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Dangerous Trends in Modern Theological Thought

By K. RUNIA

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THE BIBLE AND MYTH

When we approach the problem of demythologizing from this starting point, it is beyond question that the Bible rejects every attempt in this direction.

In the first place there is the fact that the Bible itself is the product of a thorough demythologization! It is impossible to work this out in detail here. A few summary remarks must suffice. As far as the Old Testament is concerned,¹ we first point to the fact that it emerged from a background in which myth reigned. "Myth was the form that thought about the outside world took in the ancient Near East (and indeed probably everywhere else) until the rise of scientific and philosophical thought." One of the characteristic features of such a mythical world of thought is an elaborate cosmogony, which describes the evolution of the present cosmos from a previous chaos. "The 'creator' gods somehow emerge from chaos, conquer it and re-mould it into something ordered." Israel, the people of God, lived in the midst of

¹ Cf. H. L. Ellison, "The Influence of Myths on the Old Testament," *The TSF Bulletin* (London), No. 31, p. 196. We have made liberal use of this article.

such a setting in which myth was vital and real. But when we study the Old Testament we are struck by the fact that every mythological cosmogony is altogether absent. Ellison rightly says that the Bible creation story has been "completely demythologized." This is not to deny that the language of myth is found in the Old Testament. It is, in fact, frequent, especially in some of the psalms and prophets. But again we see that it is demythologized. The extent to which this is true "may be sensed by the fact that much of it was not recognized as such until Near-Eastern literature became better known with growing archaeological discoveries. In other words, much of it is dead verbal imagery, its origins virtually forgotten." In other places, where it is deliberately used, it is used to refute the very beliefs embodied in it (cf. Ps. 74:12-15; Is. 51:9-11): the O.T. speaking of the sea, or the references to Leviathan—he is not God's enemy, but His servant! (Cf. Ps. 104:26; Am. 9:3.)

For the New Testament the situation is still much clearer. Hermann Sasse once declared: "The New Testament does not need to be demythologized, because it contains no myths,"² and we believe he is fully correct. Again we must say that the N.T. itself is already utterly demythologized.

² H. Sasse, "Flucht vor dem Dogma," *Luthertum*, 1942, pp. 161 ff.

Even where it uses so-called mythological terms it is clear that "God's Word, penetrating man's language in the revelation, broke through the myths of men."³ This is also true of the "world view" of the N. T. It cannot be denied that the N. T. speaks on the basis of conceptions which people then had concerning the structure of the cosmos (e.g., the three-storied universe, cf. Phil. 2:10). But this terminology is never presented as a divine revelation or instruction concerning the cosmos. Nor has it anything to do with "mythical" language (in the ordinary or Bultmannian sense of the word). It is simply the mode of representing the all-embracing and all-transcending character of God's saving work in Jesus Christ, in the pre-scientific language of the day.⁴

The Result of Demythologizing. There is, however, more to be said here. Because the Bible itself has already been demythologized, the *modern programme of demythologization assails and impairs the revelatory truth itself.* Nels F. S. Ferré rightly says: "All attempts to claim that Bultmann (and we may here add the names of all his fellow-demythologizers, K. R.) has done away merely with an outworn cosmology, leaving the ontology of the Gospel undisturbed, are stuff and nonsense. Bultmann is no liberal who is bringing Christianity up-to-date by differentiating between outworn and indestructible elements of Christian faith. He is the

pioneer of the most radical retranslation and transvaluation of the faith itself into existentialist categories."⁵

It is impossible at this moment to show this in all details. It must suffice to mention some of the most central aspects of the Biblical revelation as involved in the debate. The most central of all is the doctrine of a *supernatural, personal God*, which is rejected, e.g., by Tillich and Robinson. Every unbiassed student of Scripture will recognize that this conception is the basis of the whole Biblical revelation. If one destroys this basis, the whole edifice collapses. Then there is no place for the Biblical doctrines of creation and providence. Likewise the whole history of salvation, including the incarnation, cross, resurrection, ascension and second coming, has been destroyed.

