

## BULTMANN'S UNDERSTANDING OF GOD

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**PRÉCIS** - More and otherwise than demythologization, Bultmann's thinking and work suggest a new understanding of basic structures of thought. The fact that faith usually takes place according to definable regulations suggests to endow the environments in which it unfolds with proper features. And yet, Bultmann's thinking does depend neither on regulations of language nor on so-called laws of life, but on the intentional character of faith, i.e. the orientation of the movement of faith. The unity of faith is not given and it does not hide within one of the terms of the God-Man relation, but within relation itself. There is an equiprimordiality not of objects, but of relations.

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### Özet ve Plan

Mitolojiden arındırmanın (demythologization) ötesinde, Bultman'ın düşüncesi ve çalışmaları temel düşünce yapıları konusunda yeni bir anlayış önerir. İmanın genellikle tanımlanabilir düzenlemelere göre var oluşu, kendisini uygun nitelikleriyle açılmadığı ortamları da sunduğu şeklinde bir fikri önerir. Ancak yine de Bultman'ın düşüncesi ne dil hükümlerine ne de yaşam kanunları diye adlandırılan şeylere dayanmamaktadır; aksine imanın maksatlı karakterine yani iman hareketinin yönelimine dayanır. İmanın birliği verilmiş bir şey değildir ve Tanrı-İnsan ilişkisinin şartlarından biri içinde gizlenmiş de değildir, fakat ilişkinin kendi içine gizlenmiş vaziyettedir. Burada nesnelere değil fakat ilişkilere ait bir eşit-önceliklilik (equiprimordiality) vardır. Makale aşağıdaki başlıklardan oluşmaktadır:

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### 1. Biographical Sketch

Rudolf Karl Bultmann was born on August 20, 1884, in Wiefelstede, a village near the city of Oldenburg (Lower Saxony - Germany); he was the son of a Lutheran pastor and the grandson of a missionary in West Africa (Bultmann 1960, 283). He died on July 30, 1976, in Marburg an der Lahn (Germany) and was buried there on August 4 of the same year.

After completing his final exams at the gymnasium in Oldenburg in 1903, Bultmann studied theology and the history of religions at the universities of Tübingen, of Berlin, and of Marburg (Johnson 1987, 9-17). As teachers he had - among others - in Tübingen: Karl Müller (Church history), and also Adolf Schlatter (New Testament exegesis) to whom he often refers in his writings, particularly on the issue of the unity between thinking and life, for him an important issue; - in Berlin: Julius Kaftan (systematic theology) - he mentions him but a few times in his writings (for instance Bultmann 1958b, 13), without being much influenced by him, and also Hermann Gunkel (Old Testament exegesis) and Adolf von Harnack (Early Church history); - in Marburg: Adolf Jülicher and Johannes Weiss (New Testament exegesis). Weiss was one of the founders of the so-called eschatological movement within critical theology at the end of the nineteenth century and he made a profound and lasting impression on the young Bultmann, judging by an article published in the journal *Theologische Blätter* in 1939, 25 years after Weiss' death. In this article Bultmann writes that Weiss knew how to promote a sound work ethics and encourage the ability to get at personal decisions through methodical study instead of indulging in general statements. Erich Dinkler, the editor of *Zeit und Geschichte*, a book dedicated to Bultmann on his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday, writes something similar in his address:

You have taught and shown us, by living it yourself through, that theology as a thinking grounded in faith makes one really happy and free, that one must love the New Testament writings in order to understand them and that one learns how to love them through understanding, that one can live a Christian life only under exposure to risk, although one is seldom conscious of risk in one's own practice of faith. [...] You have often called our attention on the ongoing character of theological work and of philosophical thought; precisely because of that you have urged your disciples and friends to go beyond the results of your own research. (Dinkler 1984, p. vii; my translation)

The one who had the most decisive and lasting influence on Bultmann while he was studying at Marburg University was the systematic theologian Wilhelm Herrmann, his most cherished master, as Bultmann later acknowledged, no less cherished, we may add - albeit for somewhat different reasons - by Karl Barth. In a lecture on Herrmann's thinking and work published in 1925 in the journal *Zwischen den Zeiten* Barth declared that Herrmann's lectures were among his best memories as a student in Marburg. He added that it came certainly as no surprise when for years a small stream of Swiss students would go on a pilgrimage to Marburg at the beginning of every semester and that their unwilling minds towards all kind of authority were excited in seeing traditionalism from right, rationalism from left, mysticism in the back relegated in turn to scrap by Herrmann, while dogmatics - either positive of liberal - was finally undergoing the same fate. Of course, this expression of Barth's own view may run the risk of putting Herrmann in a dubious light. Therefore Barth hastened to explain that Herrmann knew very well that freedom - better: sincerity - is neither the first nor the only concern for a theologian, that there is also authority in theological matters. Barth added that Herrmann would constantly refer back to history - not just to Jesus' interior life, but also to the Bible and even to Church tradition as norms dogmatics should adjust to, although he was less convincing on these matters. This he knew and did not hesitate to tell it.

It is not possible here to offer a thorough approach to Herrmann's thought, nor even to offer a full list of rapprochements with Bultmann's thought. Only the following points can be mentioned. Both Herrmann and Bultmann insist on the distinction between nature and history, on God's revelation not as teaching (German: "Lehre") but as an *event* that places Man before God, on understanding faith not as acceptance of, and support to doctrine, but first of all as a living personal relationship with God in Jesus Christ. The necessity for Christians - underlined by Herrmann - to combine the idea of work<sup>1</sup> and the idea of faith (German: "Glaubensgedanke") in such a way that the former be determined by the latter so that Christians should behave *with* faith, not just *out of* faith, echoes Bultmann who says that "There are no particular 'professions' which perform works of faith and love; but all our acts in fulfill-

1 German: "Arbeitsgedanke". See Boutin 1974, 225 note 3 & 612 (index).

ing our everyday obligations can become such works” (Bultmann 1969, 142). This also helps situate Bultmann’s following words:

There is neither a Christian science nor a Christian morality – there is neither a political nor a social programme of Christian faith. There is no Christian art, nor culture, nor educational system – no ‘Christian humanism’. Or course, all these things do exist so far as Christians pursue them, or so far as they select their materials from the sphere of the thought world and the history of Christianity – art and science, for example, are such. But it is an abuse of language to speak, then, of ‘Christian’ science or art; for there is no Christian *method* in all these spheres of intellectual life. There may well be Christian cobblers; but there is no Christian shoe-making. (Bultmann 1955, 156)

Bultmann asks: “For who has emphasized more forcibly than W. Herrmann that there is no specifically Christian ethic?”<sup>2</sup>

Quite often in his writings, Bultmann states that “the ground and the object of faith are identical,” and sometimes he explicitly refers to Herrmann: “It is true, as Wilhelm Herrmann taught us, that the ground and the object of faith are identical. They are one and the same thing, because we cannot speak of what God is in Himself but only of what He is doing to us and with us” (Bultmann 1958b, 73). This statement is a reminder of the following words by Herrmann: “What an almighty being is for himself remains hidden to us. But he has shown himself in what he accomplishes for us. Of God we can say only what he does for us”,<sup>3</sup> and these words should be compared to Thomas Aquinas’ following words: “Of God we cannot say what He is, but only what He is not, and which relation with Him all the rest has”.<sup>4</sup> This statement is entirely adopted by Bultmann; he often states it without explicit reference to Herrmann. At least on two occasions he relates directly to Melancthon’s motto: “Hoc est Christum cognoscere, beneficia ejus cognoscere” - “To know Christ is to know the benefits he confers” (Bultmann 1969, 279) – which, according to Bultmann, emphasizes the “problem with which the church is faced afresh in every age,” namely the urgent need to work out a christology centered on the meaning of the “new being” in Christ given by God to Man in faith (Bultmann 1969, 285). A similar suggestion was made 21 years later by Karl Rahner:

In order conceptually to express the mystery of Christ, classical Christology makes use of concepts of formal ontology, the content of which recurs at *every* level of reality, according to the distinct mode of each: nature, person, unity, substance and so on. Would it not be possible to go further, without abandoning classical Christology, and make use of the concepts in terms of which the relation of created things to God is conceived? [...] If such were the case, even the bare appear-

2 Bultmann 1969, 45, and also 107 & 111.

3 W. Herrmann, *Die Wirklichkeit Gottes*, 1914, pp. 41-42. – The Reality of God; my translation.

4 “Non enim de Deo capere possumus quid est, sed quid non est, et qualiter alia se habeant ad ipsum” (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, book 1, end of chapter 30).

ance that what was offered in orthodox Christology was an anthropomorphic myth, might perhaps be more easily avoided from the start. (Rahner 1960, 163-4 & 166)

It would be too long here to indicate how far Rahner's suggestion differs from Bultmann's. One could possibly appreciate it by comparing Rahner's suggestion with Bultmann's following statement from 1952: "In my opinion, Christology should finally be radically free from objectifying thinking and be worked out in a new ontological conceptuality".<sup>5</sup>

With regard to Herrmann's words from 1914 quoted above, Bultmann writes:

W. Herrmann was always pointing out that 'the laws of nature hide God as much as they reveal him'. And although different terms are used, that statement is the equivalent of the constantly repeated assertion of Barh and [Friedrich] Gogarten: 'There is no direct knowledge of God. God is not a given entity.' (Bultmann 1969, 33)

For Bultmann, "Man, thinking he sees in nature God's omnipotence, to which he can freely surrender himself, has not as yet seen the real power of nature at all, nor recognized its uncanny nature, and its ambiguity" (Bultmann 1954, 101-2). What is at stake here is a critique of the understanding of cosmos as transparent to God, which Bultmann was far from having initiated and which he was not the only one to promote. Such an optimistic vision can claim in no way to be based on a *global* perspective of the universe – not more than its contrary vision; rather it is the consequence of an attempt – conscious or not – to *prove* the existence of God as principle or cause of the universe, as well as the contrary of it hopes to be able, and even forced, to *reject* such a God. Yet, according to Bultmann, faith is neither optimism nor pessimism. Faith dismisses both, and the question whether faith calls for an optimistic or a pessimistic worldview becomes meaningless. The reason is, again according to Bultmann, that both optimism and pessimism do take Man as criterium or as "measure for everything" (according to the Greek sophist Protagoras), whereas for Bultmann faith does not find its measure in Man.

