian Faith," Bernard W. Anderson, ed. *The Old Testament and The Christian Faith* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1963), p. 8.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*, p. 31.
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
7. Emil Kraepling, *The Old Testament Since the Reformation* (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1955), pp. 229-230.
8. Bultmann, "The Significance of the Old Testament for the Christian Faith," Anderson, *op. cit.*, p. 12.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 20.; Rudolf Bultmann, "The Significance of Jewish Old Testament Tradition for the Christian West," *Essays Philosophical and Theological*. Translated by James C. G. Greig (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1955), p. 262.
10. Rudolf Bultmann, "Reply," Charles W. Kegley, ed. *The Theology of Rudolf Bultmann* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1966), p. 285.
11. Rudolf Bultmann, *Primitive Christianity in Its Contemporary Setting*. Translated by R. H. Fuller (New York: Meridian Books, 1956), p. 11.
12. Rudolf Bultmann, *The Presence of Eternity. History and Eschatology* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957), p. 18.
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19.
14. *Ibid.*, pp. 19-23.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
16. Bultmann, "The Significance of the Old Testament for the Christian Faith," Anderson, *op. cit.*, p. 30.
17. *Ibid.*
18. Bultmann, *Primitive Christianity in Its Contemporary Setting, op. cit.*, pp. 36-37.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 34.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 42.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 44.; Rudolf Bultmann, "Prophecy and Fulfillment," Claus Westermann, ed. *Essays on Old Testament Hermeneutics*. English translation by James Luther Mays. (Richmond: John Knox Press), p. 69.
22. Bultmann, *Primitive Christianity and Its Contemporary Setting, op. cit.*, p. 44.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 45.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 23.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 26.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 46.
31. Rudolf Bultmann, "Der Mensch und seine Welt nach dem Urteil der Bibel," *Glauben und Verstehen*. Dritter Band. Zweite unveränderte Auflage (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1960), p. 163.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 163.
33. Bultmann, *Primitive Christianity and Its Contemporary Setting, op. cit.*, p. 47.
34. *Ibid.*, pp. 50-51.
35. *Ibid.*, pp. 54-55.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 60.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 61.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 62.

39. Part 2 will be based mainly on Bultmann's programmatic essay, "The Significance of the Old Testament for the Christian Faith," Anderson, *op. cit.*, pp. 8-35.
40. Bultmann, "The Significance of the Old Testament for the Christian Faith," Anderson, *op. cit.*, p. 11.
41. *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 18.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
49. *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 21.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 23.
53. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
54. *Ibid.*, p. 27.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 28.
56. *Ibid.*, pp. 28-29.
57. *Ibid.*, p. 29.
58. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
59. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
60. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
61. *Ibid.*, p. 31.
62. *Ibid.*, p. 31.
63. *Ibid.*, p. 31.
64. *Ibid.*, p. 32.
65. *Ibid.*, p. 33.
66. Bultmann, "Prophecy and Fulfillment," Westermann, *op. cit.*, pp. 51-54.
67. *Ibid.*, p. 54.
68. *Ibid.*, p. 54.
69. *Ibid.*, p. 56.
70. *Ibid.*, p. 58.
71. *Ibid.*, pp. 59-72.
72. *Ibid.*, pp. 62, 63, 67, 71.
73. Bultmann, *The Presence of Eternity*, *op. cit.*, p. 36.
74. Bultmann, "Prophecy and Fulfillment," Westermann, *op. cit.*, p. 73.
75. *Ibid.*, p. 74.
76. Bultmann, "The Significance of the Old Testament for the Christian Faith," Anderson, *op. cit.*, p. 33.
77. *Ibid.*, p. 34.
78. *Ibid.*, pp. 34-35.
79. Bultmann, *Primitive Christianity in Its Contemporary Setting*, *op. cit.*, p. 11.
80. Günther Bornkamm, "The Theology of Rudolf Bultmann," Kegley, *op. cit.*, p. 4.
81. Bultmann, "Reply," Kegley, *op. cit.*, p. 257.
82. Karl Barth, *Protestant Thought from Rousseau to Ritschl* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959), p. 330.; Hugh Ross Mackintosh, *Types of Modern Theology* (London: Nisbet and Co. Ltd., 1949), p. 60.
83. Hans Joachim Kraus, *Geschichte der historisch-kritischen Forschung des Alten Testaments von der Reformation bis zur Gegenwart* (Neukirchen Kreis Moers: Verlag der Buchhandlung des Erziehungsvereins, 1956), pp. 176-177.
84. Alan Richardson, "Is the Old Testament the Propaedeutic to Christian Faith?," Anderson, *op. cit.*, p. 36.
85. *Ibid.*, p. 37. Cf. also Alan Richardson, *The Bible in the Age of Science* (London: SCM Press, 1961), p. 113.