What, e.g., is left of the doctrine of *creation*? According to Tillich this doctrine does not describe an event. It points to the situation of creatureliness and to its correlate, the divine creativity. You cannot separate God (i. e., the ground of being) and the creation. The creation is, to be true, not necessary in the sense that God is dependent on a necessity above him. Yet it is not contingent either. "It does not 'happen' to God, for it is identical with his life. Creation is not only God's free-

³ Edmund Schlink, quoted in *Kerygma and History: A Symposium on the Theology of R. Bultmann*, ed. Carl E. Braaten and Roy A. Harrisville (1962), p. 180.

⁴ Cf. H. N. Ridderbos, *Bultmann* (Baker Book House, 1960), p. 29; K. Runia, *Karl Barth's "Doctrine of Holy Scripture"* (1962), pp. 81 ff.

⁵ Ferré, *Searchlights on Contemporary Theology* (1961), p. 109; cf. also p. 91: "For a time, Tillich and Bultmann were interpreted as merely modernizing the faith in terms of the demythologizing of outworn world-views. Then many began to question the relation between myth, symbol, and reality in their systems. Finally, it is becoming more and more obvious that *ontologically* the whole Christian interpretation and offer of salvation are not only radically altered and shrunk, but in fact surrendered."

dom, but also his destiny."⁶ Although Tillich wants to avoid pantheism, it cannot be denied that this *is* a kind of pantheism. One could call it "neo-naturalism."⁷ And how different it is from the Biblical doctrine of the eternal, supernatural God, who created this universe "in the beginning" and since preserves and governs it according to His holy will and purpose.

The programme of demythologizing has, as we have seen, the most far-reaching consequences for the *Christology*. For all of these theologians there is no place for the doctrine of the pre-existent Son of God, who assumed the human form of a servant. Jesus Christ is only a man. To be sure, most of them would agree with Robinson when he says: "Here was more than just man. Here was a window into God at work."⁸ But we should not be deceived by this terminology. Whatever it may mean, it definitely does not mean that Jesus was truly God (which is explicitly denied by Robinson and Tillich and Bultmann and all the others). It only means that in this man God's saving activity becomes manifest. As such he is "more than a man," but not in His essential nature. As to that He is not more than a creature.

We have also seen that the whole *history*

⁶ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, I (1951), p. 252. Cf. also Macquarrie, *The Scope of Demythologizing*, p. 61.

⁷ Ferré, p. 210. Cf. p. 126, where Ferré tells us that "in response to my direct question on the issues of supernaturalism in a previous book, Tillich replied . . . that if choice had to be made he would be an 'ecstatic naturalist,' one who by the ecstatic reason goes beyond our limited methods and experiences but who will never allow the positing of a world beyond this world."

⁸ J. A. T. Robinson, *Honest to God* (1963), p. 71.

of salvation is dissolved in the new programme. In this respect we can speak of a de-historization of the Gospel. To be sure, it is not denied that the man Jesus of Nazareth was a historical figure, nor that he died on a real Cross. But there is no place for a history of salvation, starting in the protevangel in Paradise, continuing through God's mighty acts in the history of Israel, culminating in the act of redemption in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and coming to its consummation in His second coming and the coming of the Kingdom in fulfilment and perfection. As someone has said: "The threefold dimension of history in the *kerygma*—past, present, future—has been collapsed to the unidimensional present tense realised in the act of proclaiming the *kerygma* here and now."⁹ Again we must say: how different is the Biblical proclamation. Here the *Cross* and the *resurrection* (to concentrate on these points) are *objective facts*. When we use the word "objective" here, we do not mean it in the narrow Cartesian sense of "verifiable by scientific, e.g., historical, analysis." We full well realise that this is impossible with regard to both cross and resurrection. Even if it could be proved on so-called historical grounds that there has been a man of the name Jesus, who was crucified in the year 30 A. D., we still would not know that this was the Cross of Jesus, *who is the Christ*. As to the resurrection, the situation is even more difficult. Although we firmly believe that Jesus' resurrection from the dead in body and soul is a historical fact, that took place in the history of this world, it is at the same time a fact that transcends all history

⁹ Carl E. Braaten, in *Kerygma and History*, p. 15.