This is most important for understanding the answer Bultmann gave for the first time in 1925 to the question of God-talk put forward again in all its radicality through the critique of the Stoics' worldview widely present in Christianity in the past and which Paul in his missionary activity (see for instance Letter to the Romans 1, 18ss) made his own in order not to give his listeners or readers to understand how God shows himself in nature, i.e. outside Christ, but in order "to open their eyes solely for the revelation of God

5 "Mich dünkt, die Christologie sollte endlich radikal aus der Herrschaft einer Ontologie des objektivierenden Denkens befreit und in einer neuen ontologischen Begrifflichkeit vorgetragen werden" (Bultmann 1952, p. 206, end of note 1; my translation). This footnote has not been included in the text of Bultmann's Shaffer and Cole Lectures of 1951 published in 1958, where Bultmann did use the text of 1952 (Bultmann 1958b, 83), most probably because it is the text of lectures. Rudolf Schnackenburg does not mention it either in "Christology and Myth" on Bultmann (Bartsch 1962, 336-355).

in Christ! And so to make the accusation, 'so that they are without excuse!'" (Bultmann 1954, 114). Bultmann's answer is stated thus: "[...] if a man will speak of God, he must evidently *speak of himself*". (Bultmann 1969, 55)

In a circular letter from February 15, 1925 to his friends,<sup>6</sup> Karl Barth did not fail to mention - among the objections he did address to Bultmann a few days before in a private conversation - the following: "He [Bultmann] thinks much too much for my liking in an anthropological, Kierkegaardian, Lutheran (+ "Gogartian") way ("To speak of God means to speak of Man") [...]"<sup>7</sup> Under the label "To speak of God means to speak of Man", Bultmann's answer will become later a kind of catch-word widely - and wildly! - spread (more on this # 3.4) in order to support the most unbelievable conclusions as to the alleged central dimension of his thinking as subjectivism, as anthropocentrism, one could even add: as horizontalism, etc. Thus one will all too easily forget that for Bultmann, theology is a reflection of faith on its object, which is at the same time its ground, and that it is certainly a reflection on Man, but as *placed before God* (coram Deo). Consequently, as Karl Rahner states, "there is no theology without anthropology".<sup>8</sup>

According to Bultmann, such a reflection on Man as placed before God cannot develop without a deeper understanding of human existence which would be ready to think more, as Martin Heidegger would say. Precisely the lack of such has been at work in a large number of those who felt themselves compelled to pass judgment on Bultmann's theological project and to reject it. Bultmann did refer back to the central idea of his 1925 article on the meaning of God-talk at least twice. A year later he made clear that this is an issue concerning not Man's experiences (German: "Erlebnisse"), but Man's reality in which God speaks (Bultmann 1969, 113-115). In *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, he gives a broader explanation and he declares among other things that "From the statement that to speak of God is to speak of myself, it by no means follows that God is not outside the believer. This would be the case only if faith is interpreted as a purely psychological event". (Bultmann 1958, 70)

## 2. Salient Aspects of Activity

After this short survey on those who did influence Bultmann on decisive aspects of his thinking, let us mention the salient aspects of his activity as an exegete and theologian at Marburg University, a university-town in the German State Hessen where Bultmann taught New Testament theology and also occasionally preached at church services from 1921 until his retirement in 1951 (see Johnson 1987, 9-17). Before being appointed in 1921 as successor of Wilhelm

6 Barth - Thurneysen 1966, 179-184. This circular letter is not included in Jaspert 1981.

7 Barth - Thurneysen 1966, 183; my translation. "Gogartian" refers back to one of the leaders of the so-called dialectical theology, the theologian Friedrich Gogarten to whom Bultmann did acknowledge in 1930 that he is no less obliged than to Martin Heidegger.

8 Karl Rahner & A. Görres 1967, *Der Leib und das Heil*. Mainz: 1967, p. 36; my translation. The Body and Salvation.



Heitmüller (1869-1926) who had accepted a chair of New Testament theology at the University of Bonn, Bultmann had taught four years at the University of Breslau (Schlesien) and one year at the University of Giessen near Marburg where he succeeded to Wilhelm Bousset. (Bultmann 1960, 283-288)

### **2.1 The “Formgeschichtliche Schule”**

Based on his first significant publication with the title *A History of Synoptical Tradition* in 1921, Bultmann was among the founders of the ‘School of Form History’ along with Karl Ludwig Schmidt who published in 1919 a study on *The Framework of the History of Jesus* and Martin Dibelius who authored *The History of the Forms of the Gospel* also published in the same year. In his review of Dibelius’ book in the journal *Theologische Literaturzeitung* in 1919 Bultmann did broadly agree with Dibelius, but he also made serious critiques. At the same time he expressed hope to show very soon that the study of the tradition of Jesus’ words and its history has to take into account the methodological principle according to which certain laws would allow to reach an even earlier stage of this tradition than the gospel of Mark and the so-called common source of the synoptic gospels (named in German : “Quelle”), once these laws have been established on the basis of a comparison between the tradition levels in Mark and the “Quelle” on the one hand, and the gospel of Matthew and of Luke on the other hand. Here, Bultmann alludes to his *History of Synoptical Tradition*, which offers more developed analyses than Dibelius. Rightly so, K. L. Schmidt did consider Bultmann’s book as unparalleled, with the exception of Adolf Jülicher’s monumental study on *The Parables of Jesus* (vol. 1, 1888, and vol. 2, 1899).

### **2.2 Dialectical Theology**

One might discuss at length the reasons why Bultmann did not adopt a mere passive attitude with regard to the kind of tidal wave caused in German Protestant theology by Karl Barth’s commentary on Paul’s Letter to the Romans published in 1919, but instead decided to actively participate in the debate. Particularly the second edition of Barth’s commentary published in 1922 – the content of which, profoundly changed, had only a vague resemblance to the first publication - did really attract Bultmann’s interest in the new theological movement. Along with Barth, Eduard Thurneysen, Friedrich Gogarten, and Emil Brunner, Bultmann was considered as representing what soon became known as dialectical theology. Some did not hesitate to view Bultmann’s decision to support that movement as a desperate endeavor : in his circular letter of March 4, 1924, Barth said that Rade regarded Bultmann as a sceptical historian who, while doubting everything, has thrown himself into our arms.<sup>9</sup> Actually, one cannot speak in Bultmann’s case – and also not in Gogarten’s or

9 Barth – Thurneysen 1966, 151-155; 151. - Martin Rade, founder and director of the journal *Die Christliche Welt*, was since 1899 professor of systematic theology at Marburg University and as such a colleague of Bultmann.

in Brunner's cases either – about unconditional surrender in the movement launched by Barth. This is obvious already in the critiques addressed in Bultmann's detailed review of Barth's second edition of the commentary on Paul's Letter to the Romans published in the journal *Die Christliche Welt* 36 (1922) col. 320-323, 330-334, 358-361, 369-373. In fact from the very beginning, there were profound dissents until the official dissolution of the movement and the end of publication of its organ, the journal *Zwischen den Zeiten*, in 1933.

As a matter of fact, Bultmann was deeply concerned in the meantime by the correspondence between language as expressed thought and thinking itself. During the 1920s he was looking for a language that would be more fitting to what he wanted to say. Between 1922 and 1930 he set up this research under the impulse first of all of Karl Barth, then of Friedrich Gogarten, but particularly of Martin Heidegger who taught at Marburg University from 1923 to 1928 and whom Bultmann befriended, as documented for instance in the dedication to Bultmann of Heidegger's public lecture on *Phenomenology and Theology* in Tübingen on March 9, 1927 and in Marburg on February 14, 1928. Therefore, what is happening these years has not to do with a crisis of some sort - and for sure not of a psychological type - allegedly caused by Bultmann's decision to face problems and dangers caused by doubt and to avoid compromise. Bultmann made it quite clear in 1927 when he replied to those who

want to know how I rescue myself from the situation created by my *critical radicalism*; how much I can still save from the fire. Wiser people, like P.[Paul] Althaus and Friedrich Traub, have even discovered that I saved myself from my skepticism by taking refuge in Barth and Gogarten. They must pardon me for finding their wisdom comical. I have never felt uncomfortable with my critical radicalism; on the contrary, I have been entirely comfortable. But I often have the impression that my conservative New Testament colleagues feel very uncomfortable, for I see them perpetually engaged in salvage operations. I calmly let the fire burn, for I see that what is consumed is only the fanciful portraits of Life-of-Jesus theology, and that means nothing other than 'Christ after the flesh' [second letter of Paul to the Corinthians chap. 5, verse 16]. But the 'Christ after the flesh' is no concern of ours. How things looked in the heart of Jesus I do not know and do not want to know. (Bultmann 1969, 132)

Later on, Bultmann will never feel the necessity of radical changes of mind and spectacular conversions. He will stay remarkably faithful to himself, while remaining fond of freedom and of truth, and also a clear-sighted observer, both generous and critical, of the development of theological reflection.

### **2.3 The “Confessing Church” (“Bekennende Kirche”)**

The rise of national-socialism and Adolf Hitler's access to power in Berlin on 30 January, 1933 were far from leaving Bultmann unconcerned. His first lecture of the summer semester on May 2, 1933 offers a reflection on the political events over the preceding months later published with the title “The Task of Theology in the Present Situation” in the journal *Theologische Blätter*. Bultmann begins as follows:



Ladies and Gentlemen! I have made a point never to speak about current politics in my lectures, and I think I also shall not do so in the future. However, it would seem to me unnatural were I to ignore today the political situation in which we begin this new semester. The significance of political happenings for our entire existence has been brought home to us in such a way that we cannot evade the duty of reflecting on the meaning of our theological work in this situation.

It should be emphasized, however, that what is at issue here is not the defense of a *political* point of view; nor can our purpose be either to repeat the "happy yes" to political events that is spoken all too quickly today or – depending on how we stand with respect to these events – to give voice to a skeptical or resentful criticism. Rather we must look at these events simply from the standpoint of their immense possibilities for the future and ask ourselves what our responsibility is *as theologians* in face of these possibilities. (Bultmann 1960, 158)

Bultmann concludes the lecture by saying among other things:

By defamation one does not convince his adversaries and win them to his point of view, but merely repulses the best of them. One really wins only by a struggle of the *spirit* in which he respects his adversary. As a Christian, I must deplore the injustice that is also being done precisely to German Jews by means of such defamation. I am well aware of the complicated character of the Jewish problem in Germany. But, "We want to abolish lies!" – and so I must say in all honesty that the defamation of the Jews that took place in the very demonstration that gave rise to this beautiful sentiment was not sustained by the spirit of love. Keep the struggle for the German nation pure, and take care that noble intentions to serve truth and country are not marred by demonic distortions!