86. Richardson, "Is the Old Testament the Propaedeutic to Christian Faith?," Anderson, *op. cit.*, p. 38.; Cf. also Alan Richardson, *History Sacred and Profane* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1964), pp. 118-121.
87. Richardson, "Is the Old Testament the Propaedeutic to Christian Faith?," Anderson, *op. cit.*, p. 38.
88. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*. Volume III. *The Doctrine of Creation*, Part 2 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1960), p. 446.
89. Paul Althaus, *Fact and Faith in the Kerygma of Today*. Translated by David Cairns (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), p. 83.
90. Ernst Voegelin, "History and Gnosis," Anderson, *op. cit.*, pp. 64-65.; Carl Braaten, *New Directions in Theology Today*. Volume II. *History and Hermeneutics* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1966), pp. 103-104.
91. Kraeling, *op. cit.*, p. 238.
92. Richardson, "Is the Old Testament the Propaedeutic to Christian Faith?," Anderson, *op. cit.*, pp. 39-40.
93. The quotation is from Hermann's *Verkehr des Christen mit Gott* (1886), p. 49. as quoted by A. E. Garvie, *The Ritchlian Theology* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1899), p. 211.
94. F. Lichtenberger, *History of German Theology in the Nineteenth Century*. Translated and edited by Hastie (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1889), p. 580.
95. Richardson, *The Bible in the Age of Science*, *op. cit.*, p. 113.
96. Cf. the parallels adduced by Richardson in "Is the Old Testament the Propaedeutic to Christian Faith?," Anderson, *op. cit.*, pp. 42-43.; Richardson, *The Bible in the Age of Science*, *op. cit.*, pp. 113-114.
97. "Autobiographical Reflections of Rudolf Bultmann," Kegley, *op. cit.*, p. xxiv.
98. Bornkamm, "The Theology of Rudolf Bultmann," Kegley, *op. cit.*, pp. 4-5.
99. Cf. Edgar Primrose Dickie, "Dialectical Theology," in Lefferts A. Loetscher ed., *Twentieth Century Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1955), I, 335-336.
100. William Hordern, *New Directions in Theology Today*. Volume I *Introduction* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1966), p. 51.
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102. Karl Jaspers and Rudolf Bultmann, *Myth and Christianity. An Inquiry into the Possibility of Religion without Myth* (New York: The Noonday Press, 1958), pp. 81-84.; John Macquarrie, *The Scope of Demythologization. Bultmann and His Critics* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1966), pp. 163-168.
103. Richardson, *History Sacred and Profane*, *op. cit.*, p. 139.
- 103a. James Barr, *Old and New in Interpretation* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1966), p. 175.
104. Oscar Cullmann, "The Connection of Primeval Events and End Events with the New Testament Redemptive History," Anderson, *op. cit.*, p. 122.; Eric Voegelin, "History and Gnosis," Anderson, *op. cit.*, p. 72.
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106. Alan Richardson, *An Introduction to Theology of the New Testament* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958), p. 12.
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108. Friedebert Hohmeier, *Das Schriftverständnis in der Theologie Rudolf Bultmanns* (Berlin und Hamburg: Lutherischer Verlagshaus, 1964), p. 132.

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111. Wilhelm Vischer, "Everywhere the Scripture is About Christ," Anderson, *op. cit.*, p. 92.
112. Bultmann, "The Significance of the Old Testament for the Christian Faith," Anderson, *op. cit.*, p. 17.
113. Vischer, *op. cit.*, p. 93.
114. Ewald M. Plass, *What Luther Says. An Anthology* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), II, p. 708.
115. Heinrich Bornkamm, *Luther und das Alte Testament* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck] 1948), p. 70.; Cf. also Kurt Frör, *Biblische Hermeneutik* (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1964), p. 112.
116. Bultmann, "The Significance of the Old Testament for the Christian Faith," Anderson, *op. cit.*, p. 17.
117. Braaten, *op. cit.*, p. 123.
118. Theodore G. Tappert, *The Book of Concord* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), p. 562.
119. Walter Künneth, "Dare We Follow Bultmann?," *Christianity Today*, 6:28, October, 13, 1961.
120. Acts 2:14-36; 3:11-26; 10:34-43; 13:16-41; 26:22-23; 28:23-24.
121. Luke 1:68-79; Romans 1:2-4; I Peter 1:10-12.
122. G. Ernst Wright, "History and Reality: The Importance of Israel's "Historical" Symbols for the Christian Faith," Anderson, *op. cit.*, p. 189.
123. Braaten, *op. cit.*, p. 125.
124. Tappert, *op. cit.*, p. 464.
125. Samuel Sandmel, "Bultmann on Judaism," Kegley, *op. cit.*, p. 219.
126. Albright, *op. cit.*, pp. 272-286.
127. Herbert F. Hahn, "Wellhausen's Interpretation of Israel's Religious History: A Reappraisal of His Ruling Ideas," Joseph L. Blau, Arthur Hertzberg, Philip Friedman and Isaac Mendelsohn, eds. *Essays on Jewish Life and Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), pp. 299-300.
128. Ian Henderson, *Rudolf Bultmann* (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1966), p. 39.
129. Per Lönning, *The Dilemma of Contemporary Theology* (New York: Humanities Press, 1962), p. 126.