("He is not here," that also means: He is now in the new world) and as such it is accessible to faith only. In fact, Jesus appeared only to those who through this encounter came to faith in Him, the risen One. All these qualifications, however, do not mean that we cannot speak of objective facts anymore. The term objective may surely be used in a wider sense than that implied in the Cartesian definition. These facts are objective in a twofold sense. (a) They are truly historical, they did happen on the plain of history. (b) They are redemptive acts prior to our faith. They do not obtain their significance through the act of faith, but they have this significance quite apart from our personal acceptance of them. To put it in Luther's words: the Christ '*in se*' precedes the Christ '*pro me*.'

The same is true of the *atonement*. Whatever explanation one may give to the Biblical expressions, such as: He died "for us," "for our sins," or He gave His life "for His sheep" or "as a ransom for many," one thing is clear: He did something for us quite independent of us. The '*extras nos*' and the '*pro nobis*' clearly precede the '*in nobis*.' The Gospels clearly show that Christ gave His life for His disciples, while they all had forsaken Him in fear and unbelief. No one has put it in clearer words than the apostle Paul, when he wrote that "at the right time Christ died *for the ungodly*" (Rom. 5:6), that "God shows his love for us in that, *while we were yet sinners*, Christ died for us" (v. 8), and that "*while we were enemies*, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son" (v. 10).

In denying all this the new school of demythologizing performs one great destruc-

tive reduction of the Gospel. Not only are all aspects that are not susceptible of existential interpretation eliminated from the Bible,¹⁰ but those that are open to such an interpretation are re-interpreted in such a way and to such an extent that the real Gospel completely vanishes into the midst of existential self-analysis. David Cairns has put it very pointedly in these words: "The actual result is to bring before modern man a gospel without the Gospels, so that not without justification we may quote Mary Magdalene and say: 'They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him.'"¹¹

"MYTH WITHOUT CHRIST"

It is quite obvious that all this is nothing else than a *new form of Liberalism*. However good the intention may be, viz., to engage in a discussion with modern man and confront him with the Biblical message, there is no denying that it is done in such a way that the Gospel itself disappears. We know, of course, that Bultmann, Tillich and their followers claim that they do retain the basic and essential Gospel, viz., the event of God's grace in Jesus Christ. But at least two questions have to be asked here. (a) Is their version of the Gospel the true Gospel? As we have pointed out above, the answer must be a clear No. (b) Can they really retain the Gospel on the basis of the demythologization programme? Again the answer must be No. We believe that the consequences of Ogden and others are fully correct.¹²

¹⁰ Cf. R. H. Fuller, *The New Testament in Current Study* (1962), pp. 21 ff.

¹¹ David Cairns, *A Gospel Without Myth* (1960), p. 88.

¹² S. H. Ogden, *Christ Without Myth* (1962), p. 180.

We even wonder whether one has not to go beyond Ogden! How can he prove even that in Christ the grace of God is manifest in a "decisive" way? How can he know that "what has taken place in Jesus of Nazareth is nothing more and nothing less than a *definitive* representation of man's existence before God that has all the force of a *final revelation*"?¹³ Is this not a gratuitous assumption, after his previous argument that Jesus and the *kerygma* are "simply a transparent means for expressing" what philosophy knows full well by itself? How can this historical event, which essentially is not really necessary, all of a sudden become "decisive," "definitive," and "final"? Why not simply adhere to the basic assumption of the whole argument, viz., that we have to do with a timeless truth which is open to all, and then say that in Jesus Christ we believe to see a glimpse of this timeless truth?