But there is yet this final word. If we have correctly understood the meaning and the demand of the Christian faith, then it is quite clear that, *in face of the voices of the present, this Christian faith itself is being called in question*. In other words, it is clear that we have to decide whether Christian faith is to be valid for us or not. It, for its part, can relinquish nothing of its nature and claim; for "verbum Domini manet in aeternum" [The word of God remains eternally]. And we should as scrupulously guard ourselves against falsifications of the faith by national religiosity as against a falsification of national piety by Christian trimmings. He issue is either or!

The brief words of this hour can only remind us of this decision. But the work of the semester will again and again bring the question to our attention and clarify it in such a way that the requisite decision can be clearly and conscientiously made. (Bultmann 1960, 165)

In his sermon on 1 John 4, 7-12 given on July 2, 1933 during the liturgical ceremony at the end of the summer semester at the university and published under the title *God Calls Us*, Bultmann did mention the "national-socialist movement" explicitly and called out the critical power of faith. (Bultmann 1933)

In the Fall of 1933, Bultmann took a very active part – at least according to Karl Ludwig Schmidt – not only in the writing of the memoir from the fac-

ulty of theology of Marburg University on the bill regarding the nomination of clergy and of employees in Church administration approved by the general synod of the Prussian Church, but also in the writing of the declaration of a group of professors on the so-called racial issue. For the bill entailed also a paragraph on the Aryan issue ("Arier paragraph"), and some were in favour of giving force of law to it for the whole Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Germany. The memoir from the faculty of theology of Marburg University, published in the October 1933 issue of the journal *Theologische Blätter*, categorically comes down against the bill and puts forward that the bill stands in conflict with the nature of the Church as set up from the authority of Scripture and of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. As to the declaration *New Testament and the Racial Issue* published immediately after the memoir from the faculty of theology of Marburg University, it states that according to the New Testament, the Christian Church is made out of Jews and of Gentiles all united in a visible community, that only faith and baptism can determine who does belong to this community, and consequently that a Christian Church should not give up this stand in its teaching and ministry.

At the same time, Karl Ludwig Schmidt, as editor of the journal *Theologische Blätter*, asked Bultmann to respond to an article written by Georg Wobbermin, professor of systematic theology at Göttingen University, against the memoir from the faculty of theology of Marburg University as well as against the declaration on the racial issue. Bultmann's response published in the December 1933 issue of *Theologische Blätter* with the title *The Aryan Paragraph and the Church* uses a language the violence of which would better fit Karl Barth for instance and is nowhere else to be found in Bultmann's writings. In a note at the beginning of his response Bultmann writes: "If my argument is so biting, it is because it upsets me to think that someone could have written such a superficial article on such grave matter." The response ends with the following terse words: "Is the preaching of the Gospel in jeopardy? Will people leave the Church? Well, then there will be clear positions and fair struggle! [...] Sint ut sunt aut non sint! [Be they as they are, or be they not!] – This word is not one of despair, but of confidence in victory."

When in 1935 the minister forbade the faculty of theology of Marburg University any declaration regarding conflicts between the Church and the Nazi regime, Bultmann wrote to him personally that "it is absolutely impossible for a theology professor not to take a stand on momentary Church issues if he does not want to upset that very relation between science and daily life, which alone gives science the right to be established."

One should also mention Bultmann's participation in the book dedicated to Karl Barth on his 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1936 with an article on Sophocle's *Antigone* (Bultmann 1954, 22-35). The article does not document some dabbling in humanist culture; it rather alludes to the awkward situation of the

Confessing Church launched in 1934, of which Karl Barth was the kingpin and which Bultmann did not hesitate to be part of from the very beginning. The Confessing Church is the new Antigone who does not shilly-shally between the authority of Zeus and the authority of the tyrant, and rather dares confronting the laws of the city and withstanding Hitler, the new Creon.

It is important to recall that Bultmann never hesitated to get involved when necessary and that his dedication to the New Testament writings alone allowed him not to panic in the highly ambiguous political situation at the beginning of the 1930s in Germany. As one knows, it seems obvious still today to declare that the existential interpretation underlying Bultmann's alleged decisionism encourages a lack of interest in everyday affairs and thus inevitably gives rise to a disembodied faith.

#### 2.4 Demythologization

Bultmann's public lecture on *New Testament and Mythology* was given first in Frankfurt-Main on April 21, 1941 to a group of pastors belonging to the Confessing Church, and then on June 4, 1941, at the congress of the Society for Evangelical Theology (Gesellschaft für Evangelische Theologie) in Alpirsbach, a small town north-east of Freiburg im Bresgau. It has been published the same year in a modified version together with a short essay on "The Question of Natural Revelation" (Bultmann 1954, 90-118) in *Offenbarung und Heilsgeschehen* and reprinted in Hans-Werner Bartsch, ed. first ed. 1948 (see Bultmann 2000, 15-48). It has been the target of intense debates on demythologizing the Bible over the last decades. And yet, it met only a modest interest in the early 1940s according to Hans-Werner Bartsch in his Preface ("Vorwort") of 1948 (see Bultmann 2000, v-vii), on account of the difficult political situation of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church confronted to other worries and problems in these years.<sup>10</sup> Besides, those acquainted with former writings by Bultmann could not find anything really new in this lecture – except the tone, which explains why one will talk later of a program, even of a manifest.

With reason, the so-called critical study of the content (German: "Sachkritik") that should prevail in New Testament exegesis according to Bultmann and on which he was insisting much in the 1920s<sup>11</sup> already entails some demythologizing device. Moreover, his book on *Jesus*, first published in German in 1926 and later, with Bultmann's approval, as *Jesus and the Word* (Bultmann 1958a), prepared what he felt he was obliged to say fifteen years later. Since the 1940s, particularly the third before last paragraph of Bult-

10 See above # 2.3. – However, the first edition of *Kerygma und Mythos I* in 1948 entails various documents written or duplicated between 1942 and 1944 (see Bultmann 2000, 49-189), in particular Julius Schniewind's response to Bultmann regarding demythologization ("Antwort an Rudolf Bultmann", 77-121) whose writing Schniewind finished on October 27, 1943.

11 See for instance Bultmann 1969, 81-86 and Jaspert 1981, 118-119.

mann's "Introduction" to the book (Bultmann 1958a, 13-14) evidenced - for the vast majority of those actively participating in the demythologizing debate later on - that nothing whatsoever did remain from the existence of Jesus in Bultmann's view. Bultmann writes:

Of course the doubt as to whether Jesus really existed is unfounded and not worth refutation. No sane person can doubt that Jesus stands as founder behind the historical movement whose first distinct stage is represented by the oldest Palestinian community. But how far that community preserved an objectively true picture of him and his message is another question. For those whose interest is in the personality of Jesus, this situation is depressing or destructive; for our purpose it has no particular significance. It is precisely this complex of ideas in the oldest layer of the synoptic tradition which is the object of our consideration. It meets us as a fragment of tradition coming to us from the past, and in the examination of it we seek the encounter with history. By the tradition Jesus is named as bearer of the message; according to overwhelming probability he really was. Should it prove otherwise, that does not change in any way what is said in the record. I see then no objection to naming Jesus throughout as the speaker. Whoever prefers to put the name "Jesus" always in quotation marks and let it stand as an abbreviation for the historical phenomenon with which we are concerned, is free to do so. (Bultmann 1958a, 13-14).

This is why Bultmann's view seemed to be adequately summarized by saying that it does not matter whether Jesus did exist or not; we have his message, and this is enough! Indeed Bultmann himself said that the subject of his book is "not the life or the personality of Jesus, but only his teaching, his message. Little as we know of his life and personality, we know enough of his *message* to make for ourselves a consistent picture." (Bultmann 1958a, 12)

It is important to recall the immediate context of these words. As Bultmann finished the writing of his introduction to *Jesus* on April 21, 1925, he was also writing a report on recent publications about "Urchristliche Religion (1915-1925)" to be published in the journal *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft* vol. 24 (1926), pp. 83-164. On pages 108-9 and 132, Bultmann did report on the publications in 1924 by the editor Diederichs in Jena of an entirely new edition of *Die Petrus Legende* (79 p.), of *Die Christusmythe* (239 p.), and also of *Die Entstehung des Christentums aus dem Gnostizismus* (389 p.) by Arthur Drews, a philosopher from Karlsruhe "who has joined the astrologers" (Jaspert 1981, 117). The first debate on myth and Christian faith in the 20<sup>th</sup> century which reached its peak in 1910 in Germany was initiated by the first publications of these books by Drews. After analysis of the latter's position Bultmann did question the opportunity to revive that debate in the 1920s; in any case, he didn't wish to expand on the matter in the introduction to his book on *Jesus*. For him the questioning by Drews of the very fact of the existence of Jesus did lack any foundation, and he did not want to repeat in his introduction what he had previously said against Drews in his report. He

simply wrote: "By the tradition Jesus is named as bearer of the message; according to overwhelming probability he really was. Should it prove otherwise, that does not change in any way what is said in the record".

As Gustaf Wingren acknowledged in 1957, "Nothing is more surprising than the puzzlement caused by Bultmann's lecture from the 1940s in which everything was indeed very well known already."<sup>12</sup> For instance with regard to Bultmann's alleged preference for the modern scientific worldview over against the ancient mythological one, it is interesting to remind Bultmann's following words in 1928:

It is, for instance, possible that insight into human existence is more true at a primitive stage of culture and science than at a more highly developed level. The concept of power, *mana* or *orenda*, which is found in 'primitive' religions, is customarily investigated in scientific accounts on the basis of a particular scientific view of nature and accordingly is explained as a concept of primitive science which has been superseded. Then, for example, statements of the New Testament in which this concept of power plays a role are customarily judged in the same way. But the question we ought to ask is what understanding of human existence finds expression in the concept of *mana*. Obviously (though with the provision that we, too, are speaking from a definite conception of existence) it is the understanding of human life as surrounded by the enigmatic and the uncanny; as at the mercy of nature and of other men. And at the same time the temptation inherent in human life is expressed in this concept, since there appears in it the will to escape from what imprisons man, to make one's self secure by outwitting the enigmatic powers through making them useful to one's self. *Perhaps a much truer conception of human existence is expressed there than in the Stoic view of the world or in that of modern science – irrespective of how much more highly developed the science may be in comparison to that of the 'primitive' world.* (Bultmann 1969, 152-3; last emphasis mine)

And yet, after the end of World War II, Bultmann's lecture of 1941 did trigger off a lively debate that was not limited – as many theological controversies – to so-called specialized circles and was rather spreading rapidly over other milieus, which made Bultmann known to a vast public abroad and in Germany as well. Bultmann was not very happy about that. For instance he wrote in 1960:

I consider irresponsible when weekly publications and other printed material intended to parishes bring up the issue – I would rather say: the catch-word – of demythologizing to people who do either understand nothing about it or necessarily misunderstand its significance because an adequate understanding of it implies theological training. To be sure, some of them are indeed excellent as they attempt to calm down people disturbed by demythologizing and to explain what it is. But it is really sad to read articles in other publications that can but frighten people and prompt them to pass condemning judgement on a matter they absolutely don't have any idea about. (Bultmann 2000, 9)

12 G. Wingren, *Die Methodenfrage der Theologie*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1957, p. 129 note 13; my translation. On the question of theological method.