Another ex-student of Bultmann, Wilhelm Kamlah, has indeed taken this line. He has set forth, on purely philosophical grounds, "a secularized Christian understanding of existence."¹⁴ He speaks of "self-giving" and describes it as an authentic self-understanding involving freedom from the past and openness to the future. He then goes on to say that the actualization of this attitude is not dependent on the event of Jesus Christ. "Philosophy as the true understanding of existence releases natural self-giving in all its truth," and therefore revelation is really unnecessary. Although Bultmann rejects these views of his student (and we are happy to note this), we nevertheless be-

¹³ Ibid., p. 179.

¹⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 82 ff.

lieve that they are implicit in the premisses upon which Bultmann's own theology is built.¹⁵ Ogden calls his book "Christ without Myth." We wonder whether it would not be more correct to speak of "Myth without Christ"! For is this not the old liberal myth of a Christianity without Christ?

A NEW LIBERALISM

Ogden openly admits that this whole new trend is a revival of Liberalism. "We have aligned ourselves with that 'liberal' tradition in Protestant Christianity that counts among the great names in its history those of Schleiermacher, Ritschl, Herrmann, Harnack, and Troeltsch and more recently Schweitzer and the early Barth and, in part at least, Bultmann."¹⁶ In the same connection he mentions for America the names of Bushnell, Clarke and Rauschenbusch, the old Chicago school, the brothers Niebuhr, Tillich, and the present "neo-liberal" movement in the University of Chicago. Indeed, it is basically all one movement that, in spite of all differences—and sometimes these are considerable!—is characterized by one common starting point. They all start with *anthropology*, man with his questions and problems, his self-understanding and need for redemption.

For Bultmann "the entire revelation of God is resolved in the truth concerning human existence."¹⁷ In his *Theology of*

¹⁵ Cf. also Bultmann's discussion of Kamlah's book in *Kerygma und Mythos*, I, 25 ff.

¹⁶ Ogden, p. 153. We would prefer to omit the qualification "in part at least." Likewise, when John Macquarrie says that Bultmann occupies a middle-of-the-road position, then we are afraid that this only reflects Macquarrie's own position!

¹⁷ Ridderbos, p. 38.

the New Testament," e.g., he explains Paul's whole theology as basically concerned with anthropology. His whole demythologization programme as expounded in his lecture on "*New Testament and Mythology*" is nothing else than an attempt to understand the Gospel in existential terms.

The same is true of Paul Tillich, as clearly appears from his basic theological method, the so-called method of correlation.¹⁸ Our first task is to find the real existential questions of human life by a thorough philosophical analysis. After that "the Christian message provides the answers to the questions implied in human existence."¹⁹ And although Tillich maintains that the answers cannot be derived from the questions but must be taken from "the revelatory events on which Christianity is based," yet he has to admit that there is "a mutual dependence between question and answer. In respect to content the Christian answers are dependent on the revelatory events in which they appear, in respect to form they are dependent on the structure of the questions which they answer."²⁰ In actual fact, however, the situation is much more serious than appears from Tillich's words. In reality the questions determine the answers one seeks. Tillich's whole systematic Theology bears out that everything in the Gospel which is not relevant to the questions of existential analysis has to be eliminated by reinterpretation.

Ogden again is very clear and outspoken on this point. He rejects Macquarrie's

statement that "theology is concerned *not only* with statements about human existence, *but* with statements about God and his activity *as well*."²¹ According to Ogden this implies that the reality of God and His saving act is essentially independent of man and his possibilities of existence, so that it is possible to speak of the one without at the same time speaking of the other. Ogden rejects this. "If our theology does not speak of God and at the same time (at least implicitly) also about man, it is incredible and irrelevant. In this sense, 'statements about God and his activity' *are* 'statements about human existence,' and vice versa."²²

All this is essentially "liberal" in the accepted sense of the word, and it means in fact that again the *special revelation* in Jesus Christ is in danger of disappearing completely *behind the general revelation*. Bultmann, Tillich and many others try to escape from this pitfall by speaking of the "decisive" or "final" or "eschatological" revelation in Jesus Christ. But as we have pointed out more than once, this escape does not fit in properly with the whole system. In fact, all these theologians admit that we can know man's existence, his need and the kind of redemption necessary for the removal of this need, from a purely philosophical analysis. In other words, *natural theology* is not only possible, but it is the basis of the whole theological edifice. In Ogden, who is one of the most consistent demythologizers, this tendency becomes a clear reality. He asserts emphatically that "it is not only possible on Scriptural grounds, but in fact necessary to

¹⁸ Cf. Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, I, 59 f.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ John Macquarrie, *An Existentialist Theology* (1955), pp. 243 f.

²² Ogden, p. 180. Cf. also Robinson, p. 50 f.

affirm that authentic human existence, or faith in Christ, can be realised apart from faith in Jesus or in the specific proclamation of the church."²³ We are definitely in need of a new doctrine of revelation. "What is presented in God's original self disclosure is *not* something different from what is given in this final manifestation in Jesus of Nazareth. The *content* of these two forms of manifestation is . . . strictly the same."²⁴ Here the line has been drawn to its consistent end: general and special revelation are identical, and the basic presupposition of Liberalism is re-established and re-affirmed.²⁵

DIFFERENCES WITH THE OLDER LIBERALISM

Does this mean that there are no differences between the old and the new Liberalism? We remember that Horton spoke of a "Post-Barthian," a term which was not meant as a simple indication of time only, but as a theological qualification. Likewise Ogden states that, although one has to continue the liberal tradition, one also has to go beyond the older Liberalism. We do believe that the new Liberalism indeed has done this in several respects. Two of the main differences are the following—

(1) There is an altogether different view concerning man's possibilities. All the new theologians maintain that there is *no way from man to God*. Man can realise his possibilities only in response to God's revelation, whether special or general. As Macquarrie puts it: only "an act from be-

²³ For Bultmann, cf. Macquarrie, *The Scope of Demythologizing*, pp. 25 f. with pp. 48 f.

²⁴ Ogden, p. 180.

²⁵ Cf. also Macquarrie's final appeal to "experience," p. 228.

yond man" is adequate to effect salvation for those who are fallen and unable to lift themselves.²⁶ At this very same point Bultmann finds the decisive difference between existentialism and the Christian faith. While the former does recognise that man is fallen, it cannot accept a "total" fall. Man is still able to realize his potentialities by his own understanding. The Christian faith does not share this optimistic view of man, but believes that man can reach his fulfilment only because of the revelation of God in the event of Jesus Christ.²⁷

(2) There is also a clear difference between the old and the new Liberalism in their view of the *person of Jesus Christ*. For the older liberal the person of Jesus Christ was not really relevant. Jesus was essentially the great teacher of ethical truths, which provide man with knowledge about God and man himself. For the new liberals Jesus Christ in his whole person is the revelation of God to man.

It cannot be denied that at least in these two aspects the new Liberalism has retained insights which are essential to the Christian *kerygma*. In this respect Horton is fully right in speaking of a "Post-Barthian" Liberalism. The shallow optimism of the Pre-Barthian Liberalism, which saw man as capable of performing his own salvation by a life of good works, aided by the great example and the deep ethical teachings of the Rabbi of Nazareth, has been given up completely. In its stead we find a new awareness of man's powerlessness and his dire need of God's grace.

The great question is, however, whether these genuinely and fundamentally Biblical insights can really *function* in this new

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 225.

²⁷ *Kerygma und Mythos*, I, 28 f.

theology. As far as we have been able to understand it, the answer must be in the negative. These insights have been caught up in the demythologization and thus have become bare theoretical affirmations without a material context. The Jesus of the demythologizers is nothing else than a mysterious historical X, a mere man in whom the existential possibilities of man are realized (Bultmann) or in whom essence and existence are in an inseparable unity (Tillich). Grace is nothing else than this very same X, who is set before us in the preaching and whom we have to accept in an existential decision, by which act his existence becomes ours. Says Bultmann: "Christ is an historical event which happened 'once' in the past; it is, at the same time, an eternal event which occurs again and again in the soul of any Christian in whose soul Christ is born, suffers, dies, and is raised up to eternal life. In his faith the Christian is a contemporary of Christ, and time and the world's history are overcome."²⁸ All is fused here into a new system of actualism and existentialism, which uses the Christian terms, but fills them all with a different meaning, because they have been severed from their foundation in the Biblical history of salvation.