Since the beginning of his career as an exegete and theologian, Bultmann is convinced that a theologian must have enough sound judgment to talk of certain things at the right place and on the right time in order that the move - necessary for the coming of age for each and every Christian - from a false sense of security to certainty granted by faith does not bring about disarray and confusion. This is why he said the following in a talk on *Theological Science and Pastoral Work* given at the "Freie Vereinigung" in Oldenburg on September 29, 1913:

The more a theologian learns how to be familiar with the kind of reflection necessary and nurtured by the scientific study of Scripture, the more he will be able to oppose sectarianism. Although one should not expect much from incorrigible and stubborn sectarians, it is certainly an obligation to instruct and protect the Christian community against them. This entails indeed a danger: whoever openly and with sympathy devotes himself to the understanding of ideas belonging to a particular epoch and history might put so much interest in it that he will eventually talk of it at the wrong place. For sure, one should not overestimate the interest of Christian communities for historical issues; they want to hear things that are practical and useful to them. And I do not think either that the preacher should offer thoughts on the historico-temporal form of texts on which he preaches, although these are part and parcel of his own preparation. I would even dare to say that the more a pastor spends time to it through scientific studying, the less he will be tempted to talk about it at the wrong place. (p. 127)[...] Besides, the danger of critical radicalism in pastoral work does not seem to me to be great. Much greater is the danger coming from old traditions and from usage. However, this is not something to be rejected without recourse! Respect and regards for the Christian community is what really matters. And yet, who does not realize that the danger of numbness is threatening? The old habit is easier to get on with! Lack of awareness and laziness will be minimal when the theological student learns how to do a critical study seriously. Professors who indulge in hypercriticism and are satisfied only when they declare that a text is not authentic - these professors do exist only in the whim of a polemic taking place in the field of Church politics; in fact, there is none. (p. 131) [...] Historical science can never provide absolute security regarding each and every event taking place in space and time; however, it can awaken conscience and see to it that the question of the ground and the object of faith always remains alive. It prevents as much from the error of identifying faith with belief in some strange story as from the error of identifying the scandal caused by some stories with the scandal inherent to faith itself. Only one scandal must remain: the scandal not of knowledge, but of conscience. (p. 135) (Bultmann 1913)

When Bultmann talks about demythologizing, it is a matter not just of destruction or simply reduction, but of *interpretation*. According to him, recourse to mythology in the New Testament writings was an attempt to meet the requirement of interpreting the historical fact of Jesus as the Word of God. In order to do so, *the reference, conservation and transmission of the tradition pertaining to the historical Jesus were all the more necessary in order to avoid that Christ be made a purely mythological figure* (see for instance



Bultmann 1975, 196). And yet the term “de-mythologizing” with its obviously negative connotation is definitely not a very satisfactory one even for Bultmann himself:

Shall we retain the ethical preaching of Jesus and abandon his eschatological preaching? Shall we reduce his preaching of the Kingdom of God to the so-called social gospel? Or is there a third possibility? We must ask whether the eschatological preaching and the mythological sayings as a whole contain a still deeper meaning which is concealed under the cover of mythology. If that is so, let us abandon the mythological conceptions precisely because we want to retain their deeper meaning. This method of interpretation of the New Testament which tries to recover the deeper meaning behind the mythological conceptions I call *de-mythologizing* – an unsatisfactory word, to be sure. Its aim is not to eliminate the mythological statements but to interpret them. It is a method of hermeneutics. The meaning of this method will be best understood when we make clear the meaning of mythology in general. (Bultmann 1958b, 18)

Despite the fact that the term “de-mythologizing” is viewed by Bultmann as unsatisfactory, his intention is not to open a quarrel. If one still sees some destruction here, then only in terms of Jeremiah’s chapter 1, verse 10, when the Lord gives Jeremiah the task: “destroy and construct.”

Demythologization is in no way the core of Bultmann’s theological project; it is only a consequence of it. And yet it questions something indeed basic for him: not that Man is the norm of God’s revelation – which would be a complete misunderstanding, but the relevance of Martin Heidegger’s *existential* interpretation Bultmann deems the best way to initiate a true dialogue between Christian faith and modern thought (see for instance Bultmann 2000, 138). Bultmann has been deeply influenced by the following questions: how, why and how far Christians in dialogue with their contemporaries can talk *also* of Christ and of understanding by faith (in German “Glaubensverständnis”)? Where do Christians get their understanding of the real situation of modern Man, and what gives them the right, even the obligation, to *put forward* – at the basis of dialogue - this understanding which *cannot be had immediately* from the sources of God’s revelation?

Let us add that Bultmann never thought Heidegger’s existential interpretation to be a kind of *magic recipe* and the unique and final method of knowledge to be had in Christian theology. However, he thinks that it mostly sensitizes on today’s crucial issues and therefore that it fosters a theology imbued not with a pathological preservation instinct prompting Christians to dialogue only between themselves and thus setting them apart, but with a real convergence instinct providing Christian theology with a unity that - far from denying open-mindedness - looks for it instead, while pursuing the only task of emphasizing the two essential aspects of Christian faith – namely *God’s revelation to Man*. Consequently, Bultmann is ready to accept any other kind of interpretation that would deem better (for instance Bultmann 2000, 124)

and doesn't think that understanding the ground and the object of Christian faith does end up with him or with the use of Heidegger's existential interpretation in Christian theology. For instance, Bultmann is deeply convinced that Jesus as historical fact does elude not only rationalist investigation, as Kierkegaard rightly pointed out, but existential interpretation as well. In other words: Christian theology as the reflection of Christian faith on its object and on its ground is not *relying on* existential interpretation to the point of being *derived* from it and then simply *referred to* the object and the ground of Christian faith. Bultmann has acknowledged that the real intention of existential interpretation *wants to* (according to Heidegger) and *can* (according to Bultmann) *prepare* – on the conceptual level – *the self-transcending* that Man is called to within and through human existence and the believer within and through Christian faith.

### 3. Basic Structures of Thought

The debate on demythologization calls for a better understanding of the basic structures of thought with regard not only to theology and philosophy, but also to daily life.

#### 3.1 Nonobjectifying Projection

To have something at one's own disposal, to have control of something (in German: "verfügen") is based upon, and achieved through, objectivation (in German: "objektivieren"). In Bultmann's view, there is a close and constant relationship between "verfügen" and "objektivieren". Controllability and objectivation are the two faces of one and the same coin. It is therefore impossible to give up objectivation while keeping controllability. And it is likewise impossible to give up "verfügen" and "objektivieren" altogether, since both are already needed in daily life. And yet, Bultmann contends, "verfügen" and "objektivieren" are called into question through God's action. (Boutin 1974, 487-492)

As basic patterns of human behavior, "verfügen" and "objektivieren" do belong to the same move within the human being. Such a move can be called "projection", a term quite unusual in Bultmann's writings. One of the reasons for this might be that Bultmann himself does not offer an analysis of the event character of salvation in Jesus Christ, although this event character is a central concern in his theology. Projection as a human activity offers one possible way to inquire how Bultmann's emphasis on the event character of God's revelation can be further developed.

To focus on projection as a human activity might seem at first sight an undue acknowledgement of critiques sometimes addressed to Bultmann – for instance by Karl Barth, and it can be viewed by students of Bultmann's theology as somewhat provocative. Is it not inappropriate to bring Bultmann's theology in such a dangerous proximity to Ludwig Feuerbach, the foremost

representative of projection-theory in modern times, whose concept of God as a projection of Man received conformation later on, particularly in psychology and anthropology?

Reference to projection in Bultmann's writings occurs only as a critique of mythological objectivation which "places supernatural events into the chain of natural events" (Bultmann 1958b, 65) and "projects" God's action onto the level of this-worldly events (Bultmann 1952, 184 & 196), thus achieving the exact opposite of Feuerbach's projection-theory. Should this mean that some hidden affinity between Bultmann's and Feuerbach's anthropology still exists, of which Bultmann was simply unaware and which should be explicitly brought forth? Such an enterprise, I am afraid, cannot be successful. Besides, it would not take into account Bultmann's emphasis on what he then calls "analogical speech" as the only alternative to both mythological and scientific objectivation. There can be no doubt that Bultmann's anthropology has nothing in common with Feuerbach's. Bultmann himself made the point very clearly at least once. In his response to Thomas C. Oden, published in 1965, he says:

However, I cannot concede that I 'anthropologize' the relation between God and man if I say that the moment (the Now) receives the demand of God. The moment is not at all the product of human subjectivity, but an occurrence demanding decision. In the moment one meets the *transcendent* divine demand in the attire of *concrete* obligation. Nor can I concede that the 'anthropological analysis of the process of the reciprocity of the Word in the situation of concrete encounter in the moment' impairs the thought of obedience, since my 'anthropology' is not that of Feuerbach, which recognizes nothing over against man. (Bultmann 1964, 144)

Bultmann's understanding of analogy as the best way to avoid objectifying God and God's action has been carefully analyzed in 1963 by Schubert M. Ogden (see Ogden 1977, 164-187). Ogden is right when in "Theology and Objectivity" (1965) he comes to the conclusion that Bultmann's concept of analogy (see for instance Bultmann 1958b, 68-69) is "too fragmentary and undeveloped to secure Bultmann's intention against misunderstanding and to enable one who shares it to make a carefully reasoned defense of his case" (Ogden 1977, 90-91; see also 161). In fact, Ogden's investigations on that issue make clear that analogy, the way Bultmann understands it, is far from making superfluous an analysis of the event character of salvation in Jesus Christ; rather it requires such an analysis, even when it becomes evident that analogy here has to be understood in the first place as *relational* analogy - "analogia relationis" (Boutin 1974, 338-341). For sure, also this kind of approach cannot claim to come to terms with the proper structure of the salvation event (more on this later # 4.4); and yet, a right understanding of relational analogy helps to work out the existential meaning of it for Christian faith and to oppose some of the misinterpretations of Bultmann's very intention. A reflection on projection as a human activity can be more helpful here,

provided that Feuerbach's projection-theory is seen in all its inadequacy with regard to the question of God and the priority given to relation itself over against its two poles: God and Man.