For this reason we believe that, in spite of the formal divergencies, there is no essential difference between the old and the new Liberalism. It is only a matter of different accents within an essentially identical framework. In both cases Jesus Christ has, essentially, only a cognitive function, which as such is very important but not really indispensable.

²⁸ Bultmann, *The Presence of Eternity: History and Eschatology*, Gifford Lectures, 1955 (1957), p. 153.

UNIVERSAL REVELATION

It is therefore not surprising that all these theologians defend a universalist view of revelation. Ogden says that what we find in Jesus Christ is "the historically decisive disclosure of the very truth that . . . God 'at sundry times and diverse manners spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets,' and even beyond this 'lighteth every man that cometh into the world.'"²⁹ Macquarrie writes: "That there is grace outside of the Christian religion, that either by 'nature' or by 'common grace' (call it what you will) some men attain to wholeness or salvation, that men 'turn from the world' and are 'liberated' apart from the *kerygma*, neither Bultmann nor any reasonable person would wish to deny."³⁰ He calls it the "most objectionable feature of Barthian theology," that it arrogantly insists "that apart from the Christian revelation there can be no genuine knowledge of God but only idolatry."³¹ Although he admits that for us, historically, Christianity has an "inescapably definitive character," yet he does not want to deny truth to other revelations. Far from it! "Presumably Islam is a live option and a genuine revelation to the West African who may find himself faced with a decision between Islam and fetishism."³²

A NEW MISSIOLOGY

It will be obvious that this "new" view also has far-reaching consequences for the theology of missions. In a recent issue of

²⁹ Ogden, p. 188.

³⁰ Macquarrie, p. 162.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 181. Cf. the whole context, pp. 180—184.

Theology Today (Princeton Seminary) an article appeared on the subject: "A New Theology for a New Missiology."³³ In this article the joint authors deal with the consequences of the new theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Rudolph Bultmann in the field of missions. They fully agree with the charge against Bultmann that he did not go far enough in his programme of demythologization. In their opinion it can no longer be maintained that Christian faith is possible only as faith in Jesus Christ. The Biblical concept of faith can and must be secularized. And then they continue: "All this has radical implications for evangelism. Gerhard Bassarak infers that we must no longer hold to the traditional belief that the world must be won for Christ. This only separates Christians from non-Christians." The authors agree with this. Yet they still believe that the Christian man has a mission. What then is this mission? Referring to the situation in Asia the authors say that the Christian mission can help to extricate Asian man from the myths of his historic religions. Asian man is at the moment in the boundary situation, living between an older order and a new. He has to be freed from his past and develop his own new being. At this point Christianity can really help, for "only the Christian mission has the resource with which to testify to the truth that only the forgiving grace of God frees man from himself, his past, and what he has made of himself, and makes him a new creature. The task in Asia in which Christian missions are privileged to join their

³³ Nolan P. Jacobson and William E. Winn, "A New Theology for a New Missiology," *Theology Today*, XX (April 1963), 43—52.

efforts is the opening of Asian man to his own authentic future."³⁴

Here we see the new theology in all its naked liberalism. To speak of "*Dangerous Trends in Modern Theological Thought*" almost seems to be a euphemism. It would be more appropriate to speak of "destructive trends," for in these views the Gospel is not only truncated but completely destroyed.

THE FAILURE OF NEO-ORTHODOXY

Before we come to the closing remarks, one more point requires our attention. It is the question: Why did this new Liberalism arise? Why were the theology of Barth and his friends, and the accompanying Biblical Theology of the period between the two wars, not able to stem this new tidal wave of Liberalism? Some twenty-five years ago we used to hear on all sides that the dialectical theology had given the "deathblow" to Liberalism. Those who still had a good word for Liberalism were simply laughed off the theological scene. Why then this resurgence of Liberalism?

To answer this question adequately is not an easy matter. In fact, it would require a thorough analysis of the new orthodox movement. Yet several factors can be mentioned. Neo-orthodoxy was from the very start vulnerable in many respects.

(1) It comprised too many *heterogeneous elements*. We should not forget that originally both Bultmann and Tillich belonged to this movement! The one thing that bound them together was their common opposition to the shallow optimism

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 52. Cf. also Macquarrie, p. 184, where he defends Arnold Toynbee's thesis of "peaceful co-existence" among the higher religions.

of liberalism. In other words, their common concern was largely negative in character. When it came to a positive reconstruction of theology on an anti-liberal basis, their views were widely divergent. This manifested itself rather soon in the dissolution of the circle around the magazine "*Zwischen den Zeiten*" (Between the Times), in 1933. There was a rift even between the two most closely associated in their positive approach, Karl Barth and Emil Brunner.

(2) The Barthian theology never satisfactorily solved the problem of the *authority of God's Word*.³⁵ Undoubtedly, the Bible had the central place in Barth's and Brunner's theology. Both theologians had but one desire, to derive their theology from the Bible. They did not hesitate to call it again the Word of God. But this expression was bracketed by far-reaching qualifications. The Bible *is* not the Word of God in the sense of a direct identification, but it has again and again to *become* the Word of God (i. e., the actualistic conception of revelation). In itself the Bible is only the human, fallible witness, that freely may be subjected to historical criticism. Barth has always defended the good right of this criticism (although he hardly ever practiced it). Brunner, on the other hand, was much more outspoken in his criticisms (cf. his view of the creation story, the virgin birth, the Pastoral Epistles, etc.). But, of course, once one accepts the critical approach as legitimate, it becomes theologically very hard, if not impossible, to oppose radical criticisms. Finally, there was in Barth's theology the Christomonistic concentration of all revelation in Jesus

Christ, to the exclusion of all general revelation. This one-sidedness was bound to lead to a reaction, whereby the significance of the general revelation would be easily overrated.

(3) In the third place, Barth's theology completely neglected the problems involved in the *relation between faith*, on the one hand, and *natural science* with its empirical approach, on the other. There is a strange silence in the eleven volumes of Barth's *Church Dogmatics* on this point. In the volume that deals with the doctrine of creation, for example, every discussion of evolutionism and its implications for the Christian faith is left out. In his strong dislike of every "eristic" theology (Brunner!) Barth has virtually neglected the apologetic conversation with the natural scientist. Again we believe that the new theology is a reaction against this omission, with all the sad results of a reaction-movement, viz., of going to the other extreme.

(4) Finally, there is the fact that, at least in the first years, Barth placed so much emphasis on the divine, transcendent aspect that the *human aspect* was almost neglected. Faith was not only seen as God's gift, but God Himself was seen as the subject of this faith. There was neither continuity in the divine revelation, nor in the responding faith of man. And so on. In recent years Barth has admitted that his approach was badly one-sided.³⁶ But in the meantime the damage had been done, and again a reaction was to be expected.

All this does not mean that we wish to

³⁵ Cf. K. Runia, *Karl Barth's "Doctrine of Holy Scripture"* (1962).

³⁶ Cf. K. Barth, *The Humanity of God* (1960).

put the new Liberalism to the account of Barth and his followers. The new Liberals are responsible for their own theology. Perhaps we may say that Liberalism has never died. For years it did not come into the open—at least not in major theologies!—but it was always there, usually as an undercurrent. As such, it was present in the dialectical theology itself,³⁷ and it was only a matter of time to come to the surface again.

THE FUTURE

This has indeed happened in the years after World War II, and personally I am afraid that it will be with us for a long time. I do not want to assume the role of a prophet, but if I read the signs of our time correctly, we can expect a further upsurge and extension of this new Liberalism. After the publication of his book, "*Honest to God*," Dr. Robinson declared in a TV interview that he was most encouraged by the many expressions of sympathy he had received from *young* theologians. When I further read the reactions to this book in the secular press, or hear the reactions of leading ministers in several denominations, only one conclusion seems to be possible; this new theology is attractive for a large segment of the church.