### 3.2 Feuerbach's Projection-Theory

According to Feuerbach, the Christian God is nothing but an illusion generated by human beings who renounce self-achievement by depriving themselves of their very essence. For him, religion is the disuniting of Man from himself; he sets God before him as the antithesis of himself. Two possible reactions to this theory are the following:

1. A negative reaction undertakes to challenge Feuerbach's standpoint from the assumption that religious consciousness can have, and has indeed, an objective content. This suggestion is made by Werner Schilling in his book on Feuerbach and religion.<sup>13</sup> Schilling contends that Karl Barth's treatment of Feuerbach's issue should be viewed either in terms of a blurring dodge or as relying on inadequate and unscientific premises. Yet Schilling shares a non-problematical understanding of projection and takes for granted what it is.

2. In his inaugural lecture given at the University of Erlangen in 1970 on "Faith as Projection: A discussion of Feuerbach", Hans-Markus Barth<sup>14</sup> pledges for a positive, more constructive and creative approach to Feuerbach by giving priority to what he calls a phenomenological approach, over those focusing on the Bible. Phenomenology, as he understands it, can elaborate a critique of Feuerbach's standpoint while doing full justice to him. According to H.-M. Barth, a great deal of well argued observations on faith are, indeed, to be found in Feuerbach and should be acknowledged by phenomenology as à propos. Feuerbach's projection-theory, however, brings faith back again within the field of immanence from which Feuerbach does try to dismiss it. H.-M. Barth offers a brief characterization of three main objections Christian theology raises against Feuerbach: 1. the reduction of theology to anthropology - this very common critique overlooks that Feuerbach sees such a reduction not as being his own task, for it had begun long before, as he himself says right at the beginning of his *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future* (1843); 2. the unconditional surrender to mere immanence; 3. the radical impossibility for the requirements of projection-theory to ever constitute an adequate basis for faith. Considering what these objections can really bear, H.-M. Barth comes to the conclusion that all this cannot allow Christian theology to remain allergic to Feuerbach's projection-theory any longer. The way is then free for exploring to what extent the understanding of faith as projection helps articulate Christian faith today, and why it calls for a new shaping of the traditional understanding of *Deus absconditus* (the Hidden God) in Christian theology.

13 *Feuerbach und Religion*. Munich: Evangelischer Pressebund für Bayern, 1957.

14 "Glaube als Projektion: Zur Auseinandersetzung mit Ludwig Feuerbach". Published in *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie* vol. 12 (1970) 363-382.

A distinction H.-M. Barth regards as major within a pure phenomenological analysis of projection process proves useful for his purpose: the distinction between reality as it *is* and as it is *perceived* from the valuing process to which reality is, in fact, always submitted precisely through what H.-M. Barth calls "projection". This distinction, he finds, offers the best guarantee for achieving the necessary task of dissociating projection from illusion or fiction: whereas illusion or fiction misses the point with regard to what reality is, projection takes reality as it is and evaluates it in such a way as to open it to transformations.

Feuerbach understands God in a way similar to classical projection-theory: as an illusion brought forth by the feeling that human desires and human needs are not fulfilled by immanent and finite reality. Still, this is not enough to make his understanding of projection simply identical with this theory. Projection is for Feuerbach the process by which conscious human "species" (German: "Gattung") objectifies its very essence by setting it apart from itself and regarding it as non-human, as God. Consequently, projection is not just illusion; it is also – and even more – objectivation of human essence. Therefore, Hermann Dembowski suggests, one should investigate Feuerbach's concept of objectivation rather than overemphasize his so-called projection-theory.<sup>15</sup>

This is precisely not what H.-M. Barth does, and besides, the justification for his decision to proceed in the opposite way is certainly questionable. He leaves out the analysis of Feuerbach's concept of objectivation, he says, because his study tries to bring out projection as basic structure of religious life, and also because Feuerbach cannot and does not want to deny the necessity of projection itself for expressing human transcending process, although Feuerbach would characterize religious faith as an objectivation process.

A thorough analysis of the objectivation process, as Feuerbach understands it, has to focus on the particular kind of logic involved in the predication process in which, as Feuerbach sees quite clearly, the entangled opposition between God and Man is at best brought forth. Feuerbach is convinced that God's attributes address the wrong subject and should be referred back to their producer: Man as a human subject. In so doing, Feuerbach is, however, locked up within the same perspective as the one acknowledged by religious Man as a human subject. In both cases projection cannot come to the fore. It is either nothing else than objectivation (Feuerbach), or it is simply ignored (by the religious subject) – but nonetheless all present as objectivation. In his radical critique of the Christian God Feuerbach does but reinforce

15 H. Dembowski, *Grundfragen der Christologie. Erörtert am Problem der Herrschaft Jesu Christi* [series "Beiträge zur evangelischen Theologie" 51]. Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1971, 358 p.; p. 119. – Basic Questions of Christology: Discussed with reference to the Problem of the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

the process by which Man becomes a subject in modern times – a process, Hans-Georg Gadamer recalls, in which we are still “caught up”.<sup>16</sup>

Between God and Man there must be an opposition as long as the God-Man relationship depends upon one of its pole: either God, or Man. Such an exclusive alternative is in no way put into question by Feuerbach’s projection-theory. Rather, it can but receive confirmation and support from it. The reason why Feuerbach’s critique of the Christian God is *obviously* so radical, is that it remains caught up within the *same logic* and does not challenge that logic in any way; it rather confirms it.

Should we then refrain from considering projection as illusion and get to a more positive approach to it simply in order to minimize the objectifying aspect of it? Or is it so, on the contrary, that projection and objectivation would be just different words for one and the same thing, so that the search for the so-called objective content of religious consciousness would be tantamount to any analysis of projection as basic structure of this consciousness? Should we get ourselves free from the confusion between projection and illusion arising from a positivistic worldview, and fall into the confusion between projection and objectivation?

This was certainly not the goal Christian theology tried to achieve in the mid-sixties, when it was explicitly concerned for a while with “The Problem of Nonobjectifying Thinking and Speaking in Contemporary Theology” as the theme of the Second Consultation on Hermeneutics convened by the Graduate School of Drew University, Madison, New Jersey, April 9-11, 1964 (See Ogden 1977, 71-98). It was roughly the time when the so-called Death of God Theology became strongly publicized and much discussed, and the so-called structuralism began to attract attention. To my knowledge, no accurate study has been done sofar on the possible link between these three trends, and there has been until now no thorough critique of some hasty reactions that superficially linked the latter two in order to turn down both of them in one sweep by saying: from God’s death to Man’s death there is but a short step, which shows how unacceptable the proclamation of the death of God is. This kind of reaction is still somewhat popular, but nonetheless questionable because it maintains the confusion between Man and human subject that characterizes modernity. This reaction does express, indeed, the kind of genuine belief modernity can afford. But this is precisely what Christian theology has to question instead of putting up a rear-guard battle in which, sadly enough, God is by-passed – in the name of God.

This issue can be best dealt with by considering a set of relations which is rather implicit in Bultmann’s theology. It requires therefore special atten-

16 “Verstrickt”. H.-G. Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*. Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1965 [2<sup>nd</sup> ed.], p. 436. – For Bultmann, see above # 3,1 (response to Oden) and also Bultmann 1958b, 70-73.



tion. In particular the formal aspect at the center of the set of relations to be considered here is puzzling. It may be called "Gleichursprünglichkeit" – which may be described as equiprimordiality at the root of human being.

### 3.3 Equiprimordiality and Correlation

According to Bultmann, the very being of a human being is built up of four basic relations: *In-Sein* or Being in... the world, *Mit-* and *Für-Sein* or Being-with and –for... others, *Aus-Sein-auf* or Being-out-toward... God (this relation is most relevant for the concept of human existence according to Bultmann), and *Sein-zu* or Being-to...oneself. The correlates of this four-dimensional set of relations are: world, others, God, and the self. They cannot be deduced from one another, and of course they cannot be isolated from one another or even opposed to one another. These four relations simultaneously constitute human being, and the understanding of their correlates is given by the very fact of being human. We may even have a concept of each of these correlates. However, on account of their being involved in the basic four-dimensional set of relations making up human being, the reality referred to by each of these concepts is not an object; rather it has event character.

Take for instance the correlate "world". The reason why Martin Heidegger did spell out the – even in German – quite unusual and indeed strange statement: "Die Welt weltet", building up a verb out of the substantive "world", is not alien to the state of affairs to be considered here. As to the fact that the reality referred to by the concepts pertaining to these correlates is not an object, one may recall the following reflection by Gordon D. Kaufman again with regard to the correlate "world":

*World* is never an object of perception or of experience; it can never 'come into view' or be in any way directly experienced. It is, rather, the backdrop against which or context within which we have all our experience and within which we know ourselves to be situated.

If we treat the concept of world as fundamentally like other concepts which refer to or represent objects (identifiable in experience), we get into insoluble antinomies. [...] 'world' is a concept for which no object (in that sense) exists (at any one time) at all. The notion of world is a construct created by the human imagination as a heuristic device to make possible the ordering and relating of all our other concepts of objects and events. It is thus indispensable to our thinking and even to the orderliness of our experience – and in every culture we find some sort of (often mythical) notions of this widest context within which human life transpires – but it is itself not an object of experience; it is a fundamental presupposition of experience. (Kaufman 1972, 343-44)

If not only world, but also the three other correlates of the four-dimensional set of relations considered here, give rise to concepts without objects, this may be crucial for the significance of otherness as well. Otherness would then mean not so much the ability of reality to stay beyond conceptuality and

language, and thus escape human enterprise of mastering it; it would rather mean that concepts and their objects can only be constructed with reference to the basic set of relations presupposed in human experience itself, although their correlates cannot be experienced otherwise than as events.

This would make impossible a subjectivistic understanding of the transcendental approach, and of its fundamental axiom in particular. This axiom might be stated as follows: the structure of the knowing being, as a human being, is the structure of the known object. In this respect one could also reconsider for instance the necessity of the concept of world for the concept of God. If concepts referring to God cannot reach God, it is not because God can be given some particular attribute impeding such an operation, or because the latter might give rise to attributes of God expressing this state of affairs; it is because even the concept of God cannot be constructed apart from – and still less in opposition to – the concept of world, among other concepts whose epistemological status still awaits closer examination in this respect – a task which cannot be pursued here.