I believe we do well to face these facts and be permanently on the alert. It is our duty to keep ourselves free from these ideas and oppose them with all our might. We must remember, however, that this is to be done in the right way. First of all, we must be willing to *listen* to these new ideas, carefully examine them, and try to discover

³⁷ Cf. C. Van Til, *Christianity and Barthianism* (1962); Fred H. Klooster, *The Significance of Barth's Theology* (1961).

not only what is wrong with them, but also which genuinely Biblical concerns are hidden in them. I believe that it is one of the great tasks for our Tyndale Fellowship to be engaged in this conversation. If our work is to be relevant for the community in the midst of which we are living, we have to give ample and serious attention to these contemporary problems. Secondly, we have to *defend* the truth of the Biblical message in the proper way. There is only one adequate defence (which is at the same time the only valid attack), viz., the one that takes its point of departure in *Holy Scripture itself*, accepting it as the fully reliable self-revelation of God. Every other basis is like quicksands and means the loss of the battle before it has started. Nels F. S. Ferré, e. g., tries to refute Tillich's rejection of a personal, supernatural God on purely philosophical grounds.³⁸ The result is a very weak and indecisive argument. There *is* only one unshakable basis: God's revelation in Scripture.

We have to guard ourselves, however, against a merely intellectual, objectivizing way of dealing with this revelation. If our theology is to have any impact on modern man, it must be through and through "existential." Ridderbos has rightly pointed out that there is an important element of truth in Bultmann's theology, viz., "that an accurate knowledge of God is accompanied by a correct knowledge of one's self and that the activity of God in Jesus Christ can be correctly understood only when it is shown how it changes, converts, and

³⁸ Ferré, pp. 120 ff. Cf. p. 218, where he says: "We share with these thinkers their horror for an arbitrary revelationalism, unsupported by genuine data or by reasoning from within the processes of our modern educational activities."

affects man in his existence."³⁰ However much it may be true that the Bible deals with "objective" facts, which are true and full of meaning apart from our acceptance, yet the Bible never speaks of them in abstraction from our acceptance. As members of the Tyndale Fellowship, or any other fellowship associated with the I. V. F., we always have to bear this in mind. Our constitution mentions several of these objective facts and truths, but let us never forget that they have never been meant in an objectivizing sense. These facts and truths are only meaningful—also in the discussion with the new theology—when they are accepted by us in a personal faith. Doctrines are relevant only when they have a bearing on our own personal life. This is, e. g., the way the apostle Paul deals with the great fact of Christ's resurrection in I Cor. 15. Throughout the whole chapter he shows how this fact is directly related to our human life. In the vv. 17-19 he puts it in the negative way: "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life we who are in Christ have only hope, we are of all men most to be pitied." In v. 23 and the vv. 35 ff. he speaks of our

future resurrection and of the body we will receive "at his coming." Finally, in v. 58 he brings the whole argument to a conclusion in the thoroughly practical words: "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labour is not in vain."

This is not an exception but, rather, typical of the New Testament's dealing with the great facts of the history of salvation. The Christ "extra nos" and "pro nobis" is always related to the Christ "in nobis." Only when our theology is of the same nature, will it provide an answer to the new Liberalism. Only in this way will it be relevant to the modern man of our day, who is so much alienated from the Christian faith that it does not convey anything to him. Finally, only in this way will our Christian faith be a living reality to ourselves. Then we know that the message of the Bible is not a mixture of myth and fact that must be demythologized in order to find its true meaning, but that in its Biblical form it is the true Word of God, "living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Heb. 4:12), and at the same time "able to instruct for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (II Tim. 3:15).

³⁰ Ridderbos, p. 39. Cf. also Leopold Malevez, *The Christian Message and Myth: The Theology of Rudolf Bultmann*, pp. 121 f.