### 3.4 To Speak of God Means to Speak of Man

Otherness opens up a perspective that is not content with the object language, i.e., a language speaking *about* the world, nor with metalanguage, i.e., a language speaking *about* language. One of the reasons for this may be found in the fact that otherness refers to a *summons* (German: “Anrede”) the relevance of which Bultmann did strongly emphasize over against factual report (German: “Tatsachenbericht”). The mode of thinking to be found in Bultmann’s theological work relies not so much on the fact that language is viewed as a particular sign or set of sign vehicles, but rather on the fact that faith has the same structure as sign: a sign is a sign *of* something/someone *for* someone. Hence the peculiarity of the subject matter of Christian theology.

Christian theology has not one, and of course not two, but rather a twofold subject matter: not only God as revealed in Jesus Christ, but also and at the same time language. What does the ‘-logy’ implied in “theology” really mean?

This issue is for sure not a new one; it has been discussed very often and in many different ways. The correlation of faith and revelation might be considered also as accounting for the twofold subject matter of Christian theology. And still the question remains: how is it possible to account for the fact that according to Bultmann faith and revelation cannot be considered apart from one another?

A possible reaction to that question might be to discuss actual instances that are very well known for they gave rise to lively debates. Most of the time, these debates do end without bringing any satisfactory conclusion and are, for that reason, still relevant.

While addressing the chosen instances specifically, one should keep in mind the following reflection made by the American philosopher and linguist Charles W. Morris concerning the threefold set of relations of signs: to one another (syntactics), to what they refer to (semantics), to their interpreters or users (pragmatics). Here, pragmatics relies not just on some kind of spontaneous understanding as opposed to theoretical reflection, and it is not the equivalent of Jeremy Bentham's utilitarianism. For Morris, pragmatics as "the science of the relation of signs to their interpreters" or "users" (Morris 1971, 43 & 46) "must then be distinguished from 'pragmatism', and 'pragmatical' from 'pragmatic'" (Morris 1971, 43).

With regard to syntactics, Morris says that syntactics "is not interested in the individual properties of the sign vehicles or in any of their relations except syntactical ones, i.e., relations determined by syntactical rules" (Morris 1971, 29) concerning the relations of signs to one another as set up for instance by grammar. About the relationship between semantics and pragmatics Morris has the following two reflections: first, "Semantics presupposes syntactics but abstracts from pragmatics; whether dealing with simple signs or complex ones (such as a whole mathematical system), semantics limits itself to the semantical dimension of semiosis" (p. 36) understood as "the process in which something functions as a sign" (p. 19); and second, "If pragmatical factors have appeared frequently in pages belonging to semantics, it is because the current recognition that syntactics must be supplemented by semantics has not been so commonly extended to the recognition that semantics must in turn be supplemented by pragmatics" (p. 41). Finally the following observation by Morris might illustrate the fact that Bultmann was not really aware that his theological argumentation was indeed not a semantical one only, but also and foremost a pragmatical one: "Rules for the use of sign vehicles are not ordinarily formulated by users of a language, or are only partially formulated; they exist rather as habits of behavior [...]" (Morris 1971, 37)

The statement "To speak of God means to speak of Man" has been widely known and much discussed so far. Although rather puzzling for the leader of the – in 1924 – "latest theological movement" known as "dialectical theology" (Bultmann 1969, 28-52), Karl Barth, who never praised very highly – to say the least! – that statement, it has been coined by Barth himself in February 25, 1925 (see above # 1) in order to characterize Bultmann's position. And yet, that statement may refer to Bultmann's own personal way of understanding what the emphasis on dialectic might mean for theology itself. Expressed in 1925, it shows also that Bultmann was on the way to pragmatics early on in his theological development and not – as it has been said mainly with regard to the article of 1925 under consideration here, and then repeated again and again at least until the end of the 1960's – that "Already in 1925, Bultmann was on the way to reduce theology to anthropology" (Smart 1967, 136). Another point is important to mention: Bultmann's discussion of that statement

in 1925 explicitly refers to the theme of otherness and thus reminds us of its relevance for the 'pragmatical turn' in the theological enterprise, a question debated at the Annual General Assembly of the international journal *Concilium* held in Tübingen (Germany) in June 1983.

In his article *What Does it Mean to Speak of God?* (Bultmann 1969, 53-65) Bultmann is making a sharp distinction that was at that time rather unusual in theology and is somewhat surprising for many interpreters who could not – and still cannot – see clearly what difference it makes to speak *about* something/someone or to speak *of* something/someone.<sup>17</sup> “To speak about” entails a strong semantical side: while taking account of the thing or being referred to, there is no need to take the user or the interpreter under consideration. The latter may be made abstraction of without disturbing in any way the whole process. “To speak of”, however, is something different: to take account of the thing or being referred to implies also – often rather implicitly, but at times quite explicitly – to take account of the user or the interpreter as well, which is in fact the case in a pragmatical approach.

When Bultmann writes: “[...] if a man will to speak of God, he must evidently *speak of himself*” (Bultmann 1969, 55), “it by no means follows that God is not outside the believer. This would be the case only if faith is interpreted as a purely psychological event” (Bultmann 1958b, 70-71). And it means in no way that God is not, cannot, and therefore should not be referred to within religious language at all. Bultmann is not fighting against the semantical dimension of religious language, for he, too, is convinced that to speak or to know refers not just to one’s own speaking or knowing, but also and always to something or someone. And yet, neither God nor the human being can be isolated from, or even opposed to one another in such a way that only a univocal language would be allowed here.

Even if I do not take myself as the subject matter of my discourse, but something or someone else – God for instance – I am still speaking *of* myself. This does not have to mean that I am putting myself in the place of God and thus violating the severe rule spelled out by the patron saint for existentialists, Qohelet: “God is in heaven and you upon earth; therefore, let your words be few” (Qoh 5:1). For this rule is true expression of the semantical dimension of language, a dimension spontaneously emphasized in ordinary language and daily life. As it happens very often, God’s radical otherness is then taken to mean in fact otherworldliness<sup>18</sup> *about* which it is of course possible to speak.

17 Bultmann opposed “to speak *about*” and “to speak *with*” in his letter of December 31, 1922 to Karl Barth; mingling the two should be considered – he said – at least a matter of “bad taste” (Jaspert 1981, 4). Instead, from 1925 on Bultmann constantly opposes “to speak *about*” and “to speak *of*”.

18 Bultmann 1958b, 19-20, and Bultmann 1969, 152-3 quoted above in # 2.4.

The debate on the statement "To speak of God means to speak of Man" – coined by Karl Barth – clearly indicates how much in contemporary theology the semantical point of view lacks supplementation by the pragmatological approach. With regard to the central relevance of the issue raised by this statement, one could say – paraphrasing the title of Smart's book: the mind of modern theology is and will remain "seriously divided" (Smart 1967, 8) as long as it is content with a semantical approach which makes abstraction of the pragmatological treatment of a good number of theological issues.

The three sets of relations referring respectively to the correlation of faith and revelation, to the question of correlation and equiprimordiality, and to the sign-structure of language – particularly to the pragmatological dimension of still actual issues – cannot be deduced from one another for they each time involve a different organization of the same basic elements. These differences and variations may be best observed by paying attention to the topic of otherness each time present.

#### 4. Understanding God and God's Action

With regard to the event character of salvation in Jesus Christ projection as a human activity has the constant possibility of becoming either objectifying or nonobjectifying. The difference here depends on the relation between human projection and God's action as an *event*. Nonobjectifying projection alone corresponds to the relation in which the event character of God's action can be acknowledged as such – Bultmann would say: in which God's action is seen as it is, namely, as taking place not between other events, and therefore apart from them and yet on the same level, but in them, in a real, though paradoxical identity, which Christian faith alone can see.

Here, the following words of Edmond Jabès, a French poet born in Egypt in 1912 and who lived in Paris from 1957 up until his death in 1991, can provide us with some indications on how to introduce the question of nonobjectifying projection, and on the shift the traditional difference, or distance, between God and Man should undergo:

"Whether God exists or not, this is not the question, reb Yasri confessed, to the indignation of the audience.

"If I believe that God exists, this does not prove His existence.

"Not to believe it is no proof at all that He does not exist.

"If it was possible for us to imagine God, it is because we are able to conceive Him and to bury ourselves in our invention.

“God remains beyond, strengthened in His mystery and protected by His secret”.

And he added: “Mystery and secret are but the giddy distance from a tolerated word to an unacceptable vocable”.<sup>19</sup>

Often in his poetry Jabès has recourse to fictitious rabbis. The latter might be wise or stupid, Jabès admits, and yet their questions and their sayings help him break down the walls set up across his way. Reb Yasri is one of these rabbis. He speaks only once in *The Unfading The Unnoticed*, the third part of the series entitled *The Book of Resemblances*. Jabès began to publish this series in 1976, after the seven parts forming the series published between 1963 and 1975 under the title *The Book of Questions*.

Reb Yasri's saying has three parts. It begins by referring to God's existence – “an Deus sit” (“whether God is”), medieval theology would say – and two possible answers to it: belief and unbelief. It then speaks of the possibility for Man to imagine God. The conclusion of the saying reminds of the giddy distance from a tolerated word to an unacceptable vocable. The last two parts of the saying point out basic elements for the understanding of nonobjectifying projection and they deserve special attention. The opening part, however, calls for a comment because there, reb Yasri rejects a way to introduce the question of God which is both traditional and spontaneous, and still common today.

#### 4.1 An Deus sit

Obviously, Jabès disregards the kind of business that goes on sometimes in contemporary discussions on God and of which Christian Chabanis might be a good illustration. In six years Chabanis authored two major books of interviews. The title of the first, published in 1973, is *Does God Exist? No*. In 1979 the second book was titled *Does God Exist? Yes*. In the foreword to the second book Chabanis acknowledges the situation. Not only has he carefully

19 E. Jabès, *Le Livre des Ressemblances*, III: *L'ineffaçable L'inaperçu*. Paris : Gallimard, 1980, 116 p. ; p. 31; my translation.

«Que Dieu existe ou pas, là n'est pas la question – avouait reb Yasri, au scandale de son auditoire.

«Si je crois que Dieu existe, cela ne prouve pas Son existence.

«De ne pas y croire, ne prouve nullement qu'Il n'existe point.

Si nous avons pu imaginer Dieuu, c'est que nous sommes capables de le concevoir et de nous abîmer dans notre invention.

«Dieu reste au-delà, renforcé dans Son mystère et protégé par Son secret.»

Et il ajoutait: «Mystère et secret ne sont que distance vertigineuse d'un mot toléré à un vocable inacceptable.»



picked up the new fashion which sprang up in the meantime and is labeled the (many-faced) comeback of Religion, of the Sacred, of God, etc.; but also – and this is more important to notice – he sees no contradiction in saying, on the one hand, that his two books prove that the question raised had lost nothing of its provocative power, and on the other hand, that it is not the question that puzzles the answer, but the answer that puzzles the question. Under such circumstances one might be rather sympathetic to reb Yasri when he denies that “an Deus sit” is “the question”.

Methodologically, however, “an Deus sit” seems to prevail over the question: what is God? (“quid Deus sit”), as to which one comes first. In fact, to investigate on what something is before considering if and that it exists, does not seem the correct way to proceed. Therefore, Thomas Aquinas examines “an Deus sit” right at the beginning of his *Summa Theologiae*, following the question dealing with various aspects of theology proper.

There is a more important reason why “an Deus sit” can be regarded as one of the first questions to be asked within Christian theology. According to Aquinas the question “an Deus sit” does not belong to the articles of faith (“articula fidei”), but to the “praeambula fidei” – the preambles of faith. It seems then compelling to deal with it first, although the outcome of the whole enterprise is already decided within the realm of faith itself. This, however, implies by no means that faith could ever be rid of the question – were it only because faithful Christians might come in touch with unbelievers as well. But it means that faith has the possibility, as Martin Heidegger recalls at the beginning of his *Introduction to Metaphysics*, to relate to the question in a mere rhetorical way, *as though* it were a real issue.

Yet the whole situation is even more complex, methodologically speaking. For Aquinas holds firmly that Man cannot know what God is (“quid Deus sit”). There is, consequently, no adequate definition of God available. How is it possible, then, to know whether God does exist or not? Here, Aquinas has recourse to the current cause-effect relationship. If no definition of a cause is at hand, the way to proceed, he says, consists of using the effect in lieu of the missing definition of the cause.<sup>20</sup> And this, he adds, pertains to God all the most. Thus, the cause-effect relationship turns out to be necessary to deal with the question “an Deus sit”, and it proves fruitful as well in this respect.

According to Aquinas, to proceed the way just mentioned is in no way peculiar to theology alone. In some philosophical sciences as well, he says, in order to demonstrate aspects pertaining to a cause through the effect of it,

20 “[...] necesse ist uti effectu loco definitionis causae” (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, part 1, question 2, article 2, ad secundum; see also L. Feuerbach, *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future*, 1843, # 7. René Descartes suggests “to anticipate causes by means of effects” – “venir au devant des causes par les effets” (*Discours de la méthode*, 1637, part 6, paragraph 3).

one takes the effect in lieu of a definition of the cause.<sup>21</sup> In so doing, Aquinas does not pay enough attention to the following point the relevance of which becomes more and more crucial in modern times. Obviously, Aquinas' historical situation did not urge him to consider it carefully. This particular point can be put as follows. In order to specify the cause, two things are required: first, of course, the very existence of something, then – and particularly – its being effected by a cause. The question implies therefore that one does not know *what* the cause is, but at the same time it implies that one knows – from the existence of something *as* an effect – *that* there is a cause. In other words, the difficulty does not arise from the application of the cause-effect relationship to the question “an Deus sit”. The difficulty is properly to make the step, as it were, *from* the bare existing of things and beings *to* the latter *as* effected by a cause that be suitable to God.

Nowadays, this step has become anything else but easy (see Boutin 1974, 219-230). For instance, it is not at all self-evident anymore that the sky is caused by God and hence can be seen as an effect “that tells of the glory of God” (Psalm 19, 2). This situation might well result from the objectifying thinking and speaking in science and technology, as Gerhard Krüger once pointed out.<sup>22</sup> And yet, would this be enough to conclude that objectivation does only bar the way to the application of the cause-effect relationship Aquinas, and others after him until now, have in mind when they give priority to the question “an Deus sit”? Should it be simply taken for granted that objectivation never takes place when the cause-effect relationship is called upon for the question “an Deus sit”?

These two questions cannot be raised while priority is given to the question “an Deus sit”. They call for a different approach to the question of God, for instance the one suggested by reb Yasri in the second part of his saying.

#### 4.2 The Possibility for Man to Imagine God

Here, reb Yasri does not simply give a positive answer to the question whether Man is able to imagine God. He does not take a stand on the dilemma known in Christian theology under the formula *the finite capable/incapable of the infinite* (*finitum capax/non capax infiniti*) (later on this # 4.3). He refers to this possibility in order to point out two conditions for it: the ability for Man to conceive God, and the ability for Man to bury himself in his own invention.

According to reb Yasri the ability to conceive God belongs to Man. It is not given, theologians would say - for instance Karl Rahner and Rudolf Bultmann (Boutin 1974, 147-166), by God's revelation – for instance in Jesus

21 *Summa Theologiae*, part 1, question 1, article 7, ad primum.

22 G. Krüger, “Christlicher Glaube und existentielles Denken” (1949), reprinted in G. Krüger, *Freiheit und Weltverwaltung. Aufsätze zur Philosophie der Geschichte*. Freiburg & Munich: 1958, p. 190. – Christian Faith and Existential Thinking.

Christ. It can be, of course, more or less reflective. From a given perspective it can be seen as accurate or not. It can be even denied. In any case, the ability for Man to conceive God does not depend upon the decision of a subject, either human or divine.

Reb Yasri does not speak of the *concept* of God. He has in mind a human activity: the *conceiving* of God. Whether and how the ability to conceive God does give rise to a concept of God, whether this does entail a definition of God or not, whether it would be then necessary to distinguish, thus following Kant, between the concept of God and the "Anschauung" of God – that is: between conceptual and "visual" representation of God – all these issues, as relevant as they might be, would stand aloof from the issue at stake here, namely, the interaction of two abilities: to conceive God, and to bury oneself in one's own invention.

From this, however, reb Yasri infers that God remains beyond, strengthened in His mystery and protected by His secret. Yet he does not declare that this kind of approach to the question of God is unsatisfying or even irrelevant, as he did for *an Deus sit* by saying that this is not the question. Considering the result of it, though, the possibility to imagine God does not reach its goal. God can be imagined, but He does remain beyond this human activity. This does not come from the mere fact that God is conceived. The negative result lays upon the activity of "burying oneself in", which does not alter the very activity of conceiving God.

The conceiving of God is mentioned first; not because it takes place before the "burying oneself in", but because the positing of the latter would not make sense otherwise. Reb Yasri does not say that the activity of conceiving God depends upon, is a function of, leads to, the other activity, or is the cause of it. Of course, the connection between the two activities could be understood in these different ways, namely, as a cause-effect relationship or as the inversion of it: the relationship of finality, or as a temporal relationship in terms of before and after. All this, however, would not help to situate what is now to be looked at.

Reb Yasri does not speak of the ability to bury oneself in one's own *conceiving* of God, but in one's own *invention*. This means that the conceiving of God is taken by the "burying oneself in" not as the activity it is, but as different and even separate from this activity of its own; it is taken as a *product*. What makes this distinction or even separation occur is the "burying oneself in" itself. The activity of conceiving God is not just replaced or refrained by the other activity. It is turned over by the very occurring of the "burying oneself in", which makes God remain beyond, distant from Man. Here, the distance between God and Man does neither correspond to, nor it is a special case of, the ontological-logical difference between the infinite and the finite, the absolute and the relative being. It is not justified by appealing either to an

ontological limitation of Man, or to a quality of God's being, so that it would be almost a definition of God to say that God eludes human reach of whatever kind. The distance between God and Man occurs because the activity of "burying oneself in", and it stands in contrast with the giddy distance reb Yasri speaks of in the third part of his saying.

### 4.3 The Giddy Distance

The first two parts of reb Yasri's saying focused on different approaches to the question of God. The last part does not offer a third one. It is an addition, a sort of appendix, as though the mere naming of God's mystery and secret at the end of the second part were calling for – not exactly an explanation, but some amplification.

"Mystery" and "secret", particularly when God is referred to, have indeed to be heard radically instead of the way often used in theology. Hence the critical remark Karl Rahner made in a series of three lectures delivered at an International Symposium of Theologians at Montreal, August 18-22, 1969. In the third lecture Rahner urged Christian theology "to avoid the danger of invoking mysteries in those areas in which all that is really needed is a more penetrating consideration, or perhaps even the 'de-mystification' in some respect of a given proposition of theology" (Rahner 1974, 107). Ogden takes a similar stand when he says that "Christian faith has no stake in unnecessary logical confusion, even when such confusion is piously called mystery, and that, so far from being the denial of this faith, a deep conviction as to the essential significance of temporality is in reality one of its chief fruits." (Ogden 1977, 161)

Reb Yasri does not explain the meaning of the words "mystery" and "secret", nor does he give a definition of them. What he says, however, is more than a definition, provided the language is not instrumentalized and reduced to a mere tool for communication. Heidegger often warns against such a reduction, particularly in his instructions for the consultation on hermeneutics in 1964 (see above # 3.2), to which he was apparently invited. Linguists like Émile Benveniste and the French literary critic Roland Barthes are also against a onesided understanding and practice of language. Instead of a definition reb Yasri situates what mystery and secret refer to, as far as language – and with it the question of God – is concerned: the giddy distance from a tolerated word to an unacceptable vocable. Here, the distance is characterized simultaneously by "from ... to" and by "giddy".

"From ... to" is commonly used for getting information on the distance between two places. Knowing it can be either necessary – say, for the preparation of a journey, or simply a matter of curiosity. In both cases the given information answers the question: how far? This question, though, is not the question to which the distance reb Yasri has in mind gives rise to, for it is

neither big nor small, it is giddy. This giddiness cuts off the ordinary use of "from ... to" and it renders the whole statement rather poor in terms of mere information.

Obviously, both characteristics of the distance reb Yasri speaks of do not cumulate and they cannot be added up. Be it as it may, the distance of God's mystery and secret is not meant here to decide whether God stands far from Man – for instance in heaven as opposed to earth (according to Qoheleth's statement: "God is in heaven and you upon earth; therefore, let your words be few" - Qoh 5,1) – or next to Man. The issue of "God the remote and the near" was given, we may recall, thorough consideration in the so-called dialectical theology of the 1920's. Bultmann for instance dedicates nearly one third of his book on Jesus to the analysis of aspects pertaining to that issue, particularly God's presence and the future God, and God's grace and Man's sin (Bultmann 1958a, 133-219). Bultmann comes to the conclusion that the issue does not entail an exclusive alternative. Rather, each dimension of it stands in tension with the other, and both build up - at least for Jesus and for Christian faith - a paradoxical identity. This, however, is not what reb Yasri means by giddy distance.

The giddy distance means *to move* ("from ... to"). It is not just the space between two terms standing together in relationship by the very fact that they would shape up this relation by themselves, so that the discovery of what each of them is could provide a full understanding of their relationship as such. Consequently, the issue here is not to construct a definition of the expressions "tolerated word" and "unacceptable vocable" while looking after explicit or at least implicit references to these expressions in the whole of Jabès' poetry. For sure, an exercise of this kind would yield interesting information. For instance, the word "vocable" often used by Jabès sounds strange not only in English but also in French because it is rarely used since Mallarmé, except in linguistics, as Jabès himself points out. (Jabès 1990, 46)

Still more important yet is the fact that use of this word by Jabès – and of other words that share with "vocable" the misfortune of being pushed into the background – belongs, Jabès says, to a kind of strategy of his own aiming at rescuing these words from oblivion. These words appear therefore almost like neologisms in his poetry. As intrusions of the past upon the present, they contribute to the creation of modernity according to Jabès, since modernity, he contends, "cannot be revealed without reference to an anterior modernity". (Jabès 1990, 46)

Even though this kind of information might help understand what "unacceptable vocable" means, and even though the same could be expected for the expressions "tolerated word" and "giddy distance", these expressions would continue to intrigue and their meaning would not become necessarily clear. One may then strive for additional information by choosing, in Jabès'

own life, biographical data suitable for this purpose. After all, is he not, as author, at least the last recourse, if not even more? Does he not speak of himself somehow in his poetry? Is he not present to the reader of his poems? The whole enterprise, however, would imply that the work of an author, being an expression of him, should be related to the author as to a kind of “archê” with the result that the work itself becomes then casual for the interpreter and might be, in fact, disregarded by him.

The giddy distance reb Yasri has in mind is not shaped by the terms in relationship, namely, “tolerated word” and “unacceptable vocable”. As a relation, the giddy distance makes rather the terms occur, and it gives also significance to them. This state of affairs, largely present in Heidegger’s thought, is being given closer attention and is sometimes called “logic of relation”. Pierre-Jean Labarrière’s excellent study on otherness offers a good example of a logic based on the priority given to relation. This particular kind of logic that gives priority to relation as such over against the poles of a relationship might well be worth considering in the search for what is sometimes called since the eighties “a new paradigm for theology”, a theme discussed at the Annual General Assembly of the international journal *Concilium* held in Tübingen, in June 1983. (referred to above # 3.4)

The giddy distance of God’s mystery and secret neutralizes the distance indicated by “God remains beyond ...” and also by the “burying oneself in” mentioned in part two of reb Yasri’s saying. As mentioned already, the “burying oneself in” makes out of the conceiving of God a product; it objectifies the projection by taking the conceiving of God as the *result* of a human activity. In so doing, the “burying oneself in” builds up the very constitutive moment of Man *as a subject*. A human activity, the conceiving of God ceases then to be viewed as the projection it is, and the way is then free to make out of the conceiving of God something to be had, something at one’s own disposal, Bultmann would say. The denying that “God remains beyond ...” may then find expression through the assurance that God is in us. Here, however, the question remains whether this kind of assurance, often insisted upon again in recent years, really overcomes the ability for Man to bury himself in his own invention. Of course, this cannot be achieved on the basis which makes Man a human subject, namely, the quest, typical of modern times, for a firm stand called by Descartes a “fundamentum inconcussum” capable of giving beings and things – including God – a status of realness.

Reb Yasri is, indeed, right : the distance of God’s mystery and secret is giddy. Or, as Bultmann would say, Man stands before God with “empty hands” (Bultmann 1958b 84), in a sort of “vacuum”<sup>23</sup> – precisely that empty place which is the event character of God’s action in Jesus Christ.



Thus faith is a 'leap in the dark' because man would find security by looking at himself and yet must precisely let himself go in order to see the object of faith; and just this is a 'leap in the dark' for the natural man. But this does not mean any blind risk, any game of chance, any mere random groping, but rather a knowing venture. For man is not asked whether he will accept a theory about God that may possibly be false, but whether he is willing to obey God's will. (Bultmann 1960, 57)

The quest for a "fundamentum inconcussum" is rather puzzled, and even discouraged, by Jabès' poetry. The spontaneous reaction would be to recall that Jabès, alas only a poet, cultivates allusiveness and vagueness like every poet allegedly does. Yet Jabès has perhaps a fairly good understanding of a proposal made by Karl Rahner in his third lecture of 1969 already referred to: the proposal to consider that every theological statement is what it truly and authentically is *only when it glides into the silent mystery of God*, i.e. "at that point at which man willingly suffers it to extend beyond his comprehension into the silent mystery of God". (Rahner 1974, 103)

#### 4.4 The Daß-Was Relationship

God and Man are not the poles of a relationship between two subjects, or else they can but enter into an entangled opposition. In the God-Man relation projection and nonobjectivation belong together. Yet they do not build up a unity, be it of the paradoxical type. They are cause and effect for one another and at the same time, which means that the cause-effect relationship is not involved in this process. Because nonobjectivation does not depend upon Man's free choice, it does not simply qualify projection otherwise than objectivation does. It is rather the ever inchoative process in which Man overcomes both himself as a subject and his understanding of God as a subject.

Here, the starting point for reflection is not the traditional one in theology and in metaphysics. It does not consist in assuming, as Thomas Aquinas does, that the first thing one has to know about something is whether it is ("an sit"), whereas the question about what it is ("quid sit") would come after. The decisive question refers rather to the relationship between the *quod* and the *quid*, as medieval theology and philosophy would say – that is: the very fact *that* something is, and *what* it is, or in German: the *Daß* and the *Was*.

The Daß-Was relationship is central in Bultmann's theology; it pertains not only to Christian faith, but to God's revelation as well. The way this relationship is understood, and particularly how these two relationships relate to one another, is most decisive for the understanding of God's action as an event. For this "relation of relations", as it were, can be considered as the very structure of God's action as an event. The significance of it is expressed by Bultmann in a remarkably constant way throughout his writings, although Bultmann was perhaps not fully aware of the "relation of relations" as such. The following diagram might provide a fair presentation of Bultmann's own view:

	- Was ("content")	
<b>Revelation</b>	-----	paradoxical identity
	- Daß ("event")	
	- Was ("content", <i>fides quae</i> )	
<b>Faith</b>	-----	paradoxical identity
	- Daß ("event", <i>fides qua</i> )	

The very "content" (Was) of Christian faith is an event: God's revelation (Daß) in Jesus Christ. The "content" (Was) of God's revelation in Jesus Christ stays in close relationship to Christian faith as an event (Daß) because of the real, though paradoxical identity of the Was and the Daß of God's revelation, and of the Was and the Daß of Christian faith itself. God comes to Man in Jesus Christ, which Christian faith alone can "see" (Bultmann 1958b, 72); and no one comes to faith unless one is attracted by God who reveals Himself in Jesus Christ as the salvation event.

Nonobjectifying projection is not the projection of the very essence of Man, as one should say from Feuerbach's perspective; it is the projection of what Man as a subject is *not* and yet, is called to be: human. Nonobjectifying projection, although it is no activity of a human *subject*, is neither alien to Man, nor is it opposed to God. It brings Man further than what the human subject strives to achieve, namely, to secure himself and to have others – and himself – at his own disposal ("verfügen"). Nonobjectifying projection prevents the conceiving of God from becoming Man's product and mere invention, and from being considered apart from God's action as an event. Without the latter, there remains nothing else than either to deny Man's ability to conceive God, or to bury oneself in one's own invention, whether it is a God who must oppose Man in order to be God, or whether it is Man who must – as the human subject he wants to be – either oppose God or reduce God to what he, as a human subject, thinks *about* God.

The consequences of both God's action as an event and nonobjectifying projection are expressed by Bultmann in the following words quoted from his sermon for Pentecost, 1917:

If we want to see God, then the first thing we should say to ourselves is that we may not see him as we have conceived him. We must remind ourselves that he may appear to be wholly other than the picture we have made of him; and we must be prepared to accept his visage even if it terrifies us. Can we not see him in the present? Has our old picture of him fallen to pieces? If so, then we must first of all be grateful that we have lost our false conception; for the only way we can see him is as he actually is. (Bultmann 1960, 26-27)

## Conclusion

Time and again Bultmann insists on the necessity for Christian theology to reflect on its own "conceptuality",<sup>24</sup> since the interpretation of New Testament Christology "shows how the first proclaimers solved the problem with which the church is faced afresh in every age, the problem of framing a Christology which meets the requirement: *hoc est Christum cognoscere, beneficia eius cognoscere* [to know Christ is to know the benefits he confers](Bultmann 1969, 285). Yet for Bultmann, such a reflection is meaningful only when it pertains first of all to "the thing itself",<sup>25</sup> for he never questioned the fact that faith does not end up in the utterable, but in the "thing", as Thomas Aquinas says.<sup>26</sup> For Bultmann, the "thing" is God's revelation in the *person* of Jesus as the Word of God. His thinking finds its proper limitation in this event, it tries to remain open to it, to constantly be put into question by it and to transcend itself *toward* it. Therefore, it always warns that it does not belong to Man to decide by himself *when* and *how* such limitation ceases and becomes transparent. In this way Bultmann's thinking helps situating the authentic limitation of theological reflection and thus it calls forth an *awareness to*, and at times a *crisis of*, faith as a way of being (*fides qua* creditur) with regard to *what* is and has to be believed (*fides quae* creditur).

Faith – Bultmann is convinced – has to be reviewed constantly. The believer has to refrain from acting and behaving – and therefore from thinking – as if today's world would simply be a duplication and a repetition of what it presumably always was in the past. Bultmann's theological discourse focuses less on God as an object than on the human condition and thus on its own process of thought. Such reflective feedback "requires not speculation but self-examination, radical consideration of the nature of one's own new existence" (Bultmann 1969, 279; Jaspert 1981, 29). Therefore, when it happens, it differs greatly from doing what one does, as it were, naturally. It entails indeed something unusual, challenging, even unbearable. For it makes one free from disenchantment and the spell is suddenly broken since it calls to attention what the mere fact of thinking seeks to forget and to avoid: God as event, alone capable of dismissing the false conceptions that are constantly re-emerging along the way.

24 "Begrifflichkeit" – for instance Jaspert 1981, 24.25.31.37to40; Bultmann 1954, 260-261; Bultmann 1969, 69.91.105.108.115.

25 "Die Sache selbst". See already on August 3, 1925 in Jaspert 1981, 116-119.

26 "Actus autem fidei non terminatur ad enuntiabile, sed ad rem" – Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* IIaIIae, question 1, article 2, ad secundum.